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WATERING FRUITS: HOW THE STATE “DEVELOPS CULTURE” IN KOREA

by

SUNHYEONG KWON

Under the Direction of Jennifer Patico

ABSTRACT

The following paper investigates and analyzes the activities of Content Korea Lab as a representative case of cultural policy implementation led by the South Korean government. This quasi-governmental organization represents the Korean government’s attempt to actively develop the national cultural industry by subsidizing what officials consider “cultural” activities, ultimately contributing to the national economy. However, these activities demonstrate the dramatic contrast between the stated mission of the policy and how it has been implemented in reality. The study illustrates the peculiar historical and sociocultural factors that significantly affected the policy implementation, through the lens of the actors involved in this process.

INDEX WORDS: Korea, Cultural Policy, Cultural Industry, Anthropology of Policy, Bureaucracy, Nationalism, K-Pop, Content Korea Lab

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by

SUNHYEONG KWON

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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For those who choose to remain foolish enough to question what is around them.

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1 INTRODUCTION

I was waiting for an interviewee at the headquarters building of the Korea Creative Contents Agency, a quasi-governmental agency affiliated with the Culture Ministry in South Korea. Sitting on a chair in the lobby, a gigantic placard came to my attention, which read: “Expand the national territory with contents!” In South Korea, “contents” is an umbrella term that refers to the products of the entertainment industries including films, popular music, animations and such.

For a moment, I was stunned by how effectively the slogan summarizes the concept of the cultural policy I was writing about, and how explicitly it exposes the unfiltered ambition of the nation-state. The slogan made me wonder, however. For whom, and why do these “contents” exist?

It strikes me as odd that the topic of this thesis has expanded enormously compared to when it was originally planned two years ago, as a qualitative study towards a particular cultural policy implemented in South Korea (hereinafter referred to as “Korea”), which was aimed at boosting the national cultural industries. This cultural policy, called “Framework Act on the Promotion of Cultural Industries,” was partially implemented through a government-funded organization called Korea Creative Content Agency. The organization was established in 2009 as a part of the Korean government’s plan to invest in the cultural industries and activities. Cultural industry, in this context, is an umbrella term that refers to particular industrial domains “associated with the arts, media, design and digital content” (Flew 2012:3). The research goal of this thesis, at the beginning, was simply to understand how this policy was implemented through the activities of this

organization, particularly based on perspectives from the people directly involved with the implementation process. However, the topic gradually expanded while conducting this research. The reason is that understanding a policy, especially one such as this one, is intertwined with various social, cultural and political contexts of the region. In a sense, this thesis discusses sociocultural, political and historical contexts of Korean society itself, gazed at through the lens of a particular cultural policy. Although this topic may sound broad, it is consistent with the anthropology of policy because policy is not simply “an instrument of governance” (Shore and Wright 1997:3) that one can completely understand by merely reading it. Rather, it tells a long, complex story about how the society has been structured and shaped throughout history, based on boundless relations between nations, regions, and peoples. As Shore and Wright suggest, studying policy gives us a deeper understanding of and insight into the field as an articulation of how power and governance systems are related to one another (Shore and Wright 1997:14).

A focal point of this thesis is the efficacy of the activities of a quasi-governmental agency named Content Korea Lab (a branch of the organization), established as a result of a peculiar cultural policy implemented in Korea. However, in order to accurately reflect the complex relations between the cultural policy implementation and the people involved in this process, I explore multiple social, cultural and political contexts in Korea that influence the implementation process by focusing on each of the different keywords brought up by the participants. In other words, while this thesis asks a simple question – that is, how a certain cultural policy in Korea is related to their complex social context – the answers will not be that simple because it is a long, complex story elucidated by ten different individual participants. As stated above, policy is not simply an instrument; when the mission of the policy has been carried out by human agents, it generates vastly different consequences in reality, often in unexpected ways. This thesis begins

with the very gap between the Korean government's stated mission of a cultural policy and how it is manifested in reality of modern society in Korea.

The active cultural policy (culture, in this context, refers to the entertainment industries) implemented by the government began in the early 1990s, by which point Korea had achieved incredible economic development following growth throughout the 1970s and the 1980s. Prior to this point, there were no significant government policy attempts to actively intervene in "cultural" areas aimed at improving the quality of the Korean citizens' lives, due to the series of major issues the nation had to overcome such as the Japanese colonial period (1910 to 1945), the division of the peninsula (1945 to present), the Korean War (1950 to 1953), a long period of military dictatorship (1948 to 1988), and a democracy movement until the late 1980s.

At the dawn of the 1990s, however, the Korean government had started to undertake a significant investment in a specific group of industries. The concept of cultural industry was introduced by the Ministry of Culture and Sports around this time, especially after the national economic crisis in 1997. The nation had to find an alternative strategy to maintain the level of economic growth as the cheap labor-based manufacturing industries were no longer effective to stimulate the national economy. As a result, high value-added industries such as film, music, video game, and information and communication technology (ICT) were categorized as the range of cultural industry sectors (Kwon and Kim 2014:426). Content Korea Lab (CKL), a branch of a quasi-government organization called Korea Creative Agency (KOCCA) is one of the latest attempts made by the Korean government to stimulate the "cultural" industries as an extension of this new interest in these emerging alternative industries.

According to the introduction on the official website, the main mission of CKL is to provide a range of supports to those who are motivated to be involved in the cultural industries as artists

(commonly referred as “creators”) or entrepreneurs (Contents Korea Lab 2017). The types of supports provided by CKL are diverse, as a variety of genres in cultural industries are meant to be embraced. On one side, there is the “hardware infrastructure” aimed at providing chances to access professional production equipment utilized in each of the genres. In terms of music production, for example, there are recording studios and audio gear installed in the public spaces in CKL, as well as a number of state-of-the-art personal computers ready for processing them. General types of products in the cultural industries such as music, film, animation, broadcasting and so on can be produced based on this hardware infrastructure. And on another side, CKL conducts various public projects in order to accelerate this cultural stimulation process. “Software infrastructure,” as it is generally called, gives the creators and entrepreneurs chances to participate in programs such as social networking, education or professional work opportunities in each of different cultural genres. For example, there are programs dedicated to offering practical aid to the entrepreneurs in the cultural industry sectors such as giving financial support, legal advice or free office spaces.

In short, CKL is the place where the Korean government’s mission for cultural policy is manifested in a very specific way. For an anthropological study, this organization is an intriguing field because it allows us to observe the very point where a vast and abstract notion like cultural policy meets the actual persons and their relations in reality, like an intersection where the different thoughts and ideas are exchanged to one another. Observing this intersection allows us to shed light on the relations between the different layers of Korean society. For example, the initial motivation of the Korean government to implement the cultural policy is closely related to the history of the nation going through things like the colonial period, the Korean War, or the nation’s rapid economic growth in the past. The driving force behind the way this cultural policy has been implemented through the people involved in this process, as they are largely shaped by the politics,

national identity, or the overall social structure of the nation. This thesis aims at pointing out these significant relations between different themes that illustrate how the different layers of the society are represented in the activities of CKL as an implementing agency of the Korean government's national agenda.

The ethnography in this thesis starts from the very smallest thoughts of the participants. Ten in-depth interviews were conducted during a month of fieldwork in two cities in Korea: Seoul, the capital of the nation, and Naju, where the headquarters of the organization are located. Participants were chosen because they are the most crucial agents in the field who possess accumulated experiences and insights regarding the cultural policy in the nation. Six of the participants are current employees of the organization, and most of them have been working there for more than fifteen years. Four of the participants are the ones labeled "creators" in the field, but in a more general sense, they are the individual artists who have studied their field in major art universities in the nation, have worked as semi-professionals in the relevant industries, and have participated at least once in the public projects conducted by the organization. The gap between the mission of the policy and the lived experiences surrounding it is articulated through their experiences and perceptions.

The next chapter presents the literature review and its relevance to this particular case of a government-led cultural policy. In the next, methods are discussed in order to consolidate the theoretical frameworks facilitated in this thesis. After that, the background is presented. This chapter discusses how the cultural policy in Korea is shaped throughout history based on the background description of the nation's historical, sociocultural and political contexts. Mainly, the background chapter focuses on the Korean government's conceptualizations of culture and how they are represented in the national cultural policy in order to effectively describe the mission of

the state. In the following chapter of ethnography, however, those ideas are questioned, evaluated and critiqued through the lens of the participants' own conceptualizations of the implementation process.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

My purpose in studying Content Korea Lab, a government organization for cultural content production in Korea, is to take a deep look at the implementation of a government-led cultural policy by engaging with the organization's members from a more human perspective. Mainly, I intend to point out the gap between the conceptualized goals of the nation-state, namely, to promote the national cultural industry by active government interventions, and how this conception has manifested itself in reality. As complex as this topic appears to be, it is largely related to a variety of key issues in anthropological studies such as the nation-state, national cultural policy, cultural industry, or mass media. There has been a significant number of studies in relation to this concepts; however, I center on three focal points. First, I discuss how ethnography has been used in anthropology to study national policy. Particularly, literature that has provided important theoretical frameworks such as the concept and the role of policy studies is introduced. And then, more specifically, I discuss particular cases of national cultural policies, especially in relation to the production of tangible cultural outcomes such as visual media production. This part of the chapter embraces a variety of crucial themes in relation to the study of policy, such as national identity, political ideologies, and capitalism. Lastly, I explain how these studies are relevant to my thesis. Even though these particular case studies were conducted in various sociocultural settings and backgrounds, I argue that these studies provide useful insights and a framework for understanding how the national policies and the lived experiences of the studied populations are interconnected.

To begin with, the work of Alexander Ervin has done much to provide the field of policy studies in anthropology with a larger framework, which can be applied and utilized to facilitate the analysis of ethnographic data. According to his definition, policy is a “complex, dynamic, and

somewhat amorphous subject that is constantly shifting in content and emphasis” (Ervin 2005:44). Policy is not only limited to formal government decisions but also reaches “beyond visible legislative and bureaucratic spheres,” so the study of policy can point out deeper social and cultural contexts within a society. To explain the importance of active engagement of anthropologists in studying policy, Ervin makes use of several case studies of national policy as examples, using ethnography as an integral component. “The Comadrona Project” by Pelto and Schensul, for example, shows the direct and active involvement of anthropologists with the community members in studying the healthcare system in Puerto Rico, especially as it relates to childbirth. Anthropologists helped the community to shape the policy process by identifying issues and creating a network with the members of the society. Ervin points out that their work suggests a particular case of national policy implementation “by their good use of ethnographic data and sound anthropological principles” (Ervin 2005:61).

The concept of policy studies pointed out by Ervin largely shapes the conceptual framework of this thesis, as the study of the cultural policy in Korea ultimately focuses on the social and cultural contexts of the nation in relation to the policy implementation, which is confined to “legislative and bureaucratic spheres” on the surface. As suggested by his definition of policy, this thesis mainly consists of ethnographic data obtained from the fieldwork conducted in Korea, rather than simply introducing the contents of the cultural policy itself based on the official documents or law articles. By utilizing this method, this thesis aims at interpreting how the lived experiences of the community members are represented in the participants’ thoughts and ideas.

Cris Shore and Susan Wright focus on national policy as a cultural agent, which is an efficient tool for constructing national identity (Shore and Wright 1997:4). Their work also provides the framework for understanding the concept of nation and its role in policy

implementation, particularly through the exemplary case studies of national policies that have utilized or exploited a certain industrial sector as means of constructing national identities. For example, this instrumental role of national policy is well demonstrated in their ethnography of audio-visual policy in the European Union in the 1980s. The study mainly focuses on why the European Commission attaches so much significance to the notion of European integration and how its attempt to foster social cohesion among the European population is closely intertwined with the historical and sociocultural contexts of European nations. Shore and Wright point out that the growing cultural influence of Japan and the United States motivated the commission to “build a powerful European culture industry” (Shore and Wright 1997:170). The audio-visual policy involves establishing European standards in broadcasting and media such as advertising, film and television programs. However, they also point out that the policy is based on the notion of “Euro-patriotism” as against imaginary threats from the “non-European other,” and it is even questionable whether the policy has actually succeeded in constructing a homogeneous European culture or interest (Shore and Wright 1997:185). Shore and Wright collected a large amount of research data including literature and official documents that point out the national policy’s backgrounds, implementation processes, discourses and its outcomes throughout time. They state that relatively few anthropologists focus on a larger unit of analysis such as policy “as an instrument for constructing mass identities” (Shore and Wright 1997:165), even though they may be generally interested in nationalism “as micro or local-level phenomena” (Shore and Wright 1997:165). Reflecting on this, their ethnography of audio-visual policy can be an example of an anthropological study that effectively demonstrates the relationship of national policy with nationalism, cultural industry and mass media altogether.

Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* also provides a relevant framework for examining national policy in relation to the attempts to strengthen national identity or consciousness. Anderson explains how nationalistic consciousness, that is, a belief that a nation consists of homogeneous social identity and practice, first emerged and how this idea has developed and evolved from 18th century Europe onward. He concludes that the notions of nationness are "cultural artifacts of a particular kind" (Anderson 1991:4), which have permanently replaced two previous forms of society: religious community and dynastic realm. The vernacular languages in these traditional societies and the emergence of print-capitalism played a crucial role in the birth of the nation-state. Anderson points out that these major shifts in the European societies towards the so-called nationalist movements influenced not only Europe, but also Africa and Asia. This nationalistic idea that conquered the world also created the resulting "cultural products," patriotism and racism (Anderson 1991:141). According to Anderson, the ideas of patriotism and racism were typically shown in the forms of poetry and song, which naturally consolidated the notion among the citizens that the nation-state must be something pure, disinterested and grandiose. Three particular cultural products were introduced as means of nation-building: the census, which encourages the idea that everyone belongs to this homogeneous national identity, the map, which shows a visual representation of imaginary boundaries, and the museum which symbolizes the political power of the nation-state (Anderson 1991:163). Anderson's work addresses how the idea of the nation-state that we take for granted is deeply related to cultural policy and its products. As national policies are aimed to create nationalistic consciousness in the first place, it is useful to consider this background idea of "imagined communities" in studying national policies in the modern times, which still carry the traces of nationalism.

