
BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

This study examines *The Last Empress*, the Korean mega-musical, as a case study to explore how Korea’s modernism in theatre shifted towards a globalizing process in its society from the early 1990s to the beginning of the twenty-first century. This study argues that the Korean musical company, Art Communication International Inc. (ACom), endeavored to make Korea’s local culture and history accessible to global audiences by facilitating more flexible, multilayered interactions between the international and local modes of receptions and by involving multinational theatre artists and practitioners both on and off stage. Finally, the examination of *The Last Empress* provides a unique opportunity to discover the new function of theatre and performance in the era of globalization beyond the binary of East versus West.

This study observes the musical’s impact on Korean musical theatre as the West End and Broadway style mega-musical shaped local musical by exploring how ACom integrated the company’s understanding of the global reaction into the musical. This research traces the musical’s production history, including its tours in The U.S.’s New York and Los Angeles, the U.K.’s London, and Canada’s Toronto. It also observes its outreach programs held in Korea and Japan. In doing so, the study investigates the reception of the mega-musical in Korea in terms of its national recognition as a new form of theater influenced and shaped by its tour abroad. Dramatically and theatrically analyzing its different adaptations, translations, and revisions, this study also closely evaluates each revised version in conjunction with its responses from the foreign critics. This research determines the revised scripts and spectacles after each international tour and explores the musical’s local contribution and adaptation by utilizing the terms “national musical” or “indigenous musical.”
To my mother and father
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Recently Korean music, particularly pop music, has been gaining popularity across the globe. Rain, a Korean pop star, for the second time won a spot “in the TIME 100, in which we [Time] asked readers to rank who they think are the world's most influential people” in 2011.¹ A year later, “Gangnam Style,” the Korean pop song by Psy, a Korean singer/songwriter, became “the most-viewed clip of all time on YouTube.”² In the present, K-pop (an abbreviation of Korean popular music) stars have toured around the United States and Europe gathering international fandom wherever they go.³ Why are people all over the world so vigorously thrilled by Korean pop music? How has it appealed to global audiences?

Kim Kyung Hyun, a scholar of East Asian studies, explains that Korean cultural popularity is not limited to the genre of music but also includes movies, TV dramas, popular songs, etc. He notes that Korean culture has been “‘cool’ to the worldwide appetite” since Korea hastily opened its doors to all aspects of globalization in 1997, which ushered in Korea’s dreadful financial crisis in 1998.⁴ Called the hallyu (韓流),⁵ translated as “Korean Wave,” this Korean cultural phenomenon has been defined as the “successful reception of Korean popular

culture outside its borders.” Jina Kim, another East Asian scholar, argues that *hallyu* has become “a catchword used in redefining the cartography of Korean culture in contemporary times,” as “a vehicle encompassing globalization (the flow or dissemination) of Korean culture and the display of modernization of Korea as a nation.”

Identified as a precursor to *hallyu*, *The Last Empress* toured abroad in order to reach the international market before *hallyu* went global in the 2010s. This dissertation reconfigures the traditional Western perspective on viewing intercultural performances by moving beyond the binary concept of East and West. Herein, a case study of the historical musical, *The Last Empress*, is examined in the context of its tours in The U.S.’s New York and Los Angeles, the U.K.’s London, and Canada’s Toronto. By tracing its production history and its outreach programs from 1995 to 2009, this study closely examines and evaluates each revised version in conjunction with its response from the international audiences. This research examines *The Last Empress* as a western style mega-musical that embarked on creating an innovative Korean globally recognized theatre contribution. I argue ultimately that the unique value of the Korean musical is founded on its global spearheading of off-stage efforts, which made possible international accessibility to Korean culture and history.

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7 Kim, 157-170.
9 According to a dictionary of English names in Korean, according to an online English-Korean dictionary of names, http://englishname.seoul.go.kr, the proper name of Empress 명성황후 in English is Myeongseonghwanghu. “Myeongseong” was her official royal name; “hwanghu” means an empress. Yet, some articles and journals written by Korean scholars in English use different spellings such as Myungseong or Myeongsung in reference to the empress. In this dissertation, “Empress Myeongseong” will be used to signify “Myeongseonghwanghu” as I explore her story in historical contexts. Otherwise, “Queen Min” will be used to signify the character of the Empress in written materials for the production. I explain more information about the naming the Empress in this dissertation in the chapter 2.
10 There is inconsistency in the Romanization (translation to English words/or characters) of Korean. Throughout this dissertation, I followed the latest Romanization System of Korean, released in 2000. I refer to the
*The Last Empress* has been marketed as the first commercially successful mega-musical created by Korean artists since its premiere at the Seoul Art Center in 1995. Following the commercial success of the musical in Korea, the production toured the U.S., the U.K., and Canada with hopes of competing with London's West End and New York's Broadway style mega-musicals. After its international tour, the musical became a pioneer in exporting Korean cultural products. The study introduces, accordingly, a different perspective of viewing global performances beyond the dualistic concept of East versus West. It attempts to reveal more versatile, multifaceted interactions between the international and local sectors by suggesting the accessibility of local history for global audiences as a new function of a global performance.

