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Marketing the Past: *Rhetorical Presentation of Bukchon in Tourist Literature**

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Abstract

Bukchon, the historic district located between two palaces of Seoul, has become a major attraction of Korean tourism in the recent decade. As most tourists form first impressions of a site based on tourist literature, Bukchon's public presentation has now become more important than ever. Due to its complicated record in the twentieth century, however, including its roots in colonial history and the residential conflict surrounding government-led preservation efforts, introducing Bukchon to visitors presents some unique challenges. By examining government-published or endorsed tourist representations of Bukchon, such as brochures, signage, and audiovisual exhibitions, this article attempts to investigate the desired image of Bukchon being projected towards the external audience and relate the issue to the discourse of heritage tourism and invented traditions. By paying close attention to the language and visual presentation of the subject of study, it illustrates how Koreans' fundamental anxieties regarding certain aspects of modern history result in sanitizing and reimagining contemporary Bukchon.

Keywords: Bukchon, Seoul, *hanok*, historic preservation, tourism, built heritage, invented tradition

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Introduction

With the increasing number of tourists to Korea in the past decade, Bukchon, the area between Seoul's two major palaces, Gyeongbokgung palace and Changdeokgung palace, was reborn as a prime tourist destination. Visitors are often impressed by the picturesque geography of the area, where, due to its elevated standing, certain locations afford sweeping vistas of central Seoul towards Namsan mountain. The entry towards Bukchon is also awe-inspiring, which typically begins by passing Gwanghwamun gate, Gyeongbokgung palace and the presidential residence framed against the backdrop of the impressive Inwangsan mountain. Such natural and cultural features give visitors the feeling that they are really standing at the very center of the old city. Once they enter Bukchon, however, something more plebeian often catches the fancy of most visitors: clusters of traditional-style, tiled-roof, wooden houses called *hanok* rub shoulders with more contemporary architecture. For the most part, if one chooses not to notice the one-too-many construction projects seemingly taking place everywhere, the complicated history of Bukchon—owing precisely to its symbolic location—can remain completely invisible.

The rapidly evolving residential and business makeup testifies to Bukchon's current popularity as a tourist destination, and observing such phenomenon makes it safe to assume that tourism will be vital to shaping the future of the district. In view of the preservation policies carried out in Bukchon from the 1970s to the present, the government's representational vision of the area and the role it is expected to play in Korean tourism will likely be significant in deciding its future. It is for these practical reasons that examining its current representation is crucial.

Although difficult to imagine today, Bukchon's reign as a tourist magnet has not been long. Due to its compressed industrialization, Korea only came to possess a *modern* understanding of heritage comparatively later than most Western developed nations. Whereas discussions on the nature of heritage began as early as the nineteenth century in Britain with pioneers, such as John Ruskin, William Morris and Philip Webb, and the establishment of international organizations, including UNESCO and ICOMOS

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(International Council on Monuments and Sites), set the tone for heritage conservation in the twentieth century, heritage was still vaguely understood in Korea, even by the 1970s and 1980s when Bukchon was bound by preservation policies banning any new construction. Consequently, Korea's experience with tourism, especially heritage tourism, has also been relatively short compared to Western countries. Yet, as Korea suddenly found itself at the center of a tourism boom in the twenty-first century, it became urgently necessary to reevaluate and promote its assets.

Such reevaluation and promotion has become more important today as heritage tourism is becoming an increasingly active field of study in step with the growing number of travellers throughout the world; tourism in our time has been called a "growth industry" (Orbaşli 2000, 2). In particular, it is generating vibrant discussions over the impact it has on the local community (Porter and Salazar 2005, 362). As Laurajane Smith notes, the Western notion of heritage, such as the UNESCO Heritage Sites, is increasingly being picked up by more and more non-Western nations who wish to also engage in the "business of heritage" (Pai 2013, xviii; Smith 2006, 11). On the other hand, tourism sometimes plays a vital role in conservation, economic regeneration, and even destruction of cultural heritage (Orbaşli 2000). Despite its multifaceted potential to bring economic and cultural prosperity to the community, tourism is also a highly fickle and volatile industry. Tourists move onto new sites as if looking for a new fashion statement once a given site is *spoilt* or over-touristed, which means how Bukchon is shown and experienced today may also have long-term consequences for its future survival as a tourist destination.

As much as heritage tourism offers economic opportunities, its negative effects have also been duly noted. In particular, the growth of a façadist approach to conservation and the prevalence of pastiche in new developments are not only undermining tourist experience but also negatively affecting the lives within the community. A tendency to fixate on aesthetic and external qualities, rather than the *continued lived-in experience*, has also been noted as a problem. Bukchon has also been criticized within the architectural and academic community for excessive gentrification and commercialization,[1]

1. For criticism on the current direction of the development of Bukchon, see Cho (2008) and Koo (2016).

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but its self-projection in the tourist narrative has not yet been thoroughly researched. At the same time, heritage tourism is not only intended for foreign tourists, but is also in fact "fueled by local citizens' nostalgia and fears that their past cultural traditions . . . are rapidly disappearing for good"; heritage, in other words, "confer[s] a sense of place in the national and colonial imaginary" (Pai 2013, xix-xx). Thus, Bukchon's presentation to Korean locals is of equal, if not more, significance and value as its presentation to the international audience.

In view of Bukchon's sudden fame, how is Bukchon being marketed as a historic tourist site? Taking for granted that visitors' perception has the potential to ultimately impact the future of the area, this article will attempt to examine how Bukchon's long and varied history is being presented to the exterior gaze. To this end, it will take as its object of study promotional materials targeting tourists, such as pamphlets, audiovisual material, and signage concerning Bukchon. Among these items, only those published, distributed, or endorsed by the government will be included.[2] The reasons for this choice are twofold: first is the obvious need to define a manageable scope for study. Second, those sources bearing an official seal—unlike articles, videos, brochures, books and suchlike put out by commercial enterprises or individual persons—has direct potential to feed back into policy as the official narrative embodying and encapsulating "ideal" Bukchon from the viewpoint of the government. Also, at the risk of equating government rhetoric with the minds of Korean people, these sources perhaps represent the face Korea would like to project, not only to its people but also to the world. In addition, once released into the world, they shape public perception, which in turn is a significant factor in shaping policy. Reversely, on the

2. Among the diverse range of promotional materials, I narrowed further by including only those immediately available to tourists upon arrival in Bukchon. As a result, government-sponsored periodicals, such as *Koreana*, published by the Korea Foundation, will be excluded from this study, as such institutional publications—along with surveys, studies, books, and exhibitions—are intended to raise long-term awareness of Korean culture rather than shape public perception by immediate consumption onsite. Still, despite lying outside the scope of this study, these periodicals do present a consistent view to promote the cultural excellence of Korean *hanok*. For examples, see S. Lee (2007) and Park (2011).

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receiving end, the official seal endows an officially-produced narrative along with an aura of integrity as most visitors rarely question the potentially rhetorical nature of such literature. The analysis will mostly focus on the language presentation of the texts for study with occasional consideration for visual presentation in such materials.[3] In the process, this study hopes to understand the type of approach used to frame and imagine Bukchon for the purposes of tourist marketing and discover how it ultimately relates to the making of Bukchon as an important heritage site. First, however, it is necessary to understand Bukchon's history and put it in conversation with the present.

A Brief History of Bukchon

Although the name "Bukchon" appears in records for the first time in 1777, it was never an administrative designation. Geographically, it was part of Bukbu 北部 (Northern *bu*) among the five *bu* 部 of Seoul (Ienaga 2011a, 79–81), but it was a general name referring to the central area in Seoul between the two palaces and north of the belfry (Jonggak), containing numerous administrative offices as well as residences of high-ranking officials (Ienaga 2011b, 281–282). After renewed preservation efforts began in the twenty-first century, the name was revived from history, and today, it indicates a slightly smaller area lying east of Gyeongbokgung palace and west of Changdeokgung palace. To the north, the mountains bound the area, and to the south, a six-lane street called Yulgok-ro marks the boundary (see Fig. 1).[4]

3. All quotes in this article are taken, verbatim, from the original English and Korean materials published by the city government, both of which appear in the text. Errors and awkwardness in translation, and inconsistencies in transliteration should be attributed to the original. Differences in nuance between the Korean and the translated English version will be pointed out where relevant; in such cases, the author will provide her own translation in the footnote. Owing to the production processes of such materials in Korea, it is assumed that the English versions were translated from Korean originals, not vice versa.
4. Following the Revised Romanization of Korean (RR) set forth by the Ministry of Culture in 2000, "Mt. Baekak" should be transcribed as "Mt. Baegak," and "Mt. Bukak" as "Mt.