Marilyn Ivy's anthropological study of cultural discourses in modern Japanese society shows a slightly different use of ethnography in national policy study. Her book, *Discourses of the Vanishing*, focuses on the policies of the Japanese nation-state from the early 1980s that aim to revive and maintain the traditional cultural practices of Japan, arguing that these revived practices are "phantasmatic" in terms of their lack of cultural connection with modern Japanese society (Ivy 1995:22). She brings up several different examples that show how Japanese officials attempted to build up a homogeneous identity for the nation in the realm of advertisement, national tourism campaigns, civic reconstruction, folklore studies and mass culture. Through these ethnographic case studies, Ivy investigates what each of these projects symbolizes and represents in the context of modern Japanese society, which is technologically modern and advanced. According to her interpretation, even though the Japanese nation-state attempts to build a homogeneous nationalistic identity through recovering the past, the results of these attempts remain limited to marginal positions in society. Ivy's work is a case of ethnographic study of national policy that mainly focuses on the interpretations of the nationalistic symbols and social contexts in relation to the policy, rather than focusing on the particular policy itself. This ultimately provides a better contextual understanding of Japanese society in relation to national policy, answering how a nation-state comes to consider itself as homogeneous, and how this identity has manifested itself in the era of the globalized world.

Ivy's work informs my understanding of how the nation-state conceptualizes cultural activities, particularly ones with traditional connotations, as a representation of the national identity as a whole. Similar to the attempts of the Japanese officials illustrated in her ethnography, cultural policy in Korea also represents the nation-state's endeavor to construct a homogeneous national identity, especially through their projects that are affiliated with the traditional image of

the nation. For example, a national campaign named Discover Japan was a government-led project that aimed at constructing public representations of Japan as something authentic or traditional, which ultimately demonstrates how different locations, communities and their practices in the nation are categorized under the singular identity of Japan (Ivy 1995:26). The ethnography of this thesis illustrates a series of cases of national projects in Korea that draws clear parallels with Ivy's, sharing a similar question in its foundation: are these "cultural" activities truly affiliated with the lived experiences of the citizens, or are they simply "phantasmatic"?

Lila Abu-Lughod's study on the postcolonial nation-state of Egypt also provides a relevant case of ethnographic study of national policy. Her research involves the role of the state-owned television network as the main apparatus for promoting national pride and constructing a unified national identity. In *Dramas of Nationhood* (2005), she suggests that television was one of the nation-state's most efficient tools to promote the social discourses that have been changed over time by political and economic trends. Based on fieldwork in a little town in Upper Egypt, Abu-Lughod points out how television programs have impacted the members of a marginalized community, creating an ideal image of a developed Egyptian society. This anthropological study efficiently utilizes ethnography in order to describe how nationalist ideologies are shaped and spread by the state-owned television network, demonstrating that an abstract concept such as national policy can be accurately scrutinized by an engagement with even a small community. Abu-Lughod's work shows that no matter how complex and enormous the unit of analysis is, an anthropological perspective of a "social microcosm" (Abu-Lughod 2005:19) may lead to relevant connections to the larger system. She briefly mentions two characteristics of the anthropological study of nation-states articulated by George Marcus: mobile ethnography and multi-sited, precisely planned ethnography of "life-worlds" locations (Abu-Lughod 2005:20).

Abu-Lughod's work has provided a conceptual model in planning my fieldwork in Korea, particularly in choosing interview questions and locations with the participants. Even though the concept of national policy is vast and complex, it is important for a researcher to be engaged with daily, mundane experiences of the people involved with this cultural policy in order to closely understand the events and interactions in the micro-social level, which ultimately leads to an understanding of a larger picture as the implementation of the national cultural policy. Based on this framework, the fieldwork of this study has focused more on the participants' own experiences which take place in various locations such as their home, workroom, office or part-time job venues, rather than sticking to the "official" field site of the headquarters building of the organization.

Similar to Abu-Lughod's ethnography, Purnima Mankekar conducted an anthropological research of television in postcolonial India. Her study involves the role of state-owned television programs that demonstrate the nation-state's hegemonic control over mass media, which mainly aims to promote the nationalistic identity and the idea of social justice. The ethnography focused on particular television programs broadcasted from the late 1980s to the early 1990s, which heavily reflect the nation-state's ideal of middle-class life (Mankekar 1999:9). Mankekar argues that the narratives appearing on the national television series, mostly about modern and traditional life practices of India, represent the national policy of cultural construction of postcolonial nationhood that includes the idea of patriotism, consumerism, gender formation, and religion.

While the above literature shows how anthropological studies have approached national policy, with particular focus on culture and using ethnography as the principle method of inquiry, there are more specific studies that have focused on particular cultural policies attempting to directly produce cultural products such as media production. Anne Allison, for example, shows how the Japanese government conceptualized popular culture as a means of constructing a national

brand after the postwar years. The book *Millennial Monsters* (Allison 2006) discusses how this conceptualization has manifested itself in the nation's cultural policies, how the implementation of the policies has impacted Japanese society, as well as the nation's complex economic and political relationship with the United States. The study begins with the Japanese national policy to promote the toy manufacturing industry directly after the war in 1945, indicating that the Japanese government played a crucial role in the development of the nation's cultural industry from its initial stages. From the era of rapid economic growth in the 1950s, the Japanese nation-state has actively and systematically intervened in the cultural industry as a part of national policy. Allison provides examples of the product of the early Japanese cultural industry such as a radio broadcasting network established by the Ministry of International Trade and Industry, the first release of the movie *Godzilla* in 1954, and a newspaper comic strip that later developed and evolved into a popular genre of entertainment called manga. According to her explanation, a key factor in the early stage of cultural industry is modern technology, which Japanese officials tried to place in the center of the national policy; in other words, "gijutsu rikkoku – building the state through technology" (Allison 2006:55). This national slogan reveals how the government has perceived cultural industry as an impactful tool to develop the national economy and to promote national identity after the end of the war. The government ministry's active intervention in the cultural industry has continued well after the 1950s.

Allison brings up an example of the government's policy to import foreign television programs in order to develop domestic cultural competence, explaining how this mass media became a crucial component of a new lifestyle, and how the foreign television programs stimulated domestic cultural industries by inspiring local artists. Due to the government's decision to actively develop the national cultural industry, Allison explains, the nation was able to achieve even more

rapid economic development, consumer culture, and a new urban lifestyle with full national confidence until the collapse of the bubble economy in the 1980s. Her ethnographic work provides a representative case of a government-led cultural policy that reveals the nation-state's conceptualized notion of cultural industry, as well as the implementation of the national cultural policy in the region. Also, the study captures the complex relationship between the cultural policy and the economy, politics, and sociocultural contexts of the nation.

Robert Foster provides another relevant ethnographic study that shows how the government's cultural policy can shape the cultural industry and practices of the nation. His study demonstrates how Papua New Guinean national identity can be observed in everyday life through media such as radio programs, advertisements and in state-sponsored projects such as the establishment of National Law Week and moral education programs in schools (Foster 2002). Foster has conducted extensive ethnographic research in Papua New Guinea, where there is relatively weak nationalistic sentiment due to its colonial history and linguistic plurality. However, since its independence from Australia in 1975, Papua New Guinean officials attempted to implement a series of national cultural policies in order to construct a collective identity for the nation. He points out that the commercial mass media was a primary device of building a unified national identity, and the Commercial Advertising Act in 1985 is an example of the reification of this nation-state's ideology. This cultural policy specifically states that all advertisement published in Papua New Guinea must be locally produced, utilizing local human resources (Foster 2002:63). Foster's ethnography investigates the various cases of implementation of this policy, shedding light on the mass communication followed by mass consumption that gradually created "shared understandings of memories, tastes, and habits" among the Papua New Guineans (Foster 2002:64). Overall, this anthropological study provides a practical example of a state-led cultural policy that

subtly propagated the notion of a sort of collective identity of the nation, particularly through the ordinary objects and daily practices that subtly represent the idea of nationality. Throughout his ethnography, the nation is defined as a homogeneous identity that can be branded in the global market, rather than simply as a territorial state (Foster 2002:126). This conceptualization of the nation, and the way nationalistic ideologies are affiliated with the market have significantly affected the ethnography of this thesis, as they draw many parallels with the implementation of the cultural policy in Korea.

Allison and Foster's ethnographies demonstrate cases of particular government-led cultural policies that are contextually similar to the cultural policy in Korea. They explain how national cultural policies have been implemented in the particular social settings of Japan and Papua New Guinea, pointing out who the main agents of these cultural policies are, through what procedures the national policies have been implemented, and how these processes have affected the communities in these regions. In doing so, the sociocultural contexts they have observed and described effectively revealed the nationalistic ideologies hidden in the policy. Even though each of the studies has a slightly different focal point, both Allison and Foster show the nation-state's desire to actively develop the industries in the cultural domain.

More relevantly, Richard Handler, in his anthropological study of Quebec's nationalism and politics, gives specific examples of national cultural policy that reflects Quebec's unique sociopolitical and historical context (Handler 1988). The sociocultural setting in his ethnography contains different characteristics compared to the above anthropological studies. First, the population in Quebec shares a strong nationalistic identity even though it is merely a province in Canada, not a nation itself. Second, the main aspect that bonds the whole community members is their shared language of French, not the national boundary that typically constitutes a

homogeneous identity. Based on this setting, Handler investigates the cultural policies implemented by the state government's department named M.A.C., Ministère des Affaires Culturelles. The study points out how the state department conceived the cultural status quo of the region from its initial establishment, and how these conceptualizations were ideologically manifested through their activities. For example, the first speech of the head of the M.A.C. stated that the cultural domain might not be "immediately tangible and perceptible," but their activities will be "useful to Canadian life" (Handler 1988:113). Handler nonetheless criticizes the way the government's conceptualization of culture was expressed in the policy for being inefficient and ineffective. According to his explanation, the M.A.C.'s cultural activities have not been successful due to the difficulties in defining cultural domains, and to the administration's way of fragmenting the cultural practices, as opposed to a more holistic approach (Handler 1988:118). Handler illustrates that "the search for an integral identity, or the attempt to formulate an undeniable interpretation of the true national culture, can never succeed – and hence must be repeated indefinitely" (Handler 1988:130). This ethnographic reflection provides an excellent example of a typical government's approach towards the cultural domain in affiliation with the nationalistic ideologies under the surface.

To sum up, these anthropological studies illustrate the unique and particular social, cultural and political contexts of their respective locations. This local particularity can be seen in most of the works that have been pointed out above: the European Union's peculiar patriotism consisting of different nations, Japan's strong motivation to inspire national pride after the loss of the war, a rural Egyptian community's desire to accept the modern lifestyle suggested by the mass media, and Papua New Guinea's heterogeneous nature consisting of hundreds of different tribes and languages. The variety of regional backgrounds indicates that the study of a national policy must

take into consideration the particular contexts (such as the cultural, political, or historical context) in which the policy is being implemented. Each of the studies suggests different and unique methodologies of study that are locally tailored, which informs that the study of Korean national cultural policy also needs to be based on a methodological framework that is particularly suitable for the Korean sociocultural context.

3 METHODOLOGY

This thesis about national cultural policy in Korea is an ethnographic study utilizing qualitative methodologies, such as semi-structured interviews and participant/non-participant observation. My ethnography included ten interviews with organization employees and project participants. In the recruitment process, I notified prospective participants about this study via e-mail with an informed consent document prior to scheduling an interview. After, I met each of the participants in person and obtained verbal consent before the interview began. The interview questions primarily focused on the content of their jobs as they understand it. I expected the interview answers to be related to a frustration with the decision making process of the organization or their critical experiences in relation to a particular project as an administrator.

In conducting ethnographic interviews, I pointed out the gap between the bureaucratic point of view – how much can we produce – and the human agents’ point of view – what is happening in reality – which cannot be easily perceived without an engagement with the actual persons whose roles as human agents are often neglected by the former. According to Chambers, one of the interests of policy study is to investigate the ideas “translated into a language of social and cultural change” (Chambers 1985:39). In approaching policy research, according to his explanation, it is important to keep in mind that “we are a bureaucratic people, relying heavily on institutional arrangements of centralized authority and coordination” (Chambers 1985:40). When a complex phenomenon is understood only in the simplest terms by a bureaucratic people, it would be an anthropologist’s job to drag out the multiple layers of meanings from the same phenomenon in order to maximize human agency. Even though the national cultural policies in Korea are rarely studied by anthropologists utilizing ethnography as a primary methodology and thus not familiar to the general public, the anthropological points of view demonstrated by the ordinary people, not

the system itself, can provide a valuable understanding of a unique case of national cultural policy in Korea. Also, an anthropological perspective on this case study contributes to our understanding of government intervention in cultural domains that connotes the underlying economic and political motives which the policy makers are subtly attempting to promote. The policy makers' subtle and sometimes explicit motivations in affiliation with sociocultural factors in Korea influence the way the policy is implemented on the ground, and this results in a large discrepancy between the stated goals of the policy and its implementation in reality. Admittedly, there are difficulties in conducting this ethnography due to the limited amount of time, and factors arising from my altered positionality. Also, the characteristic of the data which I collected is fundamentally complex and vague in nature. Even so, the anthropological study of this national policy can expand our understanding and insight of national cultural policy in human perspectives.

These ethnographic methodologies are useful and appropriate for mainly two reasons. First of all, even though this study investigates a large and complex subject such as national policy, the human agents should be strictly located in the center of the theoretical framework because cultural policy itself is a human product, not an abstract notion separated from the human lives. To briefly invoke Abu-Lughod's ethnographic study about national mass media policy in Egypt, "even when studying the nation-state, anthropologists had to concern themselves with the life-worlds of face-to-face communities of people engaged in meaningful acts within the boundaries of the nation-state" (Abu-Lughod 2005:19). Reflecting on this, this thesis focuses on the perspectives of the human agents in relation to the policy implementation rather than on the policy itself as an object. This approach provides more accurate and detailed descriptions of the social and cultural contexts of the national policy, as well as the webbed relations among its agents, which might not be effectively described otherwise. By placing human perspectives as a primary object of the study,

this thesis indicates that humans must not be alienated in national policy studies, as they often are due to the bureaucratic process of research which consists of the measurement of macroeconomic indicators.

Secondly, ethnographic methodologies are particularly suitable for studying a multi-layered, complex issue such as national cultural policy. The explanation of the policy implementation itself might be easily approached through a linear, static methodology, such as simply translating the government documents into academic languages, that might draw a simple conclusion regarding its history or technical procedures, for instance. However, there are, in fact, multiple sociocultural and political factors intertwined altogether in this cultural policy study such as the vague nature of the cultural domain, the participants' individual positions within the policy implementation process, and even peculiar aspects of Korean society itself such as a strong nationalistic ideology and postcolonial identity that can result in differences in the conclusions. While this single thesis might not be sufficient to precisely focus on each of these multiple layers of the topic, the study is based on a holistic approach embracing and contemplating these intertwined factors as much as possible. In fact, these sociocultural layers are deeply connected to one another, so focusing on a single component of the topic would not accurately describe the situation. For these reasons, ethnographic methodologies are the most relevant and appropriate. They allowed this study to locate human agents in the center, and also facilitate studying a complex, multi-layered subject such as national cultural policy.