This research shows how a western form of musical theatre was applied to create a Korean prototype of a musically recognized style, specifically about a historical Empress as displayed in *The Last Empress*. In *The Last Empress*, the concept of “re-interpretation” influences the two following aspects: the history of Queen Min and the style of the musical itself. The creative team used the recently revised history as the content of the musical and applied the conventional format of western mega-musicals to differentiate the discourse of modernizing tradition in Korean theatre.

The dissertation traces how progressive modernization shifted towards a globalizing process by analyzing different adaptations, translations, and revisions of the musical in terms of...
its relationship between the creators and the audiences. Finally, this study suggests the possible merits of intercultural performances based on the results from the dramaturgical and theatrical analyses of the revised versions of the production.

The following section explores how Korean theatre interacted with foreign audiences and how Korean theatre practitioners and artists presented their understanding of globalized theatre by intermingling it with indigenous Korean culture. The next section evaluates *The Last Empress’* significance in Korean musical theatre as a mega-musical style local musical by exploring how the Korean musical company, Art Communication Inc. (ACom) incorporated the company’s interpretation of the global response into the musical through extensive revisions. This desire to expand its influence was the key to proceeding with its revisions to bring this domestic history to international awareness. The section also explains the history of modern theatre’s influences in Korean theatre, which began in the 20th century. Finally, it observes the development of intercultural performances in Korean theatre after the Korean government encouraged the cultural policy of globalization from the 1990s to the early millennium.

**The Convergence of Traditional Korean Theatre and Foreign Influences**

The Korean peninsula began to experience foreign theatre productions during the late nineteenth century because of the Chosun dynasty's commercial treaties with foreign countries. ¹⁴ Touring companies from Japan and China visited Korea during the 1890s to present their traditional performances, including the Noh and Kabuki Japanese genres and the Beijing operatic

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¹⁴ Before the Chosun dynasty changed the name of the country to Korean Empire in 1897, she had official commercial treaties with Japan (1876), the United States of America (1882), China (1882), The United Kingdom (1883), Germany (1883), Italia (1884), Russia (1884), France (1886), Austria (1892), and Hungary (1892). For more detailed information about each treaty, see Hyung Sik Sin and Lee Bae Yong, *New Comprehension of Korean History* (Seoul: Ehwa Womans UP, 1997) 253-58.
genres.\textsuperscript{15} Japanese performers introduced \textit{shinpa}, a Japanese version of western style drama, in the beginning of the 1900, and Korean theatre began to perform its own western style \textit{shinpa}, \textit{shinpageuk}, a decade later.\textsuperscript{16}

Since the introduction of \textit{shinpageuk}, realistic drama became so popular that many elite scholars wrote their own realistic plays or translated western plays into Korean.\textsuperscript{17} Traditional Korean performances such as \textit{pansori}, a singing performance; \textit{talchum}, a mask dance; and \textit{akeuk}, a Korean burlesque, which was also developed from an transitional skit in \textit{shinpageuk}, were played with songs, music, dances, and librettos.\textsuperscript{18} Yet, their forms were different in structure, music (i.e., purely for entertainment as opposed to supporting content), and format (i.e., all dance or all singing) from the western forms of musical theatre.\textsuperscript{19}

Korean modern theatre did not fully develop due to the strict censorship of Japan's annexation; therefore, the creativity of many Korean dramatists was restricted due to only viewing western realism through the eyes of Japanese interpreters.\textsuperscript{20} Eventually, Korea began to construct indoor theaters which allowed artists to build upon realistic drama for themselves without the restrictions of the Japanese culture.\textsuperscript{21}

Meanwhile, \textit{sonyeoakgeukdan}, a Korean version of \textit{takarazuka}, a Japanese rendition of the western revue performed by all-female performers, became a popular genre in Korea during

\textsuperscript{17} Du Hyun Lee, \textit{The History of Korean Theatre} (Seoul: Hakyeonsa, 2010) 364-374.
\textsuperscript{18} Yoo, \textit{New Theory}, 75-80.
\textsuperscript{19} Han Gi Jang, \textit{The Korean Theatre History} (Seoul: Dongguk UP, 2000) 279-283.
\textsuperscript{21} Lee, 412.
the 1930s. Although *akgeuk* and *sonyeoakgeukdan* used western styled stages and dances from French revue and American vaudeville, the contents of their repertories were adaptations of Korean historical tales and folk stories.