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Even though Bukchon was a prized address in late Joseon, having led the cultural and political scene of the time, after the downfall of the dynasty and subsequent Japanese colonization (1910–1945), it suffered a decline in prestige. Enterprising developers bought and broke up the land, replacing spacious and distinguished houses with smaller, more pedestrian *hanok* to be sold to ordinary citizens.[5] Yet, through the Korean War and subsequent nation building, Bukchon's residents remained relatively well to do, owing to the area's unbeatable location. From the 1970s, however, with the rapid expansion of Seoul and the development of Gangnam (literally, "south of the river"), the fate of Bukchon took a dramatic turn. In the 1970s and 1980s, while Korea's burgeoning economy drove *hanok* to near extinction elsewhere in Seoul, the government issued a series of laws to preserve the *hanok* in the Bukchon



Figure 1. The Location of Bukchon

Source: Official website of Bukchon (http://bukchon.seoul.go.kr/eng/intro/history.jsp).

Bugak." This incorrect usage may be interpreted as owing to the careless nature of copy-editing involved in the production of historical literatures intended for visitors. More one this topic will be discussed further along in this article.

5. These new type of *hanok* are often referred to as *dosi hanok* (literally, "city *hanok*") to be distinguished from traditional *hanok*. *Dosi hanok* were generally much smaller and more practical to accommodate the changing social and cultural climate, as well as the new demographic of tenants. *Dosi hanok* employed traditional building techniques while incorporating new materials, such as glass and steel. They have both been criticized for bastardizing the pure *hanok* form and acclaimed for their innovation in adapting traditional housing to fit the changing needs of the time. Which side of argument had more weight depended largely on the social climate of the given time. From the 1970s to the 1990s when residents actively opposed the preservation policy, the former stance tended to be more prominently visible; after renewed preservation efforts began around the turn of the century, this time with monetary incentives, the latter stance gained more support. For more discussions of *dosi hanok*, see Ahn (2011), R. Kim (1992), and Song (1990).

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area.[6] Bukchon's significant and symbolic location was undoubtedly the main reason for the discriminatory treatment.[7] However, the preservation policy in effect practically froze the area in an anachronistic cast, as it banned any kind of construction in the area. As a result, it was unanimously unpopular among residents who felt that they were being excluded from taking advantage of the real estate boom happening everywhere in the country. The authorities had forgotten or overlooked that conservation is "not simply an architectural deliberation, but also an economic and social issue" (Orbaşli 2000, 1), and that conflicts are bound to arise in the face of clashing stakeholders' opinions regarding a heritage site (Porter and Salazar 2005, 363). In addition, prestigious schools relocated to Gangnam and wealthier residents left the area to follow them.[8] Meanwhile, the houses kept deteriorating, reinforcing the argument that the preservation policy was simply untenable.[9]

After years of opposition and intense lobbying from residents, the city government finally retracted its policies beginning in 1991, paving the way

6. Jini Kim Watson calls the essence of Seoul's postwar development as "a rapid construction and tabula rasa policy," and, borrowing from Jeffrey Kipnis's coinage of a "New Asian City," argues that cities such as Seoul "evidence a new model of development in which the city is conceived first and foremost as a production platform—for the production of surplus values, laboring bodies, and national subjects . . . . In the widespread urban renewal projects that were prevalent during the developmental periods, *hanok*, along with individual, single-family houses, did not stand a chance to remain. For this reason, it is possible to conjecture that the preservation policy of *hanok* in Bukchon was largely, if not entirely, motivated by its symbolic location (Watson 2011).
7. Some of the policies included: "Folk Scenery Area" in 1976; "Old City Area" in 1977; and "Collective Aesthetics Area" in 1983 (Seoul Metropolitan Government 2001, 21).
8. Relocated schools and the dates of their relocation include: Gyeonggi High School (1976); Hwimun High School (1978); and Changdeok Girls' High School (1989). See Song and Kim (2006).
9. Poor living conditions were one of main arguments used by residents, along with the architectural bastardization of the traditional *hanok* form, in arguing against the preservation policy. In one article published in one resident complained, "*Hanok* worthy of preservation are perhaps only dozens in number, such as former president Yun Po-sun's 99-*kan hanok*. Even minor improvements are banned, and as a result, houses now look almost like haunted houses (*hyungga*)." See "Hanok bojeon jigu pureodalla" (Residents Ask for Abolition of the Hanok Preservation District), *Hankyoreh*, March 18, 1996.

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for mass destruction of *hanok* throughout the 1990s. An editorial in a national newspaper succinctly encapsulated the situation, lamenting the inevitable loss of *hanok* in Bukchon:

> The driving force behind residents is not whether Bukchon is pleasant to live; rather, it concerns a realistic desire of gaining profit through real estate, which was impossible under the current preservation laws. Therefore, we cannot help but predict the *hanok* preservation area will suffer serious damages in the future.[10]

True to such prediction, almost half of the traditional houses were gone within a decade, and most were replaced by multi-household buildings that generated more rent income.[11] By the early 2000s, however, motivated by the extreme extent of destruction, a renewed preservation movement began to take shape based on the idea of giving monetary incentives to owners. Under the new scheme, whose main ideas were first outlined in Bukchon Regeneration Basic Plan, owners would be entitled to receive government subsidies in renovating their houses if they agreed to keep their *hanok* identity. The plan gained moderate support among residents, but the real boost came unexpectedly with increasing visitors. By the mid-2000s, parts of Bukchon, such as the more secluded Samcheong-dong area known for its gingko-lined streets and artistic atmosphere, started to become a popular destination among early adopters and bloggers. Stores began to open up catering to a new demand, squeezing out resident life and displaying signs of gentrification.[12] Also, certain sites within Bukchon (such as Jungang High School) were already being frequented by foreign tourists, who came to see the shooting locations for Korean TV dramas, such as *Winter Sonata*.

10. "Minwon-e millin hanok bojonchaek" (Hanok Preservation Policy Retracted Due to Resident Complaints), *Seoul Shinmun*, May 27, 1991.
11. According to various data collected in the Bukchon Regeneration Basic Plan, the number of *hanok* in Bukchon decreased from 2,756 in 1985 to 1,056 in 1999 and 947 in 2000. See Seoul Metropolitan Government (2001, 31).
12. *Hanok* changed hands most rapidly between the early years of the Bukchon regeneration project from 2000 to the mid-2000, and then stabilized around 2008. Notably, new owners tended to be younger, and building uses had become diversified (K. Lee 2012).

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Government subsidy and increasing visitors went hand in hand, and it appeared that the worst days of endangerment for *hanok* were gone. Over the next decade, Bukchon reinvented itself architecturally. Overcoming initial skepticism, it was estimated that by 2005, 353 *hanok* were voluntarily registered with the government, while 230 had undergone renovation with government support (Jeong 2005, iii). The changing tide was helped by global contexts as well: the rising wealth of Asian nations combined with the popularity of Korean pop culture brought an onslaught of tourists to Korea in the next decade, roughly matching the timeline of Bukchon's rebirth.[13]

The tourism boom of twenty-first century occasioned many self-reflective discourses about Korea's attraction as a tourist destination, during which it was pointed out that Korea, despite its long and rich history, was not being prominently perceived by the international travellers as culturally or historically interesting.[14] One element identified was the lack of urban architectural forms that spoke of premodern history, aside from obvious attractions like the palaces. The burning down of the Sungmyemun gate in 2008 also left the Korean people acutely cognizant that the city did not possess much traditional architecture nor even cherish it.[15] Under such a climate, Bukchon's singular location, picturesque scenery, and the possibility of an intriguing narrative presented a welcome opportunity to invoke history in the tourist narrative.