To be more specific, the topic of this thesis is designed to connect each of the different social issues in Korea such as a history that include a series of tragic events in the past, rapid economic growth until the 1990s, or sociocultural issues that are related to the general work environment of the nation as well as the way Korean people appreciate the products of cultural

industries, and also political issues such as the Korean government's decision making system, and the political conflicts arising in the implementation process. The most effective way to distinguish the complex connections between these issues is, again, to put human agents in the center of this study and illustrate the larger issues listed above by engaging with their collective experiences, thoughts, critiques and opinions.

In doing so, it is worthwhile to specify my positionality as an ethnographer in this study. My personal experience in the organization as a former employee provided me with a unique point of view. It is clear that my motivation to study a national cultural policy came from my work experience in the organization Content Korea Lab. As an insider of the community, I have gained extensive experience and knowledge regarding the activities of the organization, which may not be easily understood without being familiar with particular sociocultural and political contexts in Korean society. This insider's experience involves a series of public cultural projects planned by the organization, and also the mundane daily events and tasks happening in the organization.

This work experience in the past has strengths and weaknesses. To bring up some of the benefits first, it provided me with contextual knowledge of the organization including what the daily tasks of the organization are, what their long-term plans as a government agency are, and how the specific government policies are handled and conducted within the community. Another advantage was that it was relatively easy to approach the studied population due to the previous social connections I have maintained with them. In most anthropological studies, building rapport and trust with the studied community is considered a crucial component in ethnographic fieldwork because the insider's knowledge allows a researcher to observe and understand a deeper layer of the situation. My work experience in the organization had provided me with the opportunity to

build rapport and trust with the employees, and thus it put me in the advantageous position for this particular ethnographic fieldwork.

However, as a downside, the work experience I possess was limited to my personal tasks in this large organization. This positional limitation might have worked as an obstacle in observing the whole picture of the policy implementation, because what I have experienced in the organization merely belongs to the smallest part of the whole system at the most. Also, my accumulated experience and observation in the organization were not based on proper anthropological knowledge and perspectives. Through the graduate program, I had opportunities to contemplate my own understanding about the national cultural policy in Korea, as well as my perception of experiences gained from the organization. As an insider, I believed I was able to observe and criticize the governmental system properly, in an unbiased way. However, recent reflection has led me to the conclusion that what I have observed as an employee, in fact, turned out to be largely influenced by incidental factors such as the relationship between me and my colleagues or systemic flaws common in such newly established government organizations. In other words, my understanding of the organization was confined to my particular range of experience, which might not be necessarily accurate and informative when conducting an ethnographic study for the larger unit of analysis, that is, the case of national cultural policy implementation.

In studying the anthropology of policy, I have learned that there are various types of policy research that aim to approach a deeper understanding of policy implementation in relation to human agency. According to Willigen, there are different types of policy research practice such as evaluation, social impact assessment, needs assessment, social soundness analysis, and technology development research (Van Willigen 2002:165). In conducting a complex ethnographic study such

as this one, multiple research practices were selectively utilized, as these categories are not exactly separate from one another. At this point, I must confess that learning about these different types of practice made me realize that the ethnographic study cannot be simply replaced by my previous personal, limited range of experiences, which were not obtained from the participants' point of view. In conducting ethnography, I listened carefully to each of the employees' own perspectives, considering their different positions in the organizations, and also their critical thinking about this national cultural policy as crucial agents and as employees.

Keeping these reflections in mind, I elaborate the two main methodologies I have utilized in this project. First and foremost, ethnographic interviews were conducted with both agency employees who participate in each of the cultural projects and the project participants who are not organization employees, yet are directly involved with the organization's cultural projects as outside experts ("creators"). These two groups of participants were crucial to this project, as they were capable of providing detailed information given their experience as the main agents of the system, and at the same time, they could share critical reflections and feedback based on their individual, intensive experiences in relation to the organization's activities. It was particularly important to listen to their critical opinions because these two participant groups represented the crucial point where the abstract notions such as national cultural policy were manifested in reality. Cultural policy at this point becomes reified through their decisions and actions, and in their consequences in society.

It is worthwhile to emphasize the importance of the anthropological point of view in this process because in most cultural policy evaluation studies conducted in Korea, it is not uncommon to see policy evaluations made based merely on analyses of quantitative results. Choi's research on the national cultural policy of creating "specialized cities" as a means of developing cultural

industry in Korea, for example, focused on the content of the policy itself including a detailed introduction of features the “local cultural industrial cluster” plan such as the overall concept behind the policy, the implementation procedures, and its unsuccessful outcomes as well as the Korean government’s previous attempts to develop the cultural industry by active intervention (Choi 2009). While the study describes the cultural policy process through the government’s point of view in detail, it provides little knowledge beyond a superficial analysis of a particular cultural policy itself without pointing out the role of the main agents, their individual thoughts and reflections, and ultimately, extensive critical analyses of the policy based on human perspectives. Anthropological methodologies can be effective in overcoming this boundary, as utilizing them may lead policy research to become significantly enriched in its focal points, research questions, data obtaining process and ultimately the way it is written. In order to approach the project topic from a more holistic angle, than simply translating government research papers, conducting ethnographic interviews with the actual people who are directly involved with the cultural policy were essential.

Based on this methodological framework, my interview questions with the first participant group, the agency employees, included: What kind of projects do you usually get involved with? What is your understanding of the mission of this organization? What do you think the benefits that this organization provides to the society are? Considering the importance of the organization employees’ perception of their tasks, discussing these points in the interviews contributed to a deeper understanding of the national cultural policy. The organization employees I interviewed are technically civil servants who control and manage state subsidies in order to operate public cultural events. In this process, not only the state policy’s missions but also individual employees’ perception of the mission and the various decisions they make during the process may vary the

outcomes of the policy implementation significantly. In order to point this out, I included questions that ask their personal interests and motivations in relation to their tasks in the organization. Similarly, the second group of participants consists of the project participants who are mostly artists, creators or cultural industry workers. The interviews with this group included questions such as: What project have you become involved with? What were your tasks, and how did you find out about the project? Are there any other problems you encounter in conducting projects? What do you think the limitations/restrictions are to achieving this goal of the project? Similar to the first group of participants, these detailed questions provided opportunities to discuss important points where key notions such as the Korean government's cultural agenda and goals become manifested in reality through the operation of the specific cultural projects. Again, their experiences colored by their points of view, as well as their critical ideas and opinions on various cultural projects directed by the organization, contributed to a broader understanding of the national cultural policy.

Secondly, participant and non-participant observation were utilized in this research project. To briefly explain the background setting, one of unique characteristics of this cultural policy is that the government has created a physical production space for the public as a means of developing the national cultural industry. Consequently, Content Korea Lab is more of a big production facility rather than an organization's office, equipped with an abundance of media production systems such as audio and video recording studios, broadcasting equipment, 3D printers as well as empty rooms with desks and chairs that are freely open to the public. Observation occurred in this setting, where a couple hundred people visit on a daily basis in order to make use of the equipment and open spaces. Therefore, this methodology was an efficient tool to understand the activities of the general public in relation to the organization. I mainly observed

the activities of the visitors in order to figure out how this open production space is facilitated by them, basically in a non-participatory setting. Also, I obtained more detailed information about the creator participants' individual cultural projects, which are directed and conducted in relation to the organization, using rapid assessment techniques. It was an appropriate methodology utilized in a setting with a limited amount of time, and yet also participatory method that allowed an ethnographer to conduct participant observation and in-depth interviewing, according to the Trotter and Schensul's description on methods in applied anthropology (Bernard 1998:717).

I addressed potential ethical concerns and issues through several techniques. First of all, my anticipated ethical dilemma is related to my shifting position vis-à-vis the organization. As a former employee, I was able to naturally obtain sensitive information and data regarding the various processes of the cultural policy implementation such as the amount of the subsidy, the allocation process and criteria of the budget, weekly meeting agendas, and sometimes confidential communication between the departments, groups and individuals. While this information helped me to understand the tasks of the organization as an employee, I had to engage with the groups of employees as an ethnographer. My shifting position as an anthropology student in the United States raised a crucial ethical question, that is, whether making use of the internal information of the organization would be appropriate or not. Although I did not explicitly divulge any sensitive information as a part of ethnographic data, the pre-existing knowledge from working in the organization may have had significantly affected the research procedures, especially while interviewing employees.

For example, the participant and I started a conversation based on an assumption that we were both aware of specific internal information, especially that regarding the particular activities or projects conducted in the organization. I was aware of the fact that conducting an interview with

someone I already know should be based on the interviewee's point of view, not on my pre-existing knowledge or assumption about the interviewee. Also, I was cautious about using sensitive internal data that are not necessarily related to the focal point of the study. However, on the other hand, it is worthwhile to note that the organization I have been engaging with is government-funded. This means that the most part of the internal information – usage of budget, decision making processes and its criteria, for instance – is supposed to be open to the public by law.

Another ethical concern is the confidentiality of the interview process. Talking critically about their tasks and duties was uneasy, especially for civil servants who are extremely sensitive about public relations. They might have been afraid that the content of the interview might later affect their job security, reputation, or work environment in the long term. It was a natural concern for the participants considering government-funded organizations have to constantly face feedback from the public, press, other governmental departments or even higher governmental institutions. Once there is negative feedback about their decisions, activities or even productivity, the organization takes it seriously as an indicator of their public value. In fact, this was one of the main reasons that cultural organizations such as Content Korea Lab intensively focused on the outcomes of their cultural activities, even though their projects were not necessarily meant to produce any tangible or physical products. This constant tension in the organization might have caused the employees to be more sensitive about their statements and critical behaviors. This study, however, clearly addresses the most sensitive point of the organization, which employees rarely talk explicitly about. In order to mitigate this concern, I specified and emphasized the confidentiality policies of this project. For example, I explained to the participants that I would keep the conversation as strictly confidential as possible by using pseudonyms and by hiding personal characteristics so third parties cannot identify a specific individual I have interviewed. It was

essential to state before starting an interview that I would simply type the information I have gathered into a digitally written format, keep it in an encrypted digital device, and completely eliminate it upon the completion of the project. Explaining this confidentiality policy helped the participants to be more open and expressive during the interviews. Also, it was essential to keep their personal information safe from security threats. These two main ethical concerns were always kept in mind as a primary principle of an ethnographer.

4 BACKGROUND

The establishment of Content Korea Lab was part of a national cultural policy based on the unique historical and sociocultural context of Korean society. This chapter discusses the relevant history of national cultural policy in Korea as a brief background for the following chapters. Kwon and Kim, in their article “The cultural industry policies of the Korean government and the Korean wave,” explain how the Korean government has actively promoted cultural industry for the last 20 years. The government’s active intervention in cultural industry as an economic development strategy is a relatively recent phenomenon which started in the 1990s. Government policy was mainly focused on manufacturing industry-based economic development since the postwar period from the 1960s until the late 1980s. During this time, the cultural policies adopted by the government were merely an auxiliary function to the grandiose mission of industrializing the nation through manufacturing industries.

According to Kwon and Kim, however, the government’s policy towards the cultural domain has drastically changed from the 1990s due to the recognition of its potential market value. Kwon and Kim explain that the Korean national economy, which grew rapidly until the late 1980s, could not maintain its growth rate by relying on the low-cost manufacturing industries (Kwon and Kim 2013:426). The cultural industries drew the state’s attention as an alternative developmental strategy, because products of such industries as music, films, and video games are mostly high value-added products. Decisively, the overwhelming success of the Hollywood film Jurassic Park in 1993 drew nationwide attention as a representative case of the entertainment media’s enormous economic value. According to a government report in May 1994, “since Hyundai Motors’ annual foreign sales numbered about 640,000 autos, a well-made film could be worth more than two years’ of Hyundai’s car exports” (Shim 2002:340). Promptly, the government located cultural

industries as well as the information and communication technology industries at the center of the nation's development strategies. This official change in strategic direction has led to the birth of a series of specific cultural policies that explicitly aimed to promote specific cultural industry categories. Even though there have been minor changes in the policies' details over the past two decades, this government perception and the strategic orientation has basically been maintained in Korea until today (Kwon and Kim 2013:434).

After the Jurassic Park incident in 1993, another important event that drew much of the Korean government's attention lately would be Psy's popular music video on Youtube, "Gangnam Style." The astonishing success of the video once again demonstrated the potential value of media products, which represent not only economic value but also sociocultural and political value. Psy's success was powerful evidence of the recent phenomenon called Korean Wave, or the global popularity of cultural products made in Korea which began approximately in the late 1990s. According to John Walsh's analysis, this Korean Wave phenomenon has been largely reinforced by the policy of the Korean government that deliberately intended to foster cultural industries. He points out that prior to the state's decision to invest in the cultural industries, "international awareness of popular Korean cultural production was almost zero" (Kuwahara 2014:14). The Korean government's investments included "the provision of infrastructure (hard, soft, and virtual), specialized government agencies and funding bodies, tailored educational opportunities, and incentives to companies to undertake more research and development and value-added activities" (Kuwahara 2014:16). One of the main "specialized government agencies" that Walsh mentioned is Korea Creative Content Agency (KOCCA), the headquarters of the very organization studied ethnographically, Content Korea Lab.

Content Korea Lab is a branch of a government-funded organization named the Korean Content Creation Agency (KOCCA) that was established in 2009 as a part of the Korean government's strategic plan to invest in the cultural industries and activities. According to the Framework Act on the Promotion of Cultural Industries implemented in 2002, the purpose of the policy is "the improvement of the quality of national cultural life and development of the national economy, by providing for matters necessary for supporting and fostering cultural industries" (law.go.kr 2016). The establishment of KOCCA is based on article 31 of this act, "Establishment of the Korea Creative Content Agency," which states that this particular organization aims to "efficiently support the advancement and development of cultural industries" (law.go.kr 2016). The specific domains in which the government is to provide support are listed as "creative industries" on the KOCCA's official website. According to the introduction, this includes "gaming, animation, character licensing, music, fashion, and broadcasting" (eng.kocca.kr 2016).