In the beginning of the 1960s, Korean theatre actively adapted western forms of theatre. After the Korean War (1950-1953), the Korean peninsula officially divided into two parts under the worldwide ideological and political conflicts. Although the U.S. military forces controlled the South Korean government, many Korean people romanticized the American culture. Huh Eun, a Korean historian argues that the reckless worship of American culture was politically encouraged by the South Korean government to maintain her political power, and many intellects took over their ancestors’ ideology of toadyism. Still, other Koreans believed that Americans were “good people” who saved them from Japanese colonialism by bombing Japan and protecting them from being a communist nation. For these political and social reasons, American popular culture rapidly influenced the Korean society as the U.S. military remained in Korea. In particular, many young adults and university students regarded Americans as more advanced and fashionable, and therefore tried to learn and imitate American culture and literature.

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In the late 1950s, Korean theater artists and practitioners began to perform less realistic, but more experimental plays. Influenced by the west, an experimental theatre building called the Drama Center was constructed in Seoul in 1962 sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation.\textsuperscript{28} The founder of the Drama Center was Yoo Chi Jin, the prolific dramatist and scholar who studied English literature in Japan. His main purpose in building the Drama Center was twofold. He intended to expand the artistic ability of Korean theatre by providing more opportunities to present experimental theatre productions, and he aimed to educate public audiences about theatre by establishing a research center and a theatre archive.\textsuperscript{29} As a result, the Drama Center consisted of three buildings: a theatre, a research center, and a library in 1962.\textsuperscript{30}

The theatre’s architecture of the stage was influenced by both eastern and western theatre. For example, it had a bowl-shaped auditorium with a thrust stage, which was inspired by the Globe Theatre in the Elizabethan era. Behind the auditorium, there was a small semicircular stage arranged in choir seat formation, used as an acting area. Connected to the left side of the main stage was a \textit{hanamichi}-like runaway, which was used in Japanese kabuki theatre. This space was also used as an acting area. Two \textit{vomitories}, tunnel-like passages used for actors’ entrances and exits, which originated from ancient Greek theatre, were adjacent to the main stage.\textsuperscript{31}

Although the Drama Center theatre was the most creative and innovative fine arts building during this period, it was closed within a year of its grand opening due to financial

\textsuperscript{28} Yeon Ho Suh, \textit{The History of Korean Theatre: Contemporary Part}. (Seoul: Yeongeukgwaingan, 2005) 49.

\textsuperscript{29} Sung Hee Kim, “The development of Contemporary Theatre and The Musical Theatre Movement” \textit{A Hundred Years of Contemporary Korean Theatre and Drama}. (Seoul: Yeongeukgwaingan, 2008)194-195.


\textsuperscript{31} Kim, 195.
difficulty. Nevertheless, the Drama Center strongly appealed to the need among artists for experimental theater and, because of its innovative architecture, the building itself triggered a new genre of theatre in the 1970s. Many generations of dramatists, stimulated by the new theatrical conventions of the Drama Center and Yoo’s public presentations of director’s projects, began to lead little theatre movements by breaking the conventional theatrical elements normally present in realistic drama.

Since favoritism of American culture reached its peak in the 1960s, most of the aforementioned musical performances renamed themselves as “musical shows” or a “musical play.” Interestingly, most of the musical productions at this time were created by Korean dramatists, while most of the experimental plays performed in Korea were direct translations of western plays. During the 1960s and the 1970s, Yaegreen, the first theatre company founded by the Korean government, was extremely popular. Under the governmental policy of “preserving indigenous cultures in Korea” in the 1970s, this company always presented musicals about historical folk tales while combining traditional Korean and western music.

Between the 1960s and the 1970s, over fifty experimental theatre companies were founded in Korea and began performing experimental productions. Especially popular among the dramatists were two genres called the theatre of the absurd and Brecht’s epic theatre. The concept of absurdism strongly appealed to Korean audiences, as they felt confused by the rapid

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32 Kim,194.
36 Yoo, World, 66-67.
incursion of capitalism and industrialism in their society. Some Korean dramatists, such as Yoon Dae Sung and Huh Gyu, strived to revive Korean traditional performances emphasizing Brecht’s alienation effect. For example, Yoon Dae Sung’s *Neodo meokgo mulleonara*, which means, “You should eat and leave, too” in Korean, was performed by the Shilhum Theatre Group in 1973. This was a new adaptation of *pangut*, a shamanistic ritual that satires a corrupted society. *Gwangdae*, the main character of the play, continuously shifted his role from narrator to a blind man in the play. Kim Mee Do, a theatre critic argued that the play does not suggest any final conclusion because the playwright asks the audiences to participate in the play and conclude with their own imagination.

Accordingly, the theatrical connections between Korean traditional performances and Brecht’s epic theatre also created a new form of Korean modern theatre, i.e., *Madanggeuk*, which means “a play in a field or arena” in English. The *Madanggeuk* form of theatre became popular among university students because of its free speech and thus functioned as a weapon against military regimes of Park Jung Hee’s Yooshin administration (1971-1979), the Kwangju people’s revolution in 1980, and Jeon Doo Hwan’s military dictatorship (1979-1987).

**Growth Of Interculturalism**

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42 Suh, *History*, 375.

43 Kim, 232.

Between the 1970s and the 1980s, the concept of interculturalism in theatre began