In reality, however, the *renovations* (more often called *restorations*) were not expected to be faithful to the original. Because the houses were private property and the government could only go so far in dictating how to do work on private buildings, the primary criteria of any construction work on *hanok* tended to put reasons other than heritage preservation as the top

13. In 2012, ten million foreign visitors came to Korea, a drastic increase from five million in 2000. See "Oegugin gwangwanggaek cheonman sidae . . . gwaje-neun?" (Foreign Tourists Surpass Ten Million: What Are Areas of Improvement?), *News 9*, KBS, November 21, 2012.
14. According to a survey conducted on foreign tourists visiting Seoul in 2011, 66% of visitors replied they had come to Korea primarily for shopping; 44% claimed food; and only 19% cited history and culture as the main reason for visiting Korea (MCST 2012, 75).
15. For more context on the incident and one example of the series of self-reflections on heritage conservation that followed the event, see Yoon (2008).

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concern.[16] Accordingly, many *hanok* fell victim to speculation; some were purchased by non-natives looking for trophy homes and rebuilt beautifully as designer *hanok*. Often, existing *hanok* were torn down to make way for a more aesthetically pleasing and convenient ones.[17] In other instances, *hanok* owners took government support to do work on their houses and then leased them to those seeking unique business or residential opportunities, such as traditional guesthouses or cafes. Even though the primary purpose of the initial project was to *renovate* the homes to make them more amenable to resident life, in reality, the greatest success was in gentrifying and commercializing the area.[18]

This brief history of Bukchon alludes to the desired role Bukchon is to play in the twenty-first century: to embody historic Seoul for tourists and bolster the narrative of national identity for Koreans. But what exactly is the desired narrative in which Bukchon is to serve, and in what capacity? In the analysis that follows, three rhetorical foci in the marketing of Bukchon will be identified and analyzed. The first is the reduction of Bukchon to an aesthetically pleasing historical object for which *hanok* play a critical role. Second, and related to the first, is a conscious and alternate emphasis and downplaying of different historical periods. Finally, and tying both of the former foci together, is the curation of human activity in an effort to fulfill the promise of a historic past alluded to in promotional material. Keeping in view that writings geared towards visitors are an effort to shape the exterior gaze, this study will ultimately aim to connect such foci within the dis-

16. For discussion on the use of the term "restoration," see A. Kim (2015).
17. Prospective candidates for support must observe architectural requirements set by the government and also pass a committee before and after construction in order to receive funds. However, there are no rules requiring preservation of any structures in the existing building, meaning that a new *hanok* could replace an old one without any issue. For a sample of the guidelines, see the official website of Bukchon at Seoul Metropolitan Government, accessed January 27, 2015, www.bukchon.seoul.go.kr. For a discussion of this topic, see A. Kim (2015).
18. For more on the gentrification owing to Bukchon's popularity, see "Tugijang doen hanok maeul . . . bam-en 'yuryeong maeul'" (*Hanok* Village Becomes Ground for Speculation . . . Unoccupied Like a Ghost Town at Night), *Hankyoreh*, September 8, 2010, http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/society/area/438998.html.

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course to invented traditions. By examining each of these aspects, this article hopes to understand the rationale behind Bukchon's current representation and its effect on the collective consciousness.

The Aesthetic Reduction of *The Past*

The central appeal made in the tourist literature of Bukchon concerns its status during the Joseon period as a prestigious *yangban* (aristocrat) residential area. To understand the significance of this designation, understanding the centrality of Seoul in Korean history and of Bukchon in particular is necessary. In the simplest form, the historic significance of Seoul in Korean history is often expressed in a catchphrase, "six hundred years of history," a clichéd phrase familiar to every Korean: Seoul *officially* celebrated its 600th anniversary as a capital in 1994, and the age of the capital has become a source of pride, a symbol of continuity through turbulent modern history.

In light of such national pride in the capital's longevity, Bukchon's central location in the old city and its purported former prestige endows it with a certain legitimacy, indeed necessity, to embody the spirit of Joseon. In reality, however, promoting its former status presents some unique challenges, as little physical indication of such glory survives today, an inconvenience that is exacerbated by the fact that the few buildings actually dating back to the late Joseon period are mostly inaccessible to the public. Explaining their absence or unavailability is also a challenge, as doing so will draw attention to the downfall of the aristocracy and the dynasty, weakening the connection to the Joseon period and leading into the colonial period. Ideally, Bukchon would be promoted in connection to its aristocratic past during the Joseon dynasty, but the lack of architectural evidence poses some difficulties in this regard.

To some degree, this lack of evidence is solved by ambiguous language. The following passage is an excerpt from a page of promotional brochure titled *Bukchon Wanderings* (2012), published by the city of Seoul (see Fig. 2). The column located on the far right of the page, titled "Bukchon in the Past," describes Bukchon as a prized address for a bygone era:

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Figure 2. Bukchon in the past

Source: Bukchon Traditional Culture Center (2012a).

> Flanked by two palaces, Gyeongbokgung to the west and Changdeokgung to the east, the village used to be an upscale residential area for wealthy aristocrats and court employees. The traces of old roads and waterways, as well as the stone and timber dwellings, rewind the present day to centuries long past.
>
> 경복궁과 창덕궁 사이, 조선 시대의 양반들이 터를 잡으면서 시작된 이곳은, 당시부터 이어져온 오래된 길과 물길들의 흔적, 그리고 한옥들을 만날 수 있다 (Bukchon Traditional Culture Center 2012a).

This passage establishes the connection between Bukchon and the Joseon dynasty on three levels: proximity to the palaces ("flanked"), the existence of old roads and waterways, and "stone and timber dwellings" (*hanok*). As for the first claim about Bukchon's location near the palaces, the narrative clearly leads the reader to the impression that the *village* dates from the

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same era as the palaces, as if proximity proves relation. Interestingly, perhaps deciding the significance will be lost on the foreign audience, the English version does not mention "Joseon" anywhere. Rather, the fact that the village was an "upscale residential area" at some point in history is deemed sufficient. It also explains what a *hanok* is "stone and timber dwellings" instead of calling it by its name, assuming a reader unfamiliar with the concept. Instead of offering accurate proper nouns, the narrative allows readers to infer from the black and white photograph on the right hand side and the old map on the left that the era in question simply precedes modern periods: in other words, the time period is *old*.[19] As for the second connection, "old roads and waterways," the passage neglects to offer exactly where such traces can be found (inevitably so, as such *waterways* are covered and lying underground, and the current roadside scenery hardly bears any resemblance to an earlier time), deeming that a reference to the age of the scene and the presentation of an old map would be enough to quell tourists' curiosity.

Unlike the tenuous claims to Joseon along with old roads and waterways, the final claim, "stone and timber dwellings," has actual potential to be substantiated, as visitors are able to witness *hanok* in Bukchon. Although most houses do not actually date from the Joseon period, the narrative conveniently sidesteps the question of which houses actually belong to the period. Instead, readers are left to make their own associations between the houses and "wealthy aristocrats and court employees." The association between *hanok* and noble residents is not explicit; indeed, they are often subtly hinted, yet in many instances, visual resemblance between traditional architecture and the *dosi hanok* of Bukchon is emphasized to imbue the area with a desired *palace effect*. One such example is "Bukchon Eight Views," a walking tour promoted by the official website of Bukchon that supposedly includes the most scenic points in Bukchon. Using the palaces to their full

19. Although historical information is largely omitted, the English version is more detailed than the Korean version in the description of former occupants ("aristocrats and court employees"), using more adjectives to describe their status ("upscale" and "wealthy"). The difference is presumably due to the desire to exaggerate prestige with international visitors, who may not be as familiar with the concept of *yangban* and Joseon.

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Figure 3. Photo Spot No. 1

Source: Official website of Bukchon (http://bukchon.seoul.go.kr/eng/exp/rcourse02.jsp).