The concept of creative industry as well as the categorization of particular industrial domains as such, in fact, first came from a British governmental department established in 1997 as part of a strategic plan to promote the national industrial development (Flew 2012:9). According to Flew's study, the 13 industries categorized by the British government as "creative" included advertising, architecture, arts and antique markets, crafts, design, designer fashion, film and video, interactive leisure software, music, performing arts, publishing, software and computer services, and television and radio. The goal of this governmental department was "to create a nation where the creative talents of all the people are used to build a true enterprise economy for the 21st century, where we compete on brains, not brawn" (Flew 2012:10). This formation of a certain category of industries was widely accepted as a means to analyze its growth in the marketplace, and to evaluate its contribution to the national economy based on production-oriented calculation. This

conceptualization of the cultural industry became gradually widespread following adoption of this policy, and the “creative industry” concept has been utilized in many other nations’ cultural policies in the 2000s such as in the European Union, Australia, New Zealand, and China (Flew 2012:33).

Content Korea Lab, an official branch of the KOCCA, was established in 2009. It is an exceptionally active form of government intervention among other government-funded cultural organizations in the nation, because it was established as a sort of cultural content production facility. Cultural content, in this context, roughly refers to the products of “creative industries” such as music, animation, films, broadcasting programs, video games, and so on. While the cultural policy is intended to promote the national cultural industry, Content Korea Lab is aimed at producing the cultural content itself using the lab-owned facilities and equipment in order to fulfill the purpose of the policy. According to the Content Korea Lab’s website, the organization’s mission is to systematically support the cultural content creation activities of “creators” by providing open spaces and resources (ckl.or.kr 2016). It is worthwhile to note that this cultural policy was meant to promote the national cultural industries as a whole by making investments in the relevant industries, whereas the work of Content Korea Lab seems to be an attempt to become a corporation that aims at making profits. Their slogan – “small but brilliant ideas develop into global contents” (ckl.or.kr 2016) – explicitly demonstrates that this organization is a sort of a production facility that aims to directly create cultural productions as a cultural production business in the private sector. The only difference is that CKL is entirely government-funded, administered and operated by the public servants.

It is important to point out the three possible sociocultural factors that may significantly affect the activities of the organization. First of all, economic considerations are crucial factors in

planning, operating and evaluating CKL activities. Even though the mission of the organization is to promote “cultural” activities, as a part of a government agency, the organization needs to analyze and evaluate the outcomes of the activities and its own productivity in an “immediately tangible and perceptible” (Handler 1988:112) way. This means that each of the projects of the organization needs to be calculated and evaluated based on economic indicators such as number of visitors to the facility, or the number of products that have been made. Based on my reflection from my own work experience as well as the fieldwork conducted in the organization, most activities and projects were operated based on these economic considerations, regardless their qualitative nature as cultural activities. This study points out and emphasize these concerns resulting from the tension between culture and cultural products.

Secondly, there are political factors that might affect the activity of the organization. Since CKL was established as a means of manifesting the government’s strategic development plan, it is essentially an agent of the Korean government, and has frequently appeared on government advertisements as one of the state’s “achievements.” This means that the types of cultural products made in the organization, as well as their themes or messages as pieces of art, may be edited, censored or even deleted due to political reasons – due to the organization’s responsibility to keep a pro-government stance. Based on my experience and observations as a former employee, the official events of the organization, especially ones that are exposed to the general public, are safely tailored not to include any critical representations of discussions of the government, nor any politically sensitive or controversial information. In other words, questioning or criticizing the organization as well as the government’s agenda seems to be subtly forbidden, and these political considerations may also affect the organization’s activities.

Lastly, the postcolonial factors also might affect the organization's activities and its directional concepts. Korea achieved independence from Japanese occupation in 1945. From then, up to approximately the late 1980s, Korean national policies were mainly focused on economic development strategies, and the cultural domain has been largely neglected until recently due to its impracticality. This means, as Kwon and Kim indicate, the national policies in Korea at this time period were solely focused on maximum economic growth, and cultural industries were considered redundant because they "did not support the government's economic objectives" (Kwon and Kim 2013:425). As pointed out above in this chapter, the fundamental vision of the policy, from the beginning, was to contribute to the national economy. But at the same time, the notion of cultural development seems to be broadly affiliated with nationalistic ideologies, especially considering that the cultural developmental strategies are clearly aimed at building a national brand in the global market, which is fundamentally the same as the national economic developmental strategies in Korea before the late 1980s. Foster's ethnography of Papua New Guinea's national policy, similarly, illustrates how the nation-state attempts to construct and promote a sort of collective national identity shared by the citizens. A national brand, in his study, equivalently refers to the materialized images and cultural products that reflect the notion of a homogenous nation, which are effectively spread out through the mass media and consumer goods (Foster 2002:2). Reflecting on this point, the CKL's mission of producing "global" cultural contents made in Korea also may be interpreted as a process of constructing a unified national identity through the domain of popular culture. According to Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, the rise of nationalistic consciousness in 18th century Europe was related to the emergence cultural products written in vernacular languages and their commercial markets (Anderson 1991:134). Even though the CKL's official mission is simply to support the production activities by the

general Korean public without any explicit nationalistic connotation, the postcolonial history of Korea was strongly projected in the national cultural policy through an indirect way of constructing national ideologies.

Based on this background knowledge and sociocultural context, I would like to reflect on my work experience as an organization employee. The most prominent characteristic I remember is the bureaucratic nature of the organization's decision making process. Of course, as is generally known, the concept of the bureaucracy itself came from government administration as an extremely efficient decision making system. It is reasonable to think that even culture-related organizations such as CKL should be follow a standardized administrative system in order to be a part of the governmental structure. One of the obvious benefits of this system is that the activities of every single CKL project can be evaluated through quantitative measurements of the activities. In this way, the outcomes of these cultural projects become immediately tangible, clear and quantifiable data which can be utilized as an objective indicator of the value of the organization's existence.

My question during my work experience, however, was how could their official mission – “systematic support of the cultural content creation activity” (ckl.or.kr 2016) – ever be rationally defined, or even objectively measured by its outcomes? For example, what standardized system could systematically calculate human creativity? Why would this not be a mission of the national education system? What exactly is cultural content, and what specific activities can be included under this category? From the bureaucratic point of view, the answer will be clear and obvious. The products of the “creative industries,” generally believed to be high value-added industries, may be recognized as cultural contents which can be objectively evaluated by their economic indicators, without jeopardizing their political wellbeing as a part of the government organization.

My accumulated observations of the activities of CKL have demonstrated to me that this bureaucratic nature might not be practical or appropriate for the cultural domains as these activities can hardly be “systematically” created nor “objectively” evaluated. My ethnography is situated at the focal point where the employees make decisions based on bureaucratic points of view, and how these decisions come out in reality, particularly through the experiences of the “creators,” the theoretical beneficiaries of this cultural policy. The ethnography presented in this thesis is based on engagement with actual persons who play main roles in the cultural policy implementation. Through the research, I intended to provide an anthropological point of view on the Korean government’s conception of culture based on developmental ideologies and the exploitation of the notion of creativity that often misleads governments into outcome-oriented cultural policies.

This thesis is related to larger questions regarding the ideal role of government-led cultural policies: what is the Korean government’s understanding of the mission of cultural policies? What are the issues arising when these policies are manifested, and what would be an appropriate methodology of government intervention in cultural domains? CKL is an active and direct form of the government intervention in cultural industries, because their activities constitute attempts to provide very specific types of tools and devices to the general Korean public in order to create the specific types of cultural contents which can be potentially lucrative. But how do these attempts manifest themselves in reality? In asking such questions, CKL as a research site can provide a good deal of ethnographic data in relation to the implementation process of the national cultural policy, the perception or critical opinions of the main agents in this process, and ultimately, the state’s intention to “develop the cultural industry” that has led to an unexpected outcome due to the sociocultural factors elaborated above: economic, political, and postcolonial factors.

5 ETHNOGRAPHY

5.1 Contributing to the Nation

The participants' perceptions of the mission of the cultural policy are, in most cases, dominated by a sense of duty for contributing to the nation, particularly in terms of the economic growth. For the participants, it is a common premise that the cultural achievements brought about by the policy, such as the global success of a certain popular song, film or a television show are undoubtedly a way to attain the national goal. By the same token, working as employees of the quasi-governmental agency is to, in a way, fulfill a sort of responsibility as a citizen. Discussing their own opinions or insights regarding the intention of the government behind the cultural policy, for these participants, is a bizarre idea. When there is a fundamental basis that national cultural policy is supposed to be aimed at generating tangible economic growth, the other side concomitant with its implementation, the lived experiences of Korean citizens, is not a relevant factor to be considered.

Even though some of the CKL employees agreed that the policy is closely related to the everyday lives of the citizens, focusing on economic achievements was still the first priority. It was often difficult to discuss this fundamental premise because these participants found it unnecessary to explain the exact connection between economic growth and "the improvement of the quality of national cultural life," (law.go.kr 2016) as the official mission of the policy indicates. It was a general perception that a bigger national economy undeniably generates positive social benefits such as job sustainability, human creativity or expanded markets in the relevant industries. For this group of participants, it was uneasy to ask a deeper layer of contextual questions surrounding this basic premise because the importance of economic development clearly overwhelms the other values involved in this complex implementation process. It was as if there

was one simple way to understand this entire cultural policy in a straightforward way: the investment was made in high value-added industries. The fund will generate an increased amount of products, which will ultimately lead to a benevolent circle of “creative economy,” which is considered one of the most important national goals. In this chapter, I would like to illustrate the participants’ conceptual ideas and opinions surrounding the presence of the nation, that is, a sort of sense of duty as government employees, and as Korean citizens.

Jo Sooyun has been working in the government agency for more than twenty years, yet she has never questioned the direction of the Korean government’s cultural policy, because she “belongs to the role of the agency.” According to her, “If someone disagrees with the government’s direction, they should quit the job immediately.” The interview could not be further developed beyond the point where she introduced their specific tasks in the agency, because, based on her understanding of their range of responsibility, an employee must follow the mission of the upper level of the governmental institution as a means to achieve the goals of the national policy. An hour of semi-structured interview with Jo subtly but consistently reminded me how important a role the nation plays in this policy implementation process, especially for a governmental agency employee. Jo explained that the government’s active intervention in these industrial sectors is necessary since the market for cultural industries in Korea has not sufficiently matured. More people in the nation can appreciate the products of cultural industries by the government artificially providing an increased amount of cultural products to the citizens, and it is an ideal way to fulfill the mission as an employee. She further explained that this cultural policy is simply a strategic investment of the Korean government in a specific category of industries aimed at establishing a more mature industrial infrastructure in the nation, expanding jobs and markets, and creating a more active audience who will eventually consume more products made from these cultural

industries. This government investment was made to contribute to the national economic development that benefits the majority of citizens, and “it is not our job to question its direction.”

The irony is that Jo also mentioned, in discussing the reason why she believes that the cultural industries in Korea are not mature enough, that there are numbers of social and cultural factors involved with this malfunction. The main reason Korean people do not spontaneously appreciate cultural activities, according to her diagnosis, is due to the lack of personal time resulting from excessive work hours in most of the workplaces in the nation, and also due to the lack of a cultural infrastructure that expands further than the capital. Jo perceives that the more fundamental issue related to these sociocultural factors is that the nation has undergone excessively rapid economic development since its beginning, and the Korean government wanted to catch up with the other developed nations’ cultural achievements, such as Hollywood films in the United States or animations in Japan, by actively intervening in similar industries. The ironic part is that even though she clearly pointed out that the lived experiences of the citizens play a significant role in policy implementation, she has categorized this as an irrelevant issue to the cultural policy because “we cannot raise questions about the authority.” The duty of fulfilling the national mission was a sacred task for some employees like Jo.

Park Soyoung, also a long-term employee of the agency who has participated in numerous public projects aimed at increasing and expanding businesses in the cultural industries, has a similar opinion. Park points out a number of reasons for which government intervention in these industrial sectors is necessary for Korea. First of all, unlike the United States where there is the largest consumer market in the world, Korea has a significantly smaller population, which causes a lower potential for growth for the cultural industries. Also, because of that, the nation had fewer opportunities to naturally develop a business infrastructure in the cultural industries. She

recognizes that government intervention in these particular industries is essential because it helps to increase “speed and quality” in generating cultural products, which ultimately accelerates the national economic development. Her task in the agency is mainly related to the provisioning of financial and administrative support to those who wish to establish a company that belongs to the category of cultural industry yet have less field experience or capital. While Park regrets that the agency may not be able to afford to provide such support to everyone who submits the application, she finds it valuable that at least some of the prospective entrepreneurs are picked up and make their dreams come true.

This screening process, according to her accumulated experiences on the job, is extremely competitive. Park explains that those business applications submitted to the agency are strictly screened based on the potential growth rate in terms of economic profits. This task in the agency resembles the role of a broker in a stock market. The major difference is that her team must show satisfying results to the upper level of the governmental institution and to the general Korean public, not to investors. Park states that “we have to show something as achievement,” in explaining the reason the support towards the prospective entrepreneurs is strictly related to the economic aspects. Overall, the role of the cultural policy in this case, as she perceives, is to make the development process of these selected companies faster: “When it would normally take ten years, it is our job to make it five.” As Park sees it, these projects will undoubtedly generate successful economic outcomes which will eventually strengthen the national infrastructure in the cultural industries as well as contribute to the national economy.

Despite working for the same agency, different employees perceive the main focal point of their work differently. Kim Bumjin, an employee who is mainly in charge of the public relations of the agency, expressed a mixed view towards the Korean government’s cultural policy by further

illustrating the complex social contexts of the nation. While the above two participants perceived the policy as an unquestioned guide for the nation's economic development, Kim argues that this cultural policy merely focuses on the capitalist side of culture, yet that this is inevitable considering the peculiar sociocultural and political situations in Korea. "It is difficult to expect a naturally developed culture in this country," according to him, explaining the overall history of the nation in relation to the cultural policy. His statement implies that the way this cultural policy was intended is unnatural, because the cultural activities resulting from this policy are not expected to be nurtured in an organic way.

