

Stephen Epstein

Drinking Beer in Sapporo: Changing Images of Japan in South Korea

Ilboneun eopda. Ilboneun ittda. "There is nothing to learn from Japan." "There is something to learn from Japan." The elliptical and mutually exclusive titles of Jeon Yeo-ok's and Seo Hyeon-seop's attention-grabbing texts of the mid-'90s suggest the contested nature of Korea's relationship with its former colonizer. Recent years have, however, seen a significant rapprochement with Japan at the level of popular culture and a veritable explosion of Korean travel narratives about journeys to Japan that go beyond a single-minded nationalism. In this paper I examine changing images of Japan in contemporary South Korea. In doing so, I will be drawing on and analyzing the aforementioned books as well as the volumes of Yi Won-bok's popular *manhwa* (manga) series *Meon nara iutnara* (Distant Land, Neighboring Land) dedicated to Japan, Pak Chang-su's *Ilbon geugose gamyeon jeongmal gunggeumhan geosi manta?* (Japan: Are there really a lot of things you want to know?), and Jeon Yeo-ok's own revisionist *Satporoeseo maekjureul masida* (Drinking Beer in Sapporo). I will argue that Korea's ongoing engagement with globalization and increased intercultural contact with the world as a whole have played a particular role in provoking a reassessment of its closest yet most distant neighbor.