Figure 4. Photo Spot No. 5

Source: Official website of Bukchon (http://bukchon.seoul.go.kr/eng/exp/rcourse02.jsp).

advantage, "Photo Spot No. 1" does not actually pertain to Bukchon, per se, but is a view of Changdeokgung palace *as seen from* Bukchon. The description informs the reader: "The view of Changdeokgung palace from the photo spot is considered the most beautiful view of Bukchon" (see Fig. 3). Hence, the palace and Bukchon are virtually conflated, based on the criterion of physical proximity and resemblance.

Examining the rest of "Eight Views" provides further evidence that historical unity is being argued solely in terms of physical resemblance. For instance, tiled roofs (*giwa*), the most visually striking feature of *hanok* buildings, frequently draw attention, exaggerating their presentation. "The sea of blue and green tiled *hanok* is truly a sight to behold" [*sic*], states the description of Photo Spot No. 4. Faithful to such a claim, the most frequently used and quintessential images of Bukchon are those taken from Photo Spot Nos. 5 and 6, which are actually just one spot, looking up to and down from the hill. This repeated emphasis speaks to the importance of this particular scene, prominently featuring details of tiled roofs (see Fig. 4) in perfect alignment.

Such language and presentation is representative of the intentional vagueness that runs through the treatment of history in tourist literature that can also be observed at the Bukchon Traditional Culture Center located near Anguk Station, which serves as an introduction to the area (see Fig.

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Figure 5. Bukchon Traditional Culture Center: Entrance

Source: A. Kim (2014).



Figure 6. Bukchon Traditional Culture Center: Exhibition Hall

Source: A. Kim (2014).

5). The center itself is an example of the visual appeal of history through resemblance, duplicating the patterned wall and tiled roof seen in the royal buildings of Joseon, but the highlight of the Bukchon Traditional Culture Center is a museum-like series of panel exhibits housed in one building. This exhibit, displayed on either side of the walls of a walk-through corridor, chronologically tells the history of Bukchon, ending with a capstone introductory video displayed on a monitor at the end of the corridor (see Fig. 6).

The exhibition panels are somewhat more detailed than the previous brochure, but attention is consistently directed to the Joseon era through figurative language. The first panel, for example, begins with a paragraph titled "Bukchon: six centuries of living history and reads:

> . . . a residential district for Korea's nobility during the Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910), [Bukchon] is replete with time-honored cultural artifacts. The alleys of Kahoe-dong, where a host of immaculately preserved *hanok* (traditional Korean houses) stand close together, and the streets of Samcheong-dong, Kye-dong, and [Changdeokgung] are of particular interest both to history buffs and ordinary tourists seeking an enthralling walking tour.
>
> 경복궁과 창덕궁 사이에 위치한 북촌은 조선시대 양반들의 거주지로서 사적, 민속자료, 유형문화재, 문화재 자료 등 유서 깊은 문화유산이 곳곳에 산재되어 있다.

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> 또한 북촌에서 한옥 밀집지역으로 잘 보존되고 있는 가회동 11번지, 31번지 골목길을 비롯하여 조선시대부터 물길 따라 형성된 삼청동길, 계동길, 창덕궁 길을 걷노라면 한옥의 경관과 더불어 역사의 정취를 만끽할 수 있다.[20]

Because of the lack of explanation about "time-honored cultural artifacts" mentioned in the same line as the nobility of the Joseon dynasty, readers are led to believe that "alleys of Kahoe-dong [*sic*]" with "immaculately preserved *hanok*" and the Joseon era are related in some way. Ironically, without offering much detail about history, the passage concludes that Bukchon will be of special interest to "history buffs and ordinary tourists."

The assumption underlying these statements is that history will speak for itself if it takes the correct shape, evoking the right atmosphere of the time: in other words, if the *hanok* are immaculate—indeed, *because* they are immaculate—they *become* "time-honored." By the same token, the passages underestimate readers' intelligence by assuming that the immaculate *hanok* they are about to witness, when presented along with lines about "cultural artifacts," will be unquestioningly attributed to the Joseon period. Yet, as explained before, such statements are often unsubstantiated or exaggerated. Most of the *hanok* of Gahoe-dong hardly date from Joseon, and often they are not examples of *preservation* but rather result from highly subjective restorations, often involving designer architects and intensive, if not total, reconstructions.[21] In other words, they may be immaculate, but precisely because they do not date from the Joseon era.

Still, the assumption that physical impressiveness will automatically translate into historicity undeniably exists. Such carefree association between tradition and appearance, when repeated many times, occasionally becomes reality, as shown in this blunt statement taken from the Official Travel Guide to Seoul, a website run by the Seoul Metropolitan Government: "The reason there are so many traditional houses in this area is that many *yangban* (people from the ruling class) lived here during the [Joseon] dynasty (1392-

20. Here again, the English version features more exaggerated vocabulary than the Korean, such as "replete," "immaculately," and "enthralling."
21. For examples of such *hanok*, see Seoul Metropolitan Government (2004).

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1910) [*sic*].[22] The brevity of the paragraph in which this statement appears makes one suspect whether the writer herself knew enough about the area to write about it; she, too, may simply be indoctrinated by government rhetoric, innocently propagating the idea that physical similarity proves association.

Such a superficial treatment of history, however, may have more serious consequences than misinformed tourism. Indeed, in time, the actual geography of a given area may be physically remade to reflect its rhetoric. In addition, because the agenda to reconnect Bukchon to past glory relies almost exclusively on physical appearance, the rhetoric increasingly requires it to be, above all, attractive—befitting the national pride held by Korean people regarding the time period. The word "immaculate" in the previous example is one such instance. The following passage, also taken from the same exhibit at Bukchon Traditional Culture Center, makes explicit appeals to aesthetics as a criterion for prestige:

> Korean noblemen in the government' service used to live in Bukchon. . . . Ranked as one of Seoul's most photogenic and picturesque areas, Bukchon . . . boasts outstanding natural landscapes. No doubt that is why it has been a residential district for the country's most influential families from ancient times, for it is sunny, well-drained, and lies in almost the exact center of the city.
>
> 벼슬하던 양반들이 터를 이룬 곳이 북촌이다.… 사면이 아름다운 조건을 갖추고 있다. 볕이 잘 들고 배수가 잘 될 뿐만 아니라 지리적으로 도성의 중심에 놓여 있어 예로부터 권문세가들의 주거지로 자리매김해 왔다.[23]

22. This statement appears to have been removed from website, as of July 19, 2016, due to homepage renewal. Yet, the string of quotes is still widely available through search engines and appears to have been appropriated by many other sites and people. See Official Tour Guide of Seoul, accessed January 27, 2015, www.visitseoul.net.
23. In literal translation: "Bukchon is where officials in public office had settled. . . . Its location is beautiful in all four directions. Not only is it sunny and well-drained, but also geographically central, making it a prime location for powerful and influential families." In addition to the mention of photogenicity, the grandiose diction in the English version ("boasts," "outstanding," "picturesque") and the superlatives ("most," "exact") are missing from the Korean version. The inaccurate claim of being "ancient" is also something not stated in the Korean.

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Bukchon might have been sunny and well drained in the past, as it is today, but "photogenic quality" and "picturesqueness" are newly acquired perceptions that belong in the present. While the aestheticizing impulse is palpable, ironically, the choice of a phrase like "no doubt that is why" counter-accentuates the lack of historical evidence. The sentimental tone such narratives often slip into, even considering the nature of such publications, indicates history often takes a backseat to perfunctory sensory impression. In fact, the tourist literature occasionally reads as if the presence of Bukchon will *transport* the viewer to the time period being evoked. For example, the aforementioned introductory video at Bukchon Traditional Culture Center begins with the following prelude:

> Enjoy the scent of the six hundred year-long legacy. Then open your eyes and listen to the story of Seoul heading towards the new millennium. In the middle of Seoul . . . can be found a place filled with the history and spirit of Seoul: Bukchon . . . where six hundred years remain alive. . . . Here is found the residences of the powerful noble families and royal court members of the [Joseon] dynasty.[24]

The video, which runs for approximately four minutes, also includes expressions like "picturesque like a watercolor painting" and "mysterious time-travelling adventure." Nowhere does it mention what objects to look for or point out where "residences of the powerful noble families" can be found, yet it assures the audience in a strong, reassuring voice that simply walking through the village will be a fascinating time-travel experience.