First of all, Kim understands that the beginning of the development of the nation was significantly delayed due to the war period in the 1950s that completely destroyed the national infrastructure. This indicates that while other culturally developed nations such as the United States or Japan had sufficient opportunities to naturally build up the cultural industries based on their own cultural foundations (such as consumer markets for cultural commodities), Korea did not have a chance to formulate the basis until the late 1980s. More importantly, before the Korean War, the nation suffered under Japanese occupation until 1945. Park states that "We have not really recovered from the influence of this colonial period until today." According to him, under the Japanese occupation, Korea had to experience a discontinuity in the nation's cultural heritage, including the art, language, politics or lived traditions of the citizens. He explains that these tragic events in the past still deeply affect the direction of national cultural policy these days. To be more specific, after the Korean War, the economic development was absolutely the first priority of the national agenda. Park suggests that during the rapid economic growth led by the dictatorial regimes throughout the 1960s and 1980s, the role of the Korean government had to be a little bit different from other nations: Korea simply could not afford to look after the nation's cultural values because

it was not as crucial as reducing the poverty in which the majority of Korean citizens lived. During this time, the cultural policies adopted by the government were merely an auxiliary function to the grandiose mission of industrializing the nation through manufacturing industries (Kwon and Kim 2013:426). In other words, he understands that it is natural for the Korean government to actively intervene in the cultural industries, although focusing merely on the economic value over other kinds of value because, due to peculiar historical contexts, Korea “tried to follow up the other developed nations.” On the other hand, he also mentions that the government’s active intervention in the cultural industries might be complicated to explain to non-Korean people because culture is generally considered as something cultivated and grown naturally by the citizens, not by the government. Even though Kim suggests that the Korean government’s cultural policy direction is inevitable due to the various contexts explained above, at the same time, he affirms that “it might be something like cheating.” Since the rule of the game was not fair from the beginning, as Kim expresses, Korea had to “hold the government’s hand together” in order to equally compete with other developed nations in the global market. The last question I asked Kim, then, was what they believed the meaning of “winning” the game was. He indirectly responded, “To be honest, I am not really sure whether this is the right direction or not. But I am sure it works. We are contributing to the national development.”

In addition to Park’s articulation of Korea’s peculiarity that justifies the government’s intervention in the cultural industrial sectors, Ryu Jisook, one of the crucial decision makers in the agency, also mentions the point where the cultural policy is connected to the historical context of the nation. During the rapid economic development period, Ryu adds, Korea had been always concentrated on manufacturing industries because “all we had at that time was human resource, in other words, low-cost labor force.” Reflecting on this, the Korean government “still has less

understanding of how cultural industries generally work, and how the national cultural policy should be.” Unlike the other participants above, she has a critical point of view on the cultural policy officially aimed at contributing to the nation, mainly because the cultural industries are simply different from the manufacturing industries, of which the Korean government has been focused on since its beginning. She summarizes that the cultural industries are vastly different from other types of industries because they are unpredictable in their economic and social consequences in many ways. Yet, the Korean government’s conception of the cultural industries is identical to the approaches of the 1970s, where the government’s strategic support for the labor-based manufacturing industry contributed significantly to the national economic growth. “In terms of cultural industries, the government intervention is a very communistic idea,” said Ryu in explaining what is written on the business card that reads: “Let’s expand our territory with contents.”

She continued to criticize the overall idea of the cultural policy in several different points. First of all, the cultural industries are an extremely privatized and competitive sector where public agencies like CKL cannot efficiently intervene. One of the projects Ryu was involved in, for example, was to establish a public database that contains audiovisual images and information about Korean traditions. This included orally transmitted stories or traditions in the nation, traditional holidays and national events that have been nearly forgotten in the modern days, a myriad of audiovisual data that shows images of traditional Korean culture. Collaborating with a number of other public institutions like museums, universities or research institutes, the project was to provide the public database to the general public in Korea as a means of supporting creative production activities conducted by the creators. Ryu further states, “It is an extremely inefficient and communistic idea that costs millions.” Most of the government-funded projects in the cultural industries would be as inefficient as this one, she believes, because the cultural industries are

mainly driven by the private sector which is intensely competitive; the government “does not seem to understand their nature at all.” Similarly, in her understanding, the activities of the agency do not necessarily contribute to the national economy because the goals of these government projects are fundamentally aimed at “being influential to Korean society,” not at generating economic profits. The outcomes of some government-funded projects might seem profitable; however, Ryu stresses that those are “optical illusions” caused by collaborations with private sector firms which are already successful without government support. She argues that the cultural policy and the general activities of the agency are basically intended to encourage the creative activities of the nation by providing funds to those who need support and by conducting various public projects that cannot be expected from the private sector. However, even with good intentions, Ryu concludes that the official mission of contributing to the nation cannot be accomplished because of the inefficient nature of public organizations and of the fundamental lack of understanding of the concept of culture. “Why should the government expand cultural activities anyway?” Ryu who has worked as a governmental agency employee for nearly two decades, asks.

The majority of the employees’ understandings of the cultural policy are, regardless of their personal opinions on its mission, closely related to the question of nationhood. In most of the interviews, the idea of contributing to the nation is a basic premise that each of the participants perceives as a sort of duty as Korean citizens. Jo and Park understand that their tasks in the agency are undoubtedly an effective way to fulfill the mission of the cultural policy, that is, contribute to the nation’s economic growth. They are proud to be a part of the system of development, because, based on their cumulative experiences and observations as long-term employees, the agency provided a very practical support to the people involved in the cultural industries as officially promulgated. Asking more detailed or broader questions such as the possible obstacles in fulfilling

the mission, or its ability to fulfill the mission as an organization were unacceptable because the cultural policy to these participants is an authoritative mission established by the nation, which is unquestionable. They seem to express their patriotism by not questioning the mission given by the nation. On the other hand, Kim tries to connect the complex historical context of the nation and the overall direction of the cultural policy as well as the activities of the agency. Kim believes that, due to the disadvantages of the nation resulting from the past tragedies, the Korean government's active intervention is inevitable and necessary in order to cope with competition in the global market.

However, it is questionable whether the Korean government's active intervention in the cultural industries is appropriate or not. Ryu indicates that the cultural policy's goal to develop the national economy itself might be crucial, however, the way the cultural policy was manifested in the agency is extremely inefficient. She argues that providing government funds to the cultural industries resembles the Korean government's past strategic approach to economic development based on the manufacturing industries, which is no longer appropriate in modern Korean society. Even though she raises questions to the overall direction of the cultural policy, the basic premise that the cultural policy should contribute to the national economy seems to be similar to the beliefs held by Jo and Park.

Cha Jinhyuk, a semi-professional animator who was involved in several projects conducted by the agency, shortly states that it has been always obvious that the government-funded projects are "somehow nationalistic." To be more specific, even though Cha was grateful that the agency has provided them opportunities to participate in various public projects as an animator, he does not support the notion that these projects contribute to the nation. "I only did it for my own career," he states in explaining a series of different projects conducted by the agency. "To be honest, I don't

care if they advertise my work as a representative case of the national achievement, because everything I have done with the agency is strictly personal, not for anybody else.” Cha’s statements, which are further illustrated in the following chapters, indicate that there are different understandings of the concept of this cultural policy regardless of the mission intended by the policy-makers. Even though the policy was aimed at contribution to national economic development, individuals (especially “creators,” who are receiving support from this process) can perceive and utilize the resources and the opportunities provided by the organization in vastly different ways. Also, his opinion on the government-funded projects shed light on the discrepancy between the nation-state’s mission to develop the economy, and the personal goal of maintaining one’s career as an artist. This discrepancy raises a question about how individuals involved in this policy implementation relate themselves to both, that is, the centralized mission of this policy and the personal motivations regarding the cultural industries. This argument is further developed in the following chapters.

5.2 Top-Down Policy

One of the common understandings shared by the participants, especially among the agency employees, is that the Korean government has been mostly in the leading position in shaping the lived experiences of the citizens. This indicates that there has been always a distinctive dynamic between the Korean government and the Korean citizens, as that of a leading authority and the followers. As Ryu Jisook points out, the economic development policy of the 1960s to the 1980s that focused on the labor-based manufacturing industries was a representative case of government-led national policy in Korea that forced the citizens to play a passive role throughout the implementation process. In the same context, one participant jokingly added that there is virtually no area that the Korean government isn't involved in in this country, "even the underground economy, gang or mafia." The strong majority of participants seem to be in agreement that this particular cultural policy to actively intervene in select industries is strongly motivated by the apparent success of the economic policy of the past, based on the model of a leading authority with visions that guide the subordinate citizens.

From a different point of view, however, even though the Korean government, as a leading authority, possesses a certain vision of how to develop national cultural industries through policy, there might be different angles of perspective held by the other key actors such as agency employees or the creators. In this chapter, some of the critical issues surrounding the policy implementation process are discussed, such as questions of the validity and reliability of the Korean government as the leading agent, through the lens of these key actors' collective experiences and observations. Of course, not every participant is critical of the way the Korean government guides the citizens, however, the participants hold diverse views that shed light on how the government's ambitious mission meets the reality of the Korean people, possibly one of

the most complicated parts in understanding the policy implementation process.

Kang Jiyong, who has been working in the agency for several years, is involved in a project called New Story Creation project. According to Kang, this project is meant to create stories that can then be used as narratives for works of literature, animation, film, or TV dramas. The project is designed to provide practical support for the creators (referred as “writers,” in this case) who wish to write such stories professionally. He argues that providing support to the writers is necessary in Korea because they face many difficulties in attempting to successfully publish their work, mainly due to limited networking opportunities. Even though someone writes an attractive story that has great potential to be further developed into a successful media content, “it would be nearly impossible to connect the story to the actual job market in Korea unless one personally knows someone powerful in the business, because chances are very limited.” According to him, in order to mitigate the writers’ difficulties in finding job opportunities, the project aims at discovering good stories and providing support to the talented writers as well as offering networking opportunities until tangible outcomes can be produced. There are eleven “story-labs” in different cities in Korea, a sort of center for regionally-based writers, as a means to maximize this support.

Kang explains there are specific types of support provided to the prospective writers. First, these story-labs offer physical office spaces where the writers can focus on their work, because “it is difficult to find somewhere to even concentrate on writing for those who haven’t started a career yet.” Also, they provide lectures on a variety of topics aimed at inspiring or motivating the writers to develop their work to a more professional level. For example, when someone wishes to write a story based in a hospital setting, the story-lab might provide them lectures concerning professional medical knowledge that can enhance the quality of the writing. Providing job opportunities is the

most important type of assistance that is offered, Kang explains. The story-labs attempt to introduce ready-made stories to the media content industries such as film and broadcasting. The function of the labs at this point resembles a job agency that connects potential human resources to the market. In addition, the project also provides other types of support that might be helpful in the creation process, such as a mentoring program or legal advice. He states that although the selection process of the writers is becoming increasingly competitive, it is “our job to select right candidates who have the most potential.” There are evaluation committees consisting of external experts such as professional writers, producers or professors who thoroughly and impartially evaluate the candidates. Kang adds, “The project is sponsored by the state, so we must do it intensively.”

The conversation with Kang centered around his own interpretation of the project rather than what is officially introduced as its stated goals. The most notable aspect of the conversation is that he was imprecise in defining the terms used in introducing the project. For example, the writer refers to those who participate in this project as creators, according to the general introduction, but Kang reflects that “it is a very vague term to define when you think about the pre-existing job categories.” This is because there are many different types of literature including poetry, novel, journal, even screenplay, and thus it is difficult to generalize them under the single umbrella term of writer, especially in relation to the job market where the different genres of literature are each the concern of vastly different industries. “It is perhaps just the term we use to signify the creators who can potentially contribute to the birth of a hit content,” Kang says, “but of course, ‘writer’ itself is a too broad term to be considered a job or anything.”

For another example, the term “content” used in this context was also difficult for Kang to describe precisely, because the outcomes made from using the selected stories can be virtually

anything: from the various types of literature to the various media contents, including high-budget films and YouTube videos. He responds that the type of content depends on what kind of opportunities can be found for these stories; therefore, “We cannot predict anything at this stage, to be honest. We basically assume that it may be something like TV drama or film.”

Kang then continues to the specific way this project provides support to the writers. If it is difficult to point out the exact type of writers to support as well as the exact type of cultural product to be made, it must also be difficult to specify how exactly to provide support for them. He perceives that the specific types of support such as office space for writing activity or lectures for enhanced inspiration are still in an experimental stage, because “not many parts of this concept are quite clear in reality, as we are still in the beginning period of this project.” Even so, he adds it is sometimes questionable how exactly the writers may sustain their professional careers in this country, even if they are lucky enough to get a job opportunity.

Kang mentions that there might be better ways to provide more long-term support to the creators, but “what I personally think does not matter at all.” He acknowledges that “to be honest, we are simply administrators who are trained to do what is given by the upper-level institution.” This indicates that employees are not considered empowered agents who can out into practice their ideas and opinions on how to improve policy implementation, but simply administrators who handle their given repetitive tasks in the office. According to Kang, “The basic direction of the policy first comes from the high government authorities, followed by the government ministry, and then the government agencies such as CKL, then eventually becomes specific when it comes to the smaller teams like us. That is how the policy is generally manifested, and an employee like myself is not capable of questioning anything.” At the beginning of the interview, he explained that the project aims at providing more opportunities to those who wish to work in the cultural

industries professionally by providing practical support. At the end of the interview, however, the answer to the same question was given based on his own experiences and insights as an agency employee: “As a sort of an administrator, I have no opinions. But as an individual, to be honest, something about this project sounds too ambiguous. When government agencies like us have to deal with the social difficulties shared by the writers, why not try to solve the fundamental societal issues themselves, rather than being job brokers?”

Ryu Jisook has a strong opinion about this point. “This is absurd,” she says, in explaining her own perception of the way the cultural policy is implemented, particularly regarding projects as New Story Creation project or the Korean traditional culture database project. She invokes a comparison between the private sector and the public sector in order to make the argument clear. Basically, these cultural projects are conducted by a public organization funded by the state, and whatever the public sector creates in the cultural industry, such as a database or human resource pool, will be a sort of public asset shared by the community. “But when you think about what’s going on in the cultural industries, which are as competitive as they can be, which cultural product would be more likely to be successful, a public one that is freely shared by everyone, or a private one?”

To elaborate, Ryu understands that the specific type of support provided to the creators is fundamentally pointless, because the role of a government agency as public mediator simply does not fit into the way competitive cultural industries work. Firstly, she believes that the cultural industries belong to the private sector and already have a certain method of recruiting talent or utilizing raw materials (such as “stories”) to produce the final products. Even though a public-sector organization such as a government agency attempts to help this process, the administrative approach of providing public resources will not be practical because it generally requires a

tremendous amount of experience and knowledge to understand the complex nature of these industries. Secondly, the public resources provided by the government, especially the culture-related resources, are considered less useful than those provided by the private sector. This is because, as Ryu explains, government officials, as well as agency employees, are simply administrators who possess nearly zero knowledge of how cultural products are made and can be competitive in the market. “It is not enough to merely rely on those external experts. They are not capable of putting efforts as much as their own personal projects or occupations.” Lastly, Ryu raises questions about the notion of supporting human creativity. In discussing the various types of support provided to the creators, she simply concludes that “creation is a personal process that cannot be standardized or generalized by others, especially by the authorities as the government.” Ryu states that, as the Korean traditional culture database project has failed to motivate businesses in the private cultural industries, so, too, will providing office space or motivational lectures to the writers not necessarily accelerate the creation process, because the basic roles of the public sector and the private sector are simply different. “Even if these practical supports may partially help, it is not the government’s job.”