As if reflecting the dramatic, exaggerated tone, central to this aestheticizing impulse is the visual presentation of *hanok*. The cover of the aforementioned guide map, *Bukchon Wanderings*, features a black-and-white drawing of unbroken *hanok* roofs, creating an impression in the minds of readers that this image is indeed what they should expect to see. By using a drawing as a front image, rather than a photograph, the narrative gains a nostalgic appeal while simultaneously exculpating itself from obligations of

24. Bukchon Traditional Culture Center, "Bukchon: Video Introduction" (Seoul: Bukchon Traditional Culture Center, 2014), video clip.

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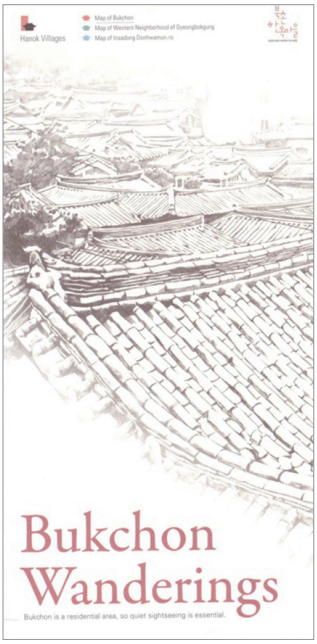


Figure 7. Aestheticization of *hanok*

Source: Bukchon Traditional Culture Center (2012a).



Figure 8. Visual continuity of *hanok*

Source: Bukchon Traditional Culture Center (2012b).

accuracy (see Fig. 7): no Photoshop is thereby needed to crop out telephone poles or cars. Thus, even if it means having to practice some artistic license, the representation of *hanok* must be, first and foremost, beautiful. In the same vein, the *sea of roofs* must also be continuous, unmarred by architectural impurities, such as bricks, concrete, or electric poles. Figure 8 is an example of such a display of aesthetic purity. By taking a bird's-eye view, the photograph portrays a homogeneous and unbroken collection of tiled roofs that would have otherwise been impossible from another angle. Electric poles have also been eliminated through Photoshop, ensuring that few blemishes appear. The inset black and white photograph of old Bukchon in the lower left corner evokes nostalgia, giving the impression that the two photos were taken from the same spot.

In these examples and other visual presentations of Bukchon, *hanok* not only take the center stage, but also monopolize the discussion, especially as they are seen as the key to the history and culture represented by the Joseon dynasty. Yet, never mentioned is that modified *hanok*, in its modernized or bastardized form depending on one's point of view, is actually closer to the original houses remaining in Bukchon today. These modified *hanok*

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are also neither exclusive to Bukchon, nor to the Joseon period as they continued to be built right until the 1960s (Hwang 2009, 58–59). Why does the narrative feel compelled to evoke a period with little evidence when other periods of history exist that allow access to tangible and realistic evidence? This question informs this article's following concern regarding the treatment (or lack thereof) of Bukchon's modern periods.

The Selective Presentation of History

Tourist literature becomes more reserved about history around the end of the Joseon era and is strangely silent about the inception of Bukchon as it stands today. None of the literature surveyed mentions, even once, the Japanese occupation, when the construction of *dosi hanok* in Bukchon started. The narrative then picks up at the present state of conservation efforts and status as a UNESCO prize-winning conservation project.[25] Considering the history of conflict regarding preservation, such omission is understandable, and perhaps it lies beyond the scope or obligation of tourist material to discuss. But the reluctance to discuss the political, social and economic climate of the post-Japanese occupation is more troublesome because it encompasses several decades of modern Korean history that happen to be vital to the physical shape of Bukchon as it stands today. For example, the introductory signage standing at the gate-entrance of Bukchon Traditional Culture Center states:

> For social and economic reasons, large plots of land were divided into smaller ones toward the end of the [Joseon] Dynasty period (1932–1910). The Korean-style houses (*hanok*) standing shoulder to shoulder here are believed to have been renovated before and after the 1920s. This

25. Bukchon was the recipient of a UNESCO Asia-Pacific Award for Cultural Heritage Conservation in 2009. See UNESCO Bangkok, "Project Profile: 2009 Award of Distinction: Hanok Regeneration in Bukchon," accessed April 11, 2016, http://www.unescobkk.org/culture/wh/asia-pacific-heritage-awards/previous-heritage-awards-2000-2013/2009/award-winners/2009dt2/.

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> change reflects higher population densities due to the inflows of people into the city's downtown.
>
> 사회 경제상의 이유로 대규모의 토지가 소규모의 택지로 분할되었으며, 지금 볼 수 있는 어깨를 마주한 한옥은 1920년대를 전후하여 개량된 것으로 추정된다. 이러한 한옥형식의 변화는 도심으로 밀려오는 인구들로 인해 고밀도화 되어가는 사회상을 반영한 것이었다.[26]

This description, one of the rare moments in which the early twentieth century is discussed, is notable in its brevity and vagueness of language, especially considering that the period in question is when most currently standing, original *hanok* in Bukchon were built. The language also leaves out some important information: believed by whom; renovated by whom? In the meantime, by discussing "social and economic reasons" that led to "higher population densities due to the inflows of people," the narrative does point out the climate of the time, while skirting around mentioning the Japanese occupation. Those aware of Korean history will be able to connect the dots, and those who are not will remain uninformed.

Also worth examining is the euphemism inherent in the language used. Since the "large plots of land" were divided following the tragic downfall of *yangban* who inhabited Bukchon at the cusp of Japanese occupation, the reasons for such division are, in addition to being "social and economic," deeply political. Furthermore, attributing it to "higher population densities due to the inflows of people" (or, "higher population densities due to industrialization," as stated in the Korean version) omits the fact that the influx of population, new developments in architecture, and even industrialization must be understood as inextricably and interactively linked with the Japanese presence in Korea, modernization, and the move from a mostly agrarian society to an urbanized one. Any serious attempt at forging an historic narrative simply cannot be accommodated without at least an acknowledge-

26. In literal translation: "For social and economic reasons, large plots of land were divided into smaller lots. The *hanok* standing shoulder to shoulder that can be witnessed today are estimated to have been renovated around the 1920s. Such changes to the *hanok* form were reflective of the social climate in which the number of people crowding into the city was driving up population density [in Seoul]."

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ment of the larger historical context; nonetheless, for the sake of the tourist gaze, this context is elided here.

But this tendency to downplay—indeed destroy—the legacy of colonial architecture is already well documented, the most ostensive case being that of the former Japanese Government-General Building (Jungangcheong), later used as the National Museum before it was destroyed in 1995 with pomp and ceremony.[27] Likewise, the primary strategy in dealing with not only architecture but also colonial memory has been primarily effacement, rendering the colonial past invisible (Kal 2011). Indeed, the need to reevaluate and reuse colonial buildings has only recently become recognized under the title of "modern cultural heritage" (*geundae munhwa yusan*), which perhaps signals the beginning of reconciliation with colonial history (H. Kim 2014, 587). In establishing sovereignty in the postwar period, the Korean government repeatedly appealed to anticolonial and anti-Japanese sentiments, resulting in the destruction of many colonial buildings that reminded them of the humiliating and tragic past. In effect, the architectural scenario until recently was to render the colonial period completely invisible in order to secure continuity without damaging the line of tradition.

For this reason, when it comes to *hanok*, the quintessential traditional Korean house that it remains purely Korean is imperative. No discussion of Japanese influence is supposed to enter into dialogue because including the colonial past in the narrative is perceived to undermine the ties between *hanok*, Bukchon and Joseon—and even the association with *yangban* residents. Even the use of the word "renovation" in the previous passage, rather than the more apt "reconstruction" is an effort to retain the prestige attached to Bukchon during the precolonial period.