Ryu spends a lot of time discussing the issues in the decision-making process surrounding the cultural policy, especially about the lack of possibility for improvement in the current policy implementation system. It is ironic that she points out the numbers of serious issues that have arisen in implementing the policy when Ryu herself is one of the key decision makers in the agency. “It is impossible to alter the overall direction of the policy, even if it is seriously absurd,” Ryu expresses in a skeptical manner, in explaining how the details of the cultural projects are shaped in the agency. In order to clarify the agency’s overall limitation in the policy implementation process, she states that the agency is “simply a subordinate organization.” This indicates that the

agency employees, even crucial decision-makers such as herself, must follow the strict guidelines established by the upper-level institution. As disempowered employees, she argues, no one in the agency can question the government's guidelines or attempt to improve the policy by suggesting better ideas based on their accumulated insights, because it is "impossible to affect the long-term direction of the policy anyway." Ryu believes that, in implementing a top-down policy such as this one, everyone in the government organizations, including even the higher government officials, simply functions as administrators who care more about the power relations within the bureaucratic structure than the policy itself.

To elaborate, Ryu illustrates how the disempowerment of employees in the decision-making process results in undesirable effects. Firstly, she argues that so many pointless indicators are created by the government employees involved with this cultural policy as a means of fulfilling the government's mission. "The examples are everywhere." According to Ryu's observation, the agency must demonstrate how effectively and efficiently cultural achievements have been made based on the allocated budget. The only way to prove the achievements of these cultural projects, as she perceives, is to collect quantitative data such as the number of visitors to the website, news articles from the media, or the number of public events held in the agency. "These numbers are completely irrelevant to the fundamental goal of the policy, and yet everyone's trying to create more and more pointless achievements." Ryu considers that this is mainly due to the rigid nature of the top-down policy, where disempowered agencies like CKL cannot suggest the way the cultural policy should be implemented. Secondly, Ryu explains that the agency is obliged to produce an annual report which must contain certain evidence of developmental progress. "This is how a strictly vertical relationship between the government organizations works," she argues, in explaining how the upper-level institutions such as the government ministry or the head of state

fail to be patient in attempting to cultivate the cultural infrastructure as a long-term national project.

To be more specific Ryu understands that most of the public cultural projects conducted in the agency cannot possibly demonstrate visible progress in a year, because it always takes time and consistent effort to make progress in something as broad and complex as culture. However, “a subordinate organization” such as the agency is not capable of raising an objection to the way projects are evaluated and funded, because the employees are not empowered agents in the policy implementation process. As a result, it is hard to expect the employees to be socially motivated or be responsible the projects, “because only the annual report may evaluate our activities and efforts.”

In addition, Ryu suggests that these undesirable effects resulting from the bureaucratic, top-down policy model may also be related to the presidential system in Korea. The presidential term in Korea is limited to five years, and it is not possible to be re-elected due to the single-term system. “Whatever the mission we get from the upper-level institutions is, employees assume that it will only last for five years at the most.” According to her analysis, it takes at least more than five years to be able to visibly recognize social improvements directed by the cultural policy, and it is the government’s role to be patient and cultivate long-term cultural foundations in Korean society. Yet, the nature of the top-down policy in the cultural areas causes numerous negative effects. “When the government authorities expect us to report annual achievements, and when the failure in fulfilling the pointless outcomes immediately affects the budget for next year, it only makes the sycophants look attractive and stand out, not the hard-working employees who have long-term visions,” Ryu summarizes.

Lee Jungyong, a semi-professional documentary filmmaker who has participated in several projects conducted by the agency, also points out a similar area where the rigid nature of the top-down policy coupled with the bureaucratic system in Korea affects the policy implementation

process in an unexpected way. Lee has been involved in several different projects conducted by different government organizations, and the one with CKL, he explains, was a representative case among them. Lee expresses that these cultural projects conducted by public organizations are helpful in some way, but not in a long-term career. As an example, he shares an experience they had with the project called Creative Mentoring Program for Young Professionals conducted by the organization, where he was accepted as a mentee about two years ago. The project was a sort of education program directed for prospective creators including documentary filmmakers such as Lee, which aimed at providing practical work experience with well-known professionals in each of the genres.

This mentoring program, according to his understanding, is meant to provide opportunities to observe and experience the intensive creative process in the respective fields. For three to four months, a small stipend is provided by the agency in addition to field experiences. Lee explains that the mission of the mentees in the project is to create their own individual projects with the given time. “Doing my own project as usual, with a little money, and a little work for the mentor,” he summarizes. He expresses that the project was generally helpful. “The main reason is because I could spend less time on other part-time jobs, because the organization gave me some money. I haven’t really learned anything from my mentor, but it didn’t matter.”

Lee did not expect anything further than these small benefits because of two reasons. First of all, based on his cumulative experience as a public project beneficiary, it is hard to expect support that can actually help one’s long-term career from one-time opportunities from these publicly funded projects. “Since it is generally known that these projects are simply a one-time event, nobody expects their careers to be improved from these opportunities. It is just about money.” Secondly, Lee doubts that the direction of the cultural policy has ever been consistent. “One day,

they want to help the documentary filmmakers but on the next day, they don't." According to him, the cultural policy has always changed when the higher government officials change, thus it is impossible for him to expect long-term support. In short, the issues raised by Lee are mainly resulting from the lack of empowerment experienced by participants in these cultural projects, which does not allow them to maximize their human agency as prospective professionals. "It is frustrating, because I cannot actively do anything. I cannot find a job, an audience to show my work, and a market to sell my product. Isn't this the government's job to solve this kind of issues? I don't need an education, I have a degree in documentary filmmaking already," Lee skeptically continues, "but I have seen it too many times. I just appreciate these opportunities because they are financially helpful, from time to time."

It was a common notion that the cultural policy is simply a different version of the economic development strategy of the Korean government in the past. Some participants seem to accept the given role as simple administrators, even though they are aware of the issues arise in the implementation process, while other participants raise an objection to the Korean authority's top-down approach to one of the most dynamic and complex industries as cultural industries. Similar to Ryu, Lee expresses concern with issues arising in the policy implementation, particularly regarding the passive role given by the Korean government to its subordinates. One other participant states that these role divisions between leader and the followers was doubtlessly effective in the 1960s when Korea as a war-torn country, and specifically for the manufacturing industries, because the Korean people at that time "had no other option but to just follow the authority." In other words, he doubts if this authoritative way of approach would be still effective in developing the cultural industries, where human creativity and individual agency are the most crucial components in the creation process. Ryu expresses that working as a part of the top-down

policy implementation process is “like driving the worst mileage car.” This indicates that he feels the core driving force of this cultural policy, such as human creativity, is severely wasted due to the inefficient decision-making system. “The gas is running out immediately after driving out of the city, where the destination is still far away. The way the agency works is quite similar. Even though there might be a mission with good intentions, the bureaucratic nature of this policy disperses those good intentions, and the mission eventually becomes pointless,” Ryu explains, in illustrating the state of inertness that she feels as a long-term employee in the agency.

5.3 Political Screening

Na Kwangho, an independent filmmaker who has released several short films in Korea, is involved with a number of CKL projects as a young, exemplary creator who actively works in the field of film industry. Na starts our interview with an anecdote about an audacious director who made a movie that reflects a critical point of view towards the lives of conscripted soldiers in the Korean army. Since the movie was based in a military barracks setting, administrative support from the army was essential. Na explains that the director submitted a fake version of the script to the Ministry of Defense in order to obtain approval, which, of course, was a censored version made by the director himself. He continues by explaining how this story effectively describes how the filmmakers in this country ceaselessly have to go through a self-censorship process, especially when they have no other option but to work with the support of government organizations. “It’s kind of a strategy,” Na says, in explaining the sort of balance between what a director desires to express in her mind and how much one can compromise with the obstacles in reality.

To elaborate, when a director works with major film companies in the private sector, one’s political stance usually does not impact the production process because the extent of success of the film is the only evaluation factor. However, in order to reach that point where a sort of political freedom is guaranteed, a director must filter one’s thoughts and messages in one’s film in order to get as many opportunities to receive support as possible from the public sector, such as from government organizations. Na points out that there are already many other obstacles for independent filmmakers to overcome, such as extreme competitiveness in applying for the government projects, or sustaining a consistent film career while having to seek other employment to make ends meet. At this pre-professional stage, he argues, maintaining a pro-government stance or even being non-political is extremely helpful. “In fact, nobody officially asks me to censor my

own work. But everybody knows that we need to, based on our cumulative lived experiences in Korean society,” Na explains. Reflecting on this, this chapter discusses the political screening processes that tacitly exist in the implementation of the cultural policy, through the arguments of the creators who have been involved with not only the agency’s projects, but also a variety of government-funded projects throughout their lifetime.

Lee, a semi-professional documentary filmmaker, shares an experience of applying for the Creative Mentoring Program for Young Professionals project. As briefly described in the previous chapter, this project, as many other projects in the agency, is aimed at providing practical support to the creators. This includes working opportunities with professionals in different cultural genres, a stipend, as well as other kinds of administrative support that can help the creators’ individual projects. Lee recalls that the project was an unparalleled opportunity because it could immediately affect his daily pattern in a positive way. Lee has been working at a cosmetic store as a full-time employee in Seoul for the last four years, and the lack of free time and money to concentrate on his own documentary project has always been a primary concern. “Fortunately, I am an expert at penetrating the government project applications. Even though they are extremely competitive, there is a trick.”

According to the Lee’s elaboration, the application process of the agency is largely quantitative rather than qualitative. This indicates that even though the applicant’s portfolio has social, cultural or artistic significance or influence, these are not considered as important factors as the number of released films and their popularity, or the list of awards or prizes received from the recognized contests. “It is easy when you know how to sell yourself. I have an award-winning career, for example, so this makes my application much more competitive than others.” According to his previous application experiences, however, the criteria are usually ambiguous and

questionable. In most projects, there is a group of external experts consisting of university professors or professional documentarists, whose job is to evaluate and rank the applicants based on their knowledge. Lee believes that their criteria are poorly organized. “Sometimes I even think these application processes are almost random, because the selected applicants I have experienced so far have been so.”

According to the Lee’s perception, there are two main reasons for the poor criteria. First, these government-funded projects are conducted by government officers who possess zero knowledge about art, therefore the application process mostly depends on external experts, who are mostly unfamiliar with the government organization’s administrative system. This means that, according to him, it is difficult to expect a sort of public confidence in the agency because the application process is conducted within the confined boundary of the officers’ conception of art. At the same time, these professors and the professional documentarists are not necessarily suitable for rating the applicants, considering the job is simply to evaluate the hundreds of applications based on the same criteria, which are insufficient to understand each of the creators’ artistic and creative potentials. “Choosing right applicants is partially an administrative work as well, but these external experts are artists after all. They cannot possibly consider the contexts of hundreds of portfolios carefully. Instead, they simply make assumptions about each of the applicants. About their interests, skills, visions and all that.” Second, Lee believes that the project’s screening process involves a strong political component, due to the nature of government-funded organizations. When the idea or the message included in the project proposal is related to any political matter, he argues, it is simply impossible to be approved for the agency’s projects. “This is not official, but everybody knows it’s there. That is the reason why some people prepare two different versions of the applications.” Lee explains that it is not unusual for the documentary filmmakers to submit an

alternative, self-censored version of the project proposal to avoid sensitive political issues that might potentially undermine their competitiveness. “If you are making a film about some sensitive political issue in Korea, would the government agency be okay to support your project?”

Lee states that this political screening in the application process may significantly impact the policy implementation at large. “If you get to interview more people in this industry to talk about the government-funded cultural projects, they will definitely use the term ‘blind money’ to illustrate this situation.” Blind money, according to him, is a sarcastic expression in Korean that refers to the allocation of government funds for such cultural projects. “It is blind, because whoever gets the money first, wins the game. No responsibility follows.” Lee explains that since these government-funded cultural projects are poorly planned and administered in a strictly bureaucratic manner, the creators simply consider the fund as a sort of public resource open for their personal benefits. “It’s like an ATM machine, but with a little procedure.” Since no one involved in this process is actually responsible for the policy’s mission, motivated by the government’s guideline, or genuinely concerned with a long-term vision of the policy, the financial support simply functions as a lottery system for the creators, especially for the creators of unpopular genres such as documentary filmmakers. In most cases, the self-censorship is essential because the creators are generally desperate for financial support and therefore cannot afford to sacrifice their competitiveness. Lee suggests that preparing two versions of project applications might be a fair strategy, because the government can obtain the subordinate, “politically castrated” young talents easily, and the creators get more chance for approval for the financial aid that they desperately need. “The general perception of the creators towards the cultural policy, as far as I know, would be something bureaucratic, quantitative, achievement-oriented, and lack of long-term vision for the cultural enrichment in this country,” he adds, in summarizing the concept of blind money.

Chung Soohyun, an agency employee who has previously worked for the Creative Mentoring Program, gives a reflective answer to this point. Chung acknowledges that the agency, as a part of the government system, is somewhat responsible for filtering out politically sensitive topics that might bring unnecessary internal and external controversy. In doing so, Chung understands that the screening process is inevitable considering the peculiar historical context of the nation. “It is a vastly different situation from other nations where the similar projects are conducted.” He further explains that the political spectrum of Korea is dominated by the conservative elites, whose form of conservatism is closer to the extreme right than moderate conservatives. The reason for this inclination, according to his insight, is due to the previous war experience in the 1950s where different political ideologies immediately became a threat to one’s life. Thus, to the older generations who are still under this influence, political criticism might cause panic as a sort of reflexive response. “This country is not yet completely open to political discussions. Kind of a national trauma, so to speak,” Chung expresses, in pointing out what is unique about the situation in Korea. Chung continues by explaining that all public servants in Korea, including the agency employees, are heavily shaped by the ruling party’s political agenda. “Since we are currently under the control of the conservative party, there’s no other option to simply follow the direction given to us.”

Another point made by Chung is that the ultimate goal of the cultural policy in Korea is “somewhat unsubstantial” compared to the other nations. In the developed nations, such as the United States, Germany or France, the cultural activities are politically and industrially mature, so the governments do not need to intervene and filter out political issues. In other words, the cultural policy in general is supposed to aim at empowering the autonomy of the market, which is based on the state of freedom of expression. In this case, political intervention by the authorities will not

be necessary because the maintenance of their natural market economy would be the primary goal of the policy itself. On the contrary, Korea has a significantly shorter history of development, and therefore, “the lack of understanding of culture affects what is happening today.” His statement indicates that the Korean government possesses insufficient knowledge and experience to fulfill their mission of promoting and developing the cultural industries as planned. This, according to Chung, makes the cultural policy in Korea merely aimed at an increase of the size of the market, without understanding the production mechanisms of the cultural industries. As a result, the goal of the cultural policy appears to be “insubstantial.”

To be more specific, the idea of this cultural policy is directly inspired by the success cases of other developed nations, therefore the approach of the Korean government officers is administrative and submissive to the upper level institutions, rather than encouraging and politically open-minded. In short, Chung believes that the process of screening project applicants is affected by the two major factors: the organization’s role as a subordinate government agency controlled by a conservative authority, and the immaturity in understanding the nature of cultural industries as a result of human agency. “Although, I think the government has good intentions. It is just the way this policy has manifested itself in this peculiar society.” Chung’s statements on the cultural policy demonstrates how he perceives the sociocultural situation in Korea as unusual, compared to how the cultural policies are supposed to be implemented in general, as in other “developed” nations. His answers imply that this cultural policy in Korea, under the surface, possesses unusual characteristics resulting from the unique political and social situation of the nation. This unusualness, ultimately, positions the cultural policy as distant from the global standard – where the cultural industries are supposed to be nurtured and developed in an organic way, based on the political freedom of the citizens.

Shim Jaehoon, a long-term employee who formerly worked at human resources department, also acknowledges that political screening is inevitable in conducting the projects in the agency. First of all, it is frustrating for a long-term employee such as Shim that the agency's autonomy has to be limited due to the authoritative administration system of the Korean government. "The agency belongs to the upper level institutions, so we cannot make up the rules. This also means that we are implicitly and explicitly obliged to filter out any politically sensitive topics included in our projects." The main reason for this, according to him, is because the high government authorities are monitoring the activities of the agency in detail. Shim's understanding indicates that the political agenda of the Korean government is heavily reflected in the agency's projects, and because of that, the employees need to actively eliminate any possible political conflicts resulting from their projects, a part of the mission of a subordinate agency.

Shim states that it is systemically impossible to be politically unbiased because of two primary reasons. First, due to the strictly hierarchical decision-making system, the agency cannot afford room for ideological flexibility. "The BH (A short for Blue House, the official office of the President of Korea) is watching us. There's no question about that." Second, he points out that it is critical that the agency remain fully funded by the government. Because of this constraint, the employees are generally cautious of political conflicts in their activities which might affect the agency's budget for the following year. "Since this cultural policy has never been quite stable, it would be no surprise even if the budget allocated for this agency is abolished tomorrow."

Shim adds that this political screening process causes several more negative effects that may severely damage the diversity of the national cultural industries in a long-term. First, the "politically castrated" contents, especially the ones censored by the authority, cannot resonate with members of Korean society, nor can they be developed into more independent, competitive cultural

products. “This selective support to the creators will inject a sort of totalitarian idea to them, unless the government wants to make propaganda videos, you know, like how they do in North Korea.” Second, it always creates “an alienated group of people” in the Korean society. The political screening, according to Shim’s explanation, divides the creators in the country into different groups: one group who wants to question authority, and the other group who does not. “Which group of creators is more likely to be supported by the agency? The answer is obvious.” Due to this division, the voices of the alienated group of creators are systemically ignored in the Korean society. “Who knows if these creators have amazing potential to be successful as artists? But we still need to filter them out, because our agency is funded by the government,” he concludes.

In relation to this point, Lee, a documentarist, shares an experience of applying for government-funded projects. “After I received an award from an international documentary competition, it became significantly easier to be approved for those projects. Thanks to that, I get chances to experience more and more about how this screening system works, and how to penetrate the process more efficiently.” The irony, Lee perceives, is that the award-winning documentary is a highly political one, portraying how a normal citizen involved with the Gwangju Democratization Movement in the 1980s was confronted by the incredible violence of the authorities. Lee explains that it is an instinctive strategy to emphasize the award-winning career itself, not the specific message or ideas contained in his previous works. “I tend to talk less about political issues that might possibly be included in my documentary when writing applications or having interviews, even though it makes me feel like a hypocrite. I have to use this strategy to get a gig.”

Lee further illustrates the process in a critical manner. “So, this cultural policy is intended to boost the cultural industry by supporting artists like me, and the agency is supposed to be

responsible to implement the policy as open-minded as possible, as an empowered organization. If the political screening must exist in the process, I would say the agency is not an independent cultural agency administered by professional people at all.” To elaborate this expression, he believes that the agency as a policy-implementing organization should remain independent and separate from the upper-level institutions, otherwise “it only functions as a mouthpiece for the authority.” Lee continues that this suspicious and biased filtering process deprives everyone of equal opportunities. The products of cultural creation, even from the most capitalistic point of view, should be able to embrace and represent the lives of everybody in the society, not only of those who agree ideologically with the authority. “I am a Korean citizen too. I pay taxes. This government fund is, in fact, our money, not their personal property. Why are these public servants afraid of the authority, not the citizens?”

5.4 We Are the Blind Spots

Na Kwangho, an independent filmmaker with an award-winning career, has been working at a clothing shop in Myeong-dong, a major tourist area in Seoul, for almost a decade. He had had several different part time jobs before, but decided to keep working at this store because it permits relatively flexible work hours compared to the other jobs. Na feels comfortable and satisfied with the current working environment, because “this is one of the few jobs in this city that allows people in the film industries such as myself to make a living and pursue a career at the same time.” As a film director, he has been involved with several projects conducted by the agency. “I am considered an exemplary case of a young, professional creator in Korea. Quite frequently, I lecture about various issues in filmmaking.” Na’s lecture subjects seem to be diverse, from technical skills in producing a film to social issues in the cultural industries. Each time there is a lecture, Na explains, there are numbers of prospective creators such as young film production majors, or internet video creators. The interesting part, he perceives, is that the majority of the audience wants to be professional filmmakers in the future, yet it is questionable if these lectures are actually beneficial to them. “I have graduated from one of the finest art universities in the nation, majoring in film production. I have been working in the professional field of film production for more than a decade, and produced several films of my own, one of which has won an award from a renowned international film competition. Isn’t it ironic that I lecture about how to be successful to these kids, when I have experienced for my entire life that the truth is exactly the opposite?”

Na elaborates by pointing out the reason. First of all, he perceives that the cultural industries in general, and especially the film industry, in Korea are extremely unstable as a career because the industry itself is highly unstructured. For example, the recruitment system is often unfair, and benefits from movies are often unfairly distributed. “The job system is literally chaos,

but it hasn't been changed since forever because there are always these 'passionate' kids out there, who are willing to provide their labor for free." He affirms that it is impossible to make a living by pursuing a film career in Korea unless one becomes a sort of a celebrity film director, of which there are "less than ten in this whole country." For the majority of independent filmmakers, it is nearly impossible to get an opportunity to be exposed to an audience, even if one makes an acclaimed independent film by surviving personal bankruptcy. "Cultural prosperity, we have heard of this term a lot, right? It is one of the key agendas of the Korean government. I'll have to say, though, they literally don't care about cultural prosperity," Na concludes, as he goes back to work. This chapter focuses on the voices of "creators," the official beneficiaries of this cultural policy, based on their lived experiences in the Korean society as independent artists who are highly trained and experienced in their field of the genre.

Cha Jinhyuk is an animation major who is soon going to graduate from a national university, which is infamous for its extremely competitive entrance examination. "Since I have started to train animation techniques a decade ago, millions of money have been spent on those private cram schools. After I was accepted to this university, instead, I work at a cram school myself as a part-time lecturer." On top of that, Cha occasionally works for the agency's projects as a semi-professional animator. Most of the projects are introduced by Cha's academic advisor, and he is grateful that these projects may enhance his professional career. "Sometimes I create and illustrate animation characters that fit the given plot, and sometimes I make a short-length animation by myself. Recently, I have made a sort of a corporate training video." Cha wishes to participate in these opportunities as much as possible, because it is important to make his career look good, filled with a variety of professional experiences.

Although these projects usually pay him “barely minimum wage,” Cha seems to appreciate the opportunities because they are not the main source of income. After graduating the university, he plans to apply for graduate school programs in Japan, and ultimately to get a job in one of the world-famous animation studios in Japan. “Working in Japan has been my dream since I was very young. And, the more I get to know about how animators around me struggle in Korea, the more I want to leave this country as soon as possible.” Cha continues by recounting the story of an animator who was a student in the same university program. The animator, Chang, used to work at one of the few entertainment companies in Korea which specialize in animation production, a position he obtained right after his graduation from university. Chang, according to Cha’s explanation, was a creator of animation characters used for a famous television series directed by the company. His characters have become more and more popular, especially among children. The animation has exploded into a world-wide success since its first debut about a decade ago. In fact, the animation now became one of the more frequently-referred success stories by the agency, mainly focusing on the extent of its success, which is unprecedented in Korean history. It is often pointed out that the value of the animation series is equivalent to five billion US dollars, in illustrating how the products of cultural industries may generate incredible economic benefits.

Cha argues, however, the enormous success of the television series was not necessarily good news for the initial creator of the character himself. He explained that despite the fact the Chang himself did not spread this story, every student in the Animation department knew that he had not received adequate compensation from the company as a crucial contributor to the success of the series. Because of that, Chang eventually had to quit the company after a long period of conflict over the character’s copyright, which ultimately left him without ownership of the characters. “The copyright of characters, especially of animation characters, are hardly protected

in Korea. In this case, for example, nobody actually cares who created the characters or whether the creators are accurately compensated for the idea. Instead, the CEO of the company gets all the credit. This is generally how this industry works,” Cha expresses in an agitated manner. “In a normal society, Chang is the one who should be rich and spotlighted.”

Cha’s statement, at this point, raises a question about what, to him, constitutes a normal society. Although Cha did not define the term himself, his expression indicates how he perceives the role of the Korean government, represented in the CKL projects, based on his accumulated experiences and observations as an artist. There are clear negative connotations in his statement. To further develop his ideas, the Korean government’s perception of the animation industry is confined to its success cases as cultural products, which severely ignores the important stage where creators such as Cha put professional skills and effort to the production. As a result, the authority of the nation state strikes him as irresponsible and imprudent rather than as legitimate and trustworthy. In other words, the focal point of the Korean government’s support towards the cultural industry, that is, making economic and nationalistic achievements, results in the failure of protecting the basic copyrights of the artists, as well as of establishing a sustainable work environment for the industry. Thus, to a creator such as Cha, this cultural policy is considered unreliable in the long term, even though those projects provide him with work opportunities in the field of animation. The “normal” role of the government in such a policy, according to this interpretation, would be something opposite of the current interest of the Korean government that Cha points out: protecting artists’ intellectual properties, and providing a better work environment for the relevant industries.

Cha emphasizes that the case of Chang is not unusual in the field of the animation industry in Korea. “There is no way I can make a living by doing what I love and what I am good at, even

though it may generate profits from the market. Somebody else will steal my effort, without an exception.” Based on life-long observations and experiences, he decided to migrate to Japan “to be protected as an artist.” He perceives that the overall working environment, as well as the general awareness of copyright issues, are better in Japanese entertainment companies. In order to make the dream come true, he attempts to utilize the opportunities provided by the agency as much as possible. “In a sense, this is kind of a fair deal, because we exploit each other.” The conclusion made by Cha seems to be remarkably similar to one of Na, a filmmaker. “Because they care about achievements, not about us.”

Lee Jungyong, a documentary filmmaker, discusses the term “creator” that is frequently used in the agency’s projects. For example, the official motto of the agency itself, according to the official website, reads “Content Korea Lab, an exciting playground and lab for all creators” (ckl.or.kr 2016). Lee perceives that although the role of creators is ostensibly considered the most important in this implementation process, as they are the beneficiaries of this national cultural policy, this is true “only on the surface.” Unlike the way the agency appreciates “creators” as creative human resources with unlimited potential, Lee understands that the viewpoints from this population are vastly different. He explains that the creators, including not only the documentary filmmakers such as herself but also the people working in the cultural industries in Korea, are “socially marginalized populations.”

For example, Lee states that the vast majority of documentary filmmakers in the country are virtually out of jobs, because it is simply impossible to make sufficient profits to maintain one’s career by doing what they are good at. As a result, the ones who choose to remain as filmmakers have no other option but to work in various part time jobs concurrently in order to make ends meet, until they eventually give up.

These desperate project applicants, whom I have seen hundreds of times, make me wonder whether their career will be even slightly improved by the Korean government's small support or not. Because, at the end, nothing has really changed because the reality of this country is still there. There's no job waiting for them. There is no market for their works and efforts. There is no autonomous industry itself, as everybody knows.

To elaborate, Lee stresses that the beneficiaries of this cultural policy, the creators, are generally young and ambitious, mostly in their twenties or thirties. For these populations, however, there are major obstacles in achieving their missions as artists. For example, the primary mission for the documentary filmmaker is generally to release a film to the public. The obstacles that hinder these career goals, he believes, include not only financial difficulties in making tangible products, but more fundamentally, also lack of overall cultural infrastructure in the nation such as job opportunities, markets, or even an audience. "How many people in this country can afford to actually enjoy the products of cultural industries? I mean, in terms of consumers, not creators or even prospective creators. Let's face it, there is no market for these areas in Korea." This issue, to quote Jo Sooyun, an agency employee, is closely related to a deeper level of societal issues such as excessively long working hours for the Korean companies in general. What Lee ultimately questions is, if the government has to invest in the cultural industries, "why not try to focus on the fundamentals, instead of implementing a stopgap policy that does not benefit anyone?"

Lee continues by answering the question himself. "Because even the government-funded projects judge what sells and what doesn't. They don't want to be involved with our complicated problems that deeply." Lee believes that the cultural policy merely focuses on the cultural products that are already popular and have an existing sustainable market, such as television shows or popular music, while feigning providing universal, unbiased support for creators in various cultural genres. "When we take a look at what they say they have 'achieved' by implementing this policy, what this cultural policy expects from the creators becomes evident." He makes an example of the

agency's periodical publications in order to elaborate the point. "Every time I get to visit the agency building, I notice there are many different magazines displayed to promote their various activities. They seem to be either about financial investment, or the success cases of their projects."

First of all, Lee argues that the agency actively advertises the cultural industries as objects of investment, which is not at all a new idea. As one of the major industries in Korea, the products of cultural industries such as film, documentary, animation, and music have already been invested in by major corporations before the government noticed their potential. However, these industries, according to his explanation, belong to the private sector where the investment happens naturally, based on their pre-existing system.

What do you think is the point of the government agency desperately advertising how the cultural industry can be profitable? I think this is perfectly pointless. These magazines are not talking to anyone, not to the creators like us, to the general Korean citizens, nor even to the investors who already know investment can be hardly successful in these areas.