What is also unsaid in tourist literatures is that ever since the beginning of the twentieth century Bukchon's resident profile underwent a steady decline in class. In fact, from the 1920s onward, the economic and social status of tenants gradually but steadily became less and less distinguished,

27. The event was widely seen as being symbolic of Korean nationalism and described as "[restoring] the former glory of the Korean race" and "cleansing . . . the memories of colonial occupation" (as cited in Pai 2000).

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as preservation policies in the 1980s led to deteriorating conditions of living and drove well-off residents away from the area. Therefore, describing the detailed history of Bukchon in the twentieth century would not only run into the problem of Japanese occupation but also diminish Bukchon's prestige as a premium address.

In truth, the declining economic profile of residents was also closely linked to Korea's development as a nation. As Korea's economic development relied heavily on construction, the conflict between residents and the government that took place in Bukchon actually encapsulated the difficulties, frenzy and confusion Korea underwent as a young, newly prosperous nation suddenly catapulted into unprecedented wealth. Yet, what it also meant was that the government was complicit in the destruction of *hanok* in the 1990s as well. After all, did the government not succumb to the demands of residents by lifting the preservation policy, and did doing so not mean that it had given up on the idea of preservation? For this reason, as eager as the authors of tourist literature are to write *about* the lineage of residents, none of the accounts come *from* the residents themselves.

Consequently, with a motivation to be as brief as possible regarding modern history, Bukchon Traditional Culture Center's panel exhibitions summarize the entire period since the Japanese annexation until the present, spanning almost ninety years, with a paragraph ambiguously titled "the History of Change." It reads:

> In the late 1920s, small and medium-sized *hanok* began to be built in Bukchon. . . . However, urban development projects forced many people and such institutions as the Kyunggi High School and Whimoon High School to move to Kangnam, south of the river. Modern structures like the [Jeongdok] Library, the Constitutional Court of Korea and the Hyundai Group's office building gradually took their place, dramatically changing the streetscape of Bukchon. Today, the village is still changing, with the old and new living in peaceful coexistence.
>
> 조선시대 정치, 행정, 문화의 중심지였던 북촌은 1920년대 후반부터 대규모 필지가 분할되면서 중소 규모의 한옥들이 들어서게 된다. 1960년대 후반에서 70년대에 이루어진 강남 개발사업을 통해 많은 사람들이 강남으로 옮겨가게 되었고 자연스레 경기고, 휘문고 등의 유서 깊은 학교도 강남으로 이전하게 된다. 1980년대

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> 에 학교들이 있었던 자리에는 정독도서관, 현대사옥, 헌법재판소 등의 현대식 건물들이 점차 북촌에 들어서게 되면서 북촌의 경관이 크게 바뀌게 된다. 옛 것과 현대적 건축물이 공존하며 끊임없이 변화하는 북촌은 세월이 그대로 풍경이 된 마을이다.[28]

Aside from the swift sweep of history, this paragraph is linguistically notable in its use of passive voice. Even considering the structure of the Korean language, which often allows omission of an active subject, the voice of the paragraph is cautious not to have an actor. The houses simply "began to be built" in the 1920s, and the people and institutions were "forced" to move south of the river, seemingly against their will, when such architectural and demographical phenomena were actually motivated by social, economic, and political incentives. The Korean version also states that the migration of people and institutions to Gangnam was "natural" (*jayeonseure*), when such moves, too, were deeply complex issues.[29] It also mentions the new large buildings "dramatically changed" the streetscape: indeed, this sentence is correct but ambiguous, as larger buildings were mainly responsible for bringing about the semi-commercial character of Bukchon, as individual houses tuned towards commercial use catering to the people occupying the larger buildings (Song and Kim 2006). Finally, the phrase, "old and new living in peaceful coexistence" deliberately misrepresents the longstanding conflict of preservation and development. No actors are present in this narrative, only natural occurrences.

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28. In literal translation: "Bukchon, which had been the center of politics, administration, and culture, started to see small to mid-sized *hanok* being built as large plots of land began to be divided up starting in the late 1920s. With the development of Gangnam in the late 1960s and 1970s, historic schools such as Kyeonggi High School and Hwimun High School naturally moved to Gangnam. In their places, modern buildings, such as Jeongdok Library, Hyundai Construction, and the Constitutional Court, moved in, dramatically changing the landscape of Bukchon. Bukchon, where the old and new buildings coexist in perpetual change, is a village where time has simply become the scenery."
29. When the population of Seoul exceeded six million, the need to expand Seoul was recognized, resulting in the development of Gangnam. Practical and military concerns also existed regarding the situation with North Korea and the evacuation of citizens south of the river in case of war. In order to give momentum to the expansion, schools were given incentives to move south of the river.

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Curiously, regarding the topic of residents, the original Korean version is more sentimental in tone and language, stating in the last line, translated literally, "in Bukchon, the passage of time has become scenery itself." Such embellishment is more typical of the English tourist literature on Bukchon, where the language tends to be more dramatic and sentimental. Yet, in this instance, the Korean version shows more of an impulse to romanticize the current era, giving rise to the suspicion that the Korean version (which has more potential to be read by residents) naturally caters more seriously to resident sensibilities. Understandably, residents would rather have their neighborhood portrayed as being historically distinguished, rather than as a colonial legacy or battleground of intense (and still vividly remembered) feuds, especially in light of the declining social status of residents. Thus, the downplaying of modern history is intended not only to undermine colonial history but also to maintain good relations between residents. For the tourist, however, such background information is hardly ever available, and the cautious, insufficient treatment of history asks her to skip through much of the twentieth century and delve straight into the contemporary era, where, she is assured, both the government and the people of Bukchon are enthusiastically taking all the steps necessary to preserve *hanok*. Even more, the people of Bukchon are elevated as keepers of tradition, actively adapting the houses to fit a contemporary lifestyle and participating in the government's efforts at preservation. The exhibition panel titled "Changing to Meet Modern Times" introduces such collaboration as follows:

> Many *hanok* are now being transformed into modern structures, such as multiplex houses, due to the deterioration, lack of modern facilities and, as a result, many projects are being undertaken to preserve them by renovation to suit contemporary tastes . . . the city of Seoul, and Bukchon residents are participating in these initiatives. This will greatly add to the value of Bukchon Hanok Village as it meets the challenge of melding the old with the new in a tasteful yet efficient manner.
>
> 한옥이 노후화되고, 거주하기 불편하게 되면서 다세대주택 등과 같은 현대건축물로 변모하고 있다. 이에 역사와 전통을 보존하고, 현대인들의 생활방식에 맞게 한옥을 수선하는 사업이 활발히 추진되고 있다. 서울시는 물론 다양한 시민단체와 북촌 주민들이 한옥 수선 사업에 동참하고 있다. 전통의 숨결에 현대적 감각이 더

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> 해져 새롭게 되살아나는 북촌의 한옥마을, 보존과 계승이란 이름으로 그 가치를 더해간다.[30]

No evidence of conflict can be found anywhere in this narrative. Indeed, despite the endangered status of *hanok* and their transformations into "modern structures, such as multiplex houses" being driven by the residents' incessant petitions and lobbying in the past, the censored, sanitized version of Bukchon's modern history leaves the viewer with the feeling that residents and the government always worked as partners to save the area from destruction.

In addition to the difference in temperature of statements, the Korean and English versions also present slightly different narratives through the choice of vocabulary and syntax. Firstly, "modern structures, such as multiplex houses" do not carry the same negative connotation as in Korean (*dagagu* or *dasedae*), the small and shabbier apartments considered lesser cousins of taller and more expensive apartments. Secondly, "tasteful yet efficient manner" hardly matches the florid style of writing in the last sentence of the Korean version (see the literal translation in footnote 30). If perhaps the first point can be dismissed as a happy coincidence lost in translation, the second point is more intriguing. No social context is given in the English version, leading readers to believe that residents were genuinely interested in improving their homes. To the Korean reader, however, to whom the cultural connotation of *dasedae* and *dagagu* would not be lost, the language makes a more direct and romantic appeal to national pride, including a nod to civic groups and residents. Finally, the quality of writing in both the translated and original seems to hint at the difficulty the writer(s) faced in including the history of residential conflict.

Plausibly then, having evidence of resident-government cooperation

30. In literal translation: "*Hanok* deteriorated due to age and became less suited to living, they are being transformed into modern buildings, such as multi-household complexes. As such, a *hanok* renovation project is being actively carried out in effort to conserve history and tradition, as well as to make the houses amenable to modern ways of living . . . many civic groups, residents, as well as the city of Seoul, are participating in the *hanok* renovation project. Bukchon's *hanok* village, revived through adding a modern touch to the breath of tradition—its value increases in the name of conservation and heritage."

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was greatly welcomed in representing this particular conundrum about depicting the periods of conflict. Receiving the 2009 UNESCO heritage prize was one such occasion. However, such an event also called for an explanation of the recent conflict. Faced with this task, Bukchon's description of the recipients' summary includes a reluctant, roundabout mention of the turn of events:

> Bukchon Hanok Village, whose existence was once endangered due to its redevelopment, was restored as a traditional urban residential area thanks to the efforts of Seoul City, the village residents, and NGOs. This renewed public awareness of *hanok* (traditional Korean house) and highlighted its value as a cultural heritage.
>
> 북촌은 한 때 재개발로 사라질 위기에 처했으나, 서울시와 북촌주민, 단체의 노력으로 도심 속 전통주거지로서의 활력을 되찾고, 전통한국건축 한옥에 대한 인식의 변화와 문화유산적 가치를 재조명하는 계기를 마련했다는 점에서 그 성과를 높이 평가받았다.[31]

The village obviously did not put itself on the verge of extinction, as the residents themselves precipitated the "redevelopment." Still, the passive voice is careful not to incriminate residents, and as soon as the "endangerment" is mentioned, residents are immediately reinstated and absolved along with NGOs and Seoul City.

The careful emphasis and de-emphasis of historical periods and sociocultural factors achieve two objectives. First, they reinforce Bukchon's ties to Joseon by removing the rest from view. Second, by extolling the virtue of *hanok* to their residents, the narrative provides a better chance for future survival of the houses, and hence of Bukchon's continued survival as a tourist destination. Both objectives serve to enact and perpetuate Bukchon for the tourist gaze and solidify it into reality. As long as the public gaze does

31. In literal translation: "Bukchon was at one point in danger of destruction due to urban renewal; yet, thanks to the efforts of the city of Seoul, residents of Bukchon, and civic groups, it regained vitality as a traditional residential district in the center of the city. It also contributed to changing public consciousness regarding traditional Korean architecture and reilluminted the value of cultural heritage, for which it was awarded the prize."

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not stray far from the beautiful *hanok* and their physical similarity to the palaces, preferably failing to notice the occasional brick and concrete buildings peppered throughout the town, the *selected* biography of Bukchon will remain unquestioned by most tourists. But such a flawed narrative is untenable: as soon as the tourist steps into the scene, she will notice that reality looks much different. Not the least of that impression will owe in the next component in this analysis to the people of Bukchon, how they are transforming and being transformed by the area, as they become the primary contact points for tourists.

The Curation of Human Activity

As much as visual appeal is emphasized, part of Bukchon's allure undeniably lies in its residential status. Unlike a folk village or museum, visitors can witness real lives being lived. Authenticity in tourism has long been a draw for tourists seeking a new sensation.[32] Bukchon's symbolic location between the palaces imbues even more meaning to residential life, especially since it represents the continuity of human lives in the midst of palaces that are long unoccupied. Efforts to present Bukchon in this light are plainly visible in tourist literature. The Official Travel Guide to Seoul states that "Unlike other *hanok* villages, Bukchon was not created for tourists but it is a living village inhabited by Seoulites.[33]

Because residents are of such importance, Bukchon's tourist narrative actively erases the history of conflict, careful not to offend resident sentiments, as observed earlier. The enterprising nature of tourist literature practically demands the treatment of residents to be positive, if not excessively romanticized. But where is the line between acceptable Romanization and downright untruthfulness? In *Discovery Bukchon* (2012), a mini guidebook

32. "Tourist consciousness is motivated by its desire for authentic experiences, and the tourist may believe that he is moving in this direction, but often it is difficult to know for sure if the experience is in fact authentic" (MacCannell 1976).

33. Visit Seoul Net, accessed April 11, 2016, http://english.visitseoul.net/attractions/Bukchon-*Hanok*-Village_/263.

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published by the city government, the people of Bukchon are given this exaggerated introduction:

> The residents in this area are mainly descendants of *Yangban* (powerful noble families and royal clan members), people who started to live in the early 20th century, and artisans. In recently, this area is appeared as attractive living places again.
>
> 북촌(Northern Village)은 살림집으로서의 한옥이 밀집되어 있는 한옥 주거지다. 대대손손 가옥을 물려받은 양반집과 오랜 세월을 같이한 토박이 주민들, 전통문화를 이끄는 장인들이 이곳에 머물며 한옥 생활을 이어가고 있다. 예부터 양 궁(경복궁과 창덕궁) 사잇길에 위치한 북촌은 권문세가와 왕족, 사대부 양반들의 거주지로 자리매김해 왔으며, 배산임수를 따르는 자연 환경과 조용하고 고즈넉한 정취 덕분에 최근에는 정, 재계 인사와 예술가들의 생활 무대로 주목 받고 있다 (Bukchon Traditional Culture Center 2012b).

In an attempt to connect Bukchon's illustrious past to its current occupants, the paragraph falsely elevates current *hanok* dwellers as descendants of powerful families. There is no truth to the statement and perhaps to its credit, the passage does not claim to have evidence.[34] In addition, the writing is also exclusively concerned with *hanok* residents, either ignoring or forgetting the fact that the area contains just as many non-*hanok* residents. The claim made in the last sentence about Bukchon becoming an "attractive living place again" is intriguing, and the original Korean version also brings up its popularity in recent years as a *premium* address among those in high rank in politics, finance, or art. Both seem to subtly hint that the modern-day equivalent to *yangban* lives in Bukchon, extending the prestige to the contemporary era.[35]

Yet, even such aggrandized mention of residential life is rare, as the res-

34. Here, too, where the narrative concerns current residents, the Korean version is more florid in language. It also does not claim that the current residents are direct descendants from former *yangban*. This difference seems to suggest the possibility that the English translation may have been the result of careless translation, editing, or fact checking, which is another commentary on the depth or expectation regarding such literature.

35. The changing social and economic status of residents is never mentioned throughout tourist literature.

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ident members who make the most frequent appearance in tourist literature are actually "artisans." Artisans are a curious group to be classified as residents since the number is so small compared to the rest of community. Here, however, artisans are being suggested as a connecting link to the past, perhaps because the ordinary lives of modern Koreans do not fit preconceived ideas about the traditional way of life in a *hanok* anymore. Artisans, therefore, are substitutes, stand-ins for residents. To this purpose, many artisans are installed in government-owned *hanok* to showcase tradition.[36] Yet, ignoring the depth and dynamism of Bukchon's residential makeup in favor of the re-creation of sterile and "experienceable" settings (Orbaşli 2000, 2) makes the tourist gain only a superficial peek at a *hanok*.