Second, Lee believes that the listing of the agency's achievements in these publications gives undue credit to the agency. For example, among the countless lists of success cases of the agency's projects, "there is hardly a case where the agency has played a significant part in the production process." In most cases, the list of achievements consists of the human resources utilized in the cultural industries that are already popular with the general Korean audience, such as television dramas, video games, or popular music. "My point is these cases would have been successful regardless of the government's interventions. Television programs are popular already, and K-Pop sells itself worldwide anyway. They are the achievements of each of the private companies, not of the Korean government." Lee argues that it is absurd that one staff member who has participated in an agency project in the past makes the whole project an achievement of the agency. "If I ever make a famous and influential documentary in the future, I am positive that I will be on these magazines, as a proud achievement of the agency. My point is that, they really

don't care who I am, what I have been doing, and what I am struggling with as a creator." he hypothesizes cynically.

Lee points out where this cultural policy unintentionally and systematically neglects the creators as "socially marginalized populations," by sharing an experience of participating in the Creative Mentoring Program for Young Professionals project. "Granted, the project was a good opportunity for me because the financial support helped me to concentrate more on my own documentary project during that time." Lee, working at a cosmetic store as a long term, full-time employee, participated in this mentoring program designed for perspective documentary filmmakers about two years ago. The program has provided financial and administrative support, which is the reason why he could not miss the chance as a competitive applicant. According to Lee, the project provided "around minimum wage" as a stipend for three to four months, which was approximately equivalent to eight hundred US dollars a month. "It is significantly less than what I am making from this sales job, but it didn't matter. During that time, at least, I was able to do something more for my project than other times."

However, he admits that living off eight hundred dollars a month as a documentary filmmaker in Seoul was a challenging experience. "I first applied for the project because they give me financial support. But it didn't take long to realize that it is impossible to live in Seoul with that money, unless I work both jobs (the government project and the cosmetic shop) at the same time. Eight hundred dollars hardly keeps you alive. You cannot buy anything you need, or even shoot your documentary within that budget." Lee points out the list of basic expenses including housing, transportation, "and perhaps one gimbap (one of the cheapest meal choices costing under three US dollars) a day," which cannot possibly be covered by the stipend.

How many filmmakers in this country can say they can live with that money? It is not very realistic, in other words, not sustainable. My point here is, why is the Korean

government trying to offer temporary jobs to the creators like us, instead of trying to expand the market and the audience itself, based on a long, systematic approach?

Lee doubts the current version of the government-funded projects cannot support the creators in a long term, because it fails to embrace the lived experiences of the young creators who are living on the edge, and more fundamentally, to understand how cultural products, as the results of autonomous artistic activities, can be created. “I am willing to sacrifice my time and effort to my documentary regardless how challenging it is, if I can make eight hundred dollars from the market, not from temporary government projects. I feel less and less enthusiastic about my dreams and goals these days, because I am tired of relying on these occasional government-funded projects. I cannot possibly continue to verify myself as a serious artist to those government officers to be approved. Not anymore. We are the blind spots of this society.”

For the interviewees who have been involved with the agency as “creators,” this cultural policy appears to be an object of love and hatred. At first, the participants express gratitude that the Korean government at least attempts to provide support and project opportunities to them. At the same time, however, they commonly point out that the ultimate mission of this cultural policy, namely, to boost the cultural industries, requires in fact much more consideration of the complex social context of the nation, as well as the lived experiences of the artists struggling with a variety of challenges to maintain their careers. For example, Na Kwangho, a filmmaker, argues that the government should focus more on the systematic issues that arise in the actual field of the industry by sharing their own experience as a retail worker and a professional filmmaker who gives positive lectures to the prospective creators as an example. Cha Jinhyuk, similarly, mentions the copyright issue that severely violates the rights of the animators in the country. He believes it is a right decision to leave the country because the overall situation in Korea is not desirable. As an artist who is still in a university, Cha decided to make the best use of the government-funded projects

as means of improving his career. Lee Jungyong, a documentarist, feels that creators are socially marginalized populations in Korea, because most of them need to rely on the small number of government-funded projects in order to cope with the harsh reality that hinders creators from pursuing their career goals and dreams. He understands that the direction of this cultural policy may be merely focused on certain type of industries that are already popular and proven profitable, as means of “stealing credit” from the private sector industries, which unintentionally results in negligence of the deeper layer of social issues in the cultural industries.

Ultimately, the interviewees point out that, even though the agency attempts to conduct various cultural projects as a government agency charged with policy implementation, their understanding of culture and the cultural industry is confined to the notion of capitalistic investment where the popular fields of genre receive more and more financial and administrative resources. This situation, then, has led the “creators” to question, what the ideal role of the government really is, particularly in such a complex area as culture.

6 CONCLUSIONS

As I was conducting fieldwork in Korea, one of my research participants, who is a long-term agency employee, questioned how exactly a researcher can study something as vast as national policy by talking about “something completely incomprehensible.” In answering “an unnecessary question” about one’s experience as an employee of the agency, the participant responded that everything one needs to know is already on the government website. She also suggested that a researcher will not be able to gain sufficient insight through short interviews because they only explain a small part of this gigantic governmental system. It was a valid point. Even though the fieldwork included a series of interviews with people who are deeply involved with the cultural policy implementation, their individual cases and opinions do not necessarily represent the national cultural policy as a whole. Instead, the participants simply share their various stories based on different job positions, political perspectives, career goals, and accumulative observations. Even though each of the stories are small and mundane, they are, in fact, clearly forming a sort of imaginary map that illustrates how the different roads of thought are interconnected to each other: where they come from, and ultimately, where are we going at the end.

Abu-Lughod, in her ethnography regarding how national television in Egypt reflects the nation’s post-colonial identity, used the term “sociocultural microcosm” in explaining this massive gap between a small, personal lived experience and the big national policy. Even though a researcher might attempt to study something as vast and complex as nation-state or even national policy, according to her ethnography, it is always an essential first step to engage with “the life-worlds of face-to-face communities of people” in order to approach their everyday lives “in the structure of the complexes of microcosms” (Abu-Lughod 2008:19).

Understanding policy in a literal sense, such as scrutinizing the relevant laws, the governmental documents or the budget can be also valuable, because these objectifiable facts also tell stories about how the Korean government has conceptualized culture and cultural industries, and what specific methods of implementation use to bring about the stated goals. However, as an anthropologist who studies humanity, simply translating those documents into academic language was not sufficient. Through “engagement,” including ethnographic interviews and observations, this study draws a larger map that illuminates a certain geography of Korean society in relation to this cultural policy. These small, mundane roads drawn on the map have led the study to conclusions, which even the researcher could not have anticipated in the beginning. This chapter concludes the study by illustrating how the map was drawn based on ethnographic data, and also by suggesting possibilities of a more efficient, equally distributed, and evenly developed geography reflected on the map in the future, based on the participants’ own ideas and insights.

To begin with, in the way this cultural policy was established and implemented, the Korean government, particularly the officials involved with the agency, has attempted to realize its very specific mission to visibly enlarge the cultural industries’ piece of the economic pie by intentionally or unintentionally neglecting some of the crucial components in sustaining the “development” process. These overlooked components include: a) the fundamental difference in the way the private and the public sector recruit and utilize the resources, and eventually generate their outcomes, and b) the significantly unpredictable and complex nature of the cultural industries, where input of resources does not necessarily guarantee the expected amount of output, which is the evidence the government organizations must give to ensure a generous allocation of funds. Some agency employees raise doubts about how government intervention in the cultural industries can be as competitive (in terms of cultural products in the market) and efficient (in terms of

decision making process and distribution of resources) as the way those private entertainment companies have been already doing. Even though the Korean government aspires to boost the cultural industries by accelerating the “speed and quality” of those industrial production processes, some participants are skeptical about this active intervention. This is due to the extreme inefficiency resulting from the government’s lack of understanding of the competitiveness of the private industries, and also from the bureaucratic nature of the government organizations that does not allow room for a bottom-up improvement of the cultural policy.

At the same time, however, the other participants believe that government intervention is necessary despite notable side effects because of the historical and sociocultural handicaps of the nation. Those who believe this argue that Korea, as a late starter of industrialization, needs to maximize the use of national resources, regardless of public or private, in order to “catch up” with the previously developed nations whose cultural industries and markets are “sufficiently” mature and diverse. In other words, this group of participants argues that the nation is urgently required to enlarge the economic contributions of these industries as a first priority, regardless of the evident conflicts of interest between the two different islands of the government and the private sector.

Second, the cultural policy implemented through the agency demonstrates how the Korean government perceives people in the cultural industries, “creators,” as simply human resources without human agency. As demonstrated by the lived experiences of the creators, this cultural policy reveals a certain superficial and schematic view towards the policy’s beneficiaries, that of complete negligence of the complex sociocultural and political issues that are commonly shared by the artists’ group. In most cases, it is extremely challenging to maintain one’s career as an artist in Korea, not only because there is an insufficient number of job opportunities, but also, there are more fundamental issues in the nation including the lack of an audience who appreciates works of

art, the market, copyright protection, and the fair distribution of benefits. The negligence of these issues results in a severe gap between the mission of the agency's well-intentioned government-funded projects, and the way these projects are perceived and utilized by the artists as a sort of "a band-aid policy."

Some participants responded, of course, that these job or project opportunities provided by the agency help in improving their careers, because it is still better than not having any opportunity to work at all. However, when looking at this situation closer, it only reveals that relying on occasional government funds can hardly be sustainable, especially in maintaining one's career in the long run. In other words, the government's role in implementing a cultural policy should be aimed at mitigating the ground-level societal issues in the cultural industries in order to protect the "socially vulnerable populations," and at maximizing the creators' human agency to build up more sustainable, independent careers as professional artists. One might question, then, what the difference between the role of the different government ministries such as the Labor Ministry and the Cultural Ministry is, when the issues of the cultural policy ultimately point out the fundamental social problems in Korea, such as the ones the participants have experienced as artists. This study concludes then, that it is extremely important for government agencies, especially for the cultural agencies, to realize that these social phenomena are all interconnected, and that simply allocating funds and conducting projects are not sufficient in themselves to solve these complex issues.

Lastly, CKL, as an implementing agency of the Korean government's national agenda, is tacitly obliged to maintain a pro-government or apolitical attitude in their activities, which ultimately results in the opposite effect of what is expected from this cultural policy, that is, promoting cultural industries and the creative activities of Korean citizens. As shown in a series of interviews with the participants, the way the agency carries out this cultural policy is strictly

limited to the simple execution of the specific tasks given by the Cultural Ministry, due to hierarchical relations between the government organizations. This limitation directly indicates that the agency's projects, originally aimed at promoting the cultural industries, are highly affected by the political agenda of the upper level of the government institutions.

These explicit and implicit influences inevitably filter out a significant portion of the creators' ideas in conducting projects, based on their political points of view. Thus, the outcomes of these "politically castrated" projects may function as no more than a sophisticated version of propaganda, which can hardly resonate with the nationwide audience. The participants who are well aware of this problem as agency employees have also pointed out that even the decision makers in the agency, who have been working there the longest, have no other option but to follow the given tasks because the agency is simply "a subordinate organization." This point sheds light on the fact that the employees of the agency are, in fact, not empowered agents of the policy implementation, and, because of that, the political screening is considered necessary in order to fulfill their mission within the given role. This bureaucratic and hierarchic nature of the government organizations not only limits the topic of their projects, but also results in several more negative effects.

First, the tacit existence of political screening forces the artists in Korea into self-censorship of their work. These "socially marginalized populations," even though packaged as "creators," have few options but to rely on the government funds in their pre-professional stages, mainly due to the various life struggles that impede them from maintaining their career goals as artists. Instead of protecting their freedom of expression, which can strengthen the autonomy of the industries and can ultimately expand its potential to attract an audience, the Korean government chose to control the political expression of the beneficiaries by intentionally or unintentionally

increasing the artists' dependency on government funds. As a result, the majority of the creator participants conceive the government's support as "blind money (whoever gets the money first wins)," or an "ATM machine with a little procedure," which is clearly not the intended effect of this national cultural policy.

Second, the political screening process results in severe loss of diversity in the creative production process. As one participant pointed out, the main reason the cultural industries are the best fit for the private sector is because they are relatively free from the political constraints of the state. The participant stressed that freedom in expressing their ideas or messages can naturally diversify the products of each of the cultural genres, and eventually maximize their competitiveness and profitability in the market. On the other hand, the political screening subtly enforced by the government results in the exact opposite, ultimately deteriorating the autonomous foundation of the cultural industries.

Third, it is worthwhile to note that, based on the previous reasons, there is a great danger of the exploitation of the cultural industries and the creators as means of spreading political and ideological propaganda for the state. Most participants were concerned that the official motto of the agency, "expanding our territory," has strong political connotations, and it already functions as a sort of national propaganda that does not necessarily relate to the beneficiaries of this cultural policy, the Korean people. Considering the fact that the agency is responsible for submitting an annual report that must contain a certain amount of tangible, quantifiable evidence of "national cultural development," it is questionable if the annual "achievement" made from self-censorship of the artists can be completely free from this danger. Some participants argue that political issues (criticism, particularly) are considered extremely sensitive for the older generations in Korea due

to the series of tragic events in the past, which still heavily shape the way people behave and think in general.

However, fundamentally speaking, the overall direction the cultural policy, such as the way the agency demonstrates their “achievements” through their various publications, focuses on the nationalistic idea of economic and cultural penetration (how, for example, a certain movie generates a large amount of income and attracts millions of consumers in other nations), rather than the culture as an expression of the lived experience of the citizens: making a movie, making a living by working in the movie industry, learning how to make a movie, planning a career goal and overcoming obstacles, maintaining life through the struggling pre-professional stages, demanding fair distribution of profits in the field of production, reflecting a director’s original messages and ideas in the movie regardless of the external political pressure, having an equal opportunity to be exposed to an audience, having enough time to appreciate movie outside of work hours, making enough compensation for the labor in general to maintain one’s life to be a part of the audience of the cultural industry.

Feigning development by reproducing countless “optical illusions,” pretending to be creative by censoring human creativity, and spending money on the “high value-added” industries in the most inefficient way may be described as *watering fruits*. It is perhaps worthwhile to take a look at what actually makes the fruits grow. When the ground becomes fertile, sprouts come up naturally because the seeds are already there. They start to grow by overcoming sunlight, wind, rain, storms, and a tremendous amount of time. A farmer’s job here would be watering roots, and simply being patient until the fruits are ripened. Granted, this might look like a great waste of time and money, however, the fruits are definitely worth it.

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