For example, the exhibition at the Bukchon Traditional Culture Center features a passage titled "People Continuing the Tradition of Bukchon," suggesting how the role of artisans are being conceptualized by the government:

> In Bukchon, museums, pavilions, and workshops can be found everywhere, with artisans and intangible cultural properties embracing the finest of traditional Korean culture—including varnishing with lacquers, traditional embroidery, industrial arts using straw, plants, and rushes, knotting, and court cuisine. Cultural programs at *hanok* workshops and hands-on "experience halls" help visitors from both home and abroad experience Korea's traditional culture and lifestyle.
>
> 북촌 거리 곳곳에서 보여지는 전시관, 박물관, 공방 등은 북촌 고유의 정취를 느낄 수 있는 색다른 명소이다. 중요무형문화재, 서울시 무형문화재를 포함한 다수의 장인들이 옻칠, 전통자수, 초고공예, 매듭, 궁중음식 등 다양한 분양에서 전통문화의 맥을 이어가고 있다. 특히 한옥공방과 한옥체험관에서 이루어지는 전통문화 프로그램은 북촌을 찾는 국내외 방문객들에게 북촌의 문화를 생생하게 전달하면서 북촌을 서울의 대표적 전통문화 체험장소로 자리매김하는데 중요한 역할을 하고 있다.[37]

36. According to the official website of Bukchon, twelve out of sixteen *hanok* owned by the city were being used as traditional craft workshops. The "Plan to Select Bukchon Hanok Craft Workshop Operators" states that priority for application is given to those who can live in the city-owned *hanok* while using them as a workshop simultaneously.
37. In literal translation: "Numerous artisans, including Intangible Cultural Assets, are carrying on a stream of traditional culture, such as lacquerware painting, embroidery, straw craft, knot craft, and palace cuisine, etc. In particular, traditional cultural programs undertaken

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The artisans, therefore, function as "experience halls" whose main function is to provide access to *hanok* in the notable absence of publicly accessible (and presentable) traditional houses. The setting and content—a house owned and renovated by the government and occupied by an artificially planted resident—are anything but representative of ordinary residential life. For the purpose of tourism, however, the virtue of aesthetic attractiveness and visual association still applies: better to have model artisans reenacting crafts from the Joseon era in a beautifully curated *hanok* than have an unhappy resident showcasing his unkempt, but more realistic home.

Such active tradition making is not limited to currently existing houses. In 2015, the city of Seoul announced that it has purchased Pungmun Girls' High School with a goal to turn it into a crafts museum.[38] According to the master plan published by Seoul Metropolitan Government, one of its principal aims will be to "build infrastructure for the succession of traditional crafts that has been ruptured during the colonial period and modernization."[39] It seems that "problem periods" present themselves even in the midst of Bukchon's curated present and even while surrounding themselves with numerous craftsmen. Once again, the solution for such problems is to install even more ostensible venues for imagined traditions, in name and presence, such as the Crafts Museum.

Discussion and Conclusion

In view of Bukchon's recent popularity, this study has attempted to investigate the tourist promotion of the area in terms of historical treatment as

in *hanok* craft workshops and *hanok* experience halls convey Bukchon's culture to domestic and foreign visitors, helping Bukchon become one of the representative places for experiencing traditional culture in Seoul."

38. "Pungmun yeogo, gongye bangmulgwan-euro bakkwinda" (Pungmun Girls' High School to Be Turned into a Crafts Museum), *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, May 17, 2015.
39. "Seoul gongye munhwa bangmulgwan geollip gyehoegan" (Plan for Constructing Seoul Craft Culture Museum), last modified July 1, 2015, http://opengov.seoul.go.kr/sanction/5259011?from=mayor.

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well as contemporary representation. After examining evidence drawn from various official promotional materials, it seems feasible to conclude the presentation of Bukchon in such outlets indicates a desire to create an unbroken narrative consistently pointing towards a period of projected and continued glory. Yet, because the physical features of Bukchon cannot help but bear witness to blemishes in history, such as the Japanese occupation, economic and social compromises, and bitter conflicts between interested parties, adhering to a neatly linear narrative progressing from the desired period to the contemporary era presents some unique challenges. As this study has shown, these challenges are being met in tourist literature with ambiguity and self-censorship, which, if anything, demonstrate that Bukchon is still a much-contested site. The excessive preoccupation with visual appeal and social prestige, carried out through linguistic manipulation or visual presentation, indicate of the difficulty inherent in presenting only parts of a whole, and reveal rhetorical strategies in dealing with these issues.

Such practices witnessed in the tourist literature of Bukchon fall within the realm of Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's idea of invented traditions, in which they argue that modern societies "try to establish continuity with a suitable historic past" (Hobsbawm and Ranger [1983] 2004, 1). For a country that underwent rapid and turbulent economic and social transformation as well as political complexity, promoting historic sites such as Bukchon understandably presents difficulties in fitting into the national self-narrative, especially if a large part of that transformation was built upon a raze-and-build approach to urban architecture. Indeed, where does one begin to explain to a third party about the source of discontent for residents? Yet, going even further than simply furnishing Bukchon with a sanitized version of history, official tourism literature also actively engages in creating an imaginary stream of human activity in an attempt to imbue the area with even more historic legitimacy.

To conclude this article, it is perhaps relevant to introduce a recent tourism trend concerning *hanbok* (traditional Korean dress) rental that arrived in Bukchon in the past few years. Inspired by the fact that admission to palaces is free while wearing *hanbok*, businesses have started lending *hanbok* clothes by the hour. Today, a common experience is running into

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numerous *hanbok*-wearing tourists in Bukchon. This new trend indicates that the general public is feeding off and variegating the invented history and tradition of Bukchon with creative appropriations of their own. Just as Jean Baudrillard stated, "the cultural product represents a copy without an original," Bukchon has become so comfortable and successful in its own invented narrative that it has almost become a parody of what it purports to be. Every tourist knows that she is standing in front of pastiche, but why not have some fun while acting as if she is *buying it*? What implication will such an attitude have on the future of Bukchon as a tourist site? Such a turn of events gives rise to numerous occasions for contemplation.

Granted, tourist literatures as such are generally not expected to be comprehensive, objective or free from a larger agenda. For this particular study, questions remain about the quality of translation, especially whether the errors were intentional or carried out with prior knowledge. Because production and translation are often outsourced in Korea and quality control is not consistent, it may be unclear just how much of the fabricated or distorted information in Korean or in translation was intentional or should be attributed to the problems inherent in production and bureaucracy. When even Romanization is slippery in many instances, could these errors be honest mistakes in fact checking? Such questions are difficult to answer, but even if the errors had been committed through loopholes in the bureaucratic process, they would still speak volumes about how such writings are conceived, accepted, and distributed. That the actual writers and translators would base their work on expectations of bureaucrats and departments who are ultimately responsible for the production of the material is also reasonable to assume.

Moreover, unconscious censorship is arguably just as significant, perhaps even more so, than censorship committed with full knowledge, as it indicates the ways in which history takes shape in the general consciousness—meaning that when a mother points out a *hanok* in Bukchon by telling her school-age child that noblemen and women lived in this very house (as one frequently overhears), the statement becomes the truth until an active and more concerted effort is put into place to overcome the misconception.

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Additionally, the non-scholarly nature of the materials analyzed, in addition to the scope of material pertaining only to certain tourist literatures, may also pose potential questions regarding objectivity. While not purporting to be a comprehensive study of every tourist literature available on Bukchon, as stated in the introduction, the aim of this article has been to study a relatively small sample of government-endorsed literatures so that it could examine whether a certain agenda could be detected in the marketing of Bukchon. As such, the results of this analysis should be read as being symptomatic of the current discourse about Bukchon, but having significant potential to influence the larger discourse in the longer term. One implication is that because popular literatures tend to offer easier access to the public, they therefore present immediate potential to influence the general consciousness.

The author also hopes that this study would be read as an attempt to point out just how the national impulse is manifesting itself in tourism and what it implies for Bukchon as heritage. Arguably, every instance of an invented tradition is alternately underwritten by pride and shame, a self-remedy to address a troubled or possibly confused ego. But if the image Bukchon seeks to promote and sell is simply that of a version of its past, it presents many questions about the desirability of such a portrayal, not the least of which concerns future sustainability. Will such pseudo-history stand the test of time? Will visitors not at some point in the future as they regard an immaculately designed *hanok*, beautiful in its own right but clearly of recent construction, question the authenticity of their claim?

Perhaps then, the next step in research may be to contemplate the most healthy and beneficial narrative to present to the public so that this rapidly changing, transforming neighborhood will remain an asset to the Korean people as well as to the tourism industry in the long term because despite everything, Bukchon is doubtless still a gem, a treasure to keep for future generations. Such a question is not in the scope of this study to answer but is left to become a subject for further discussion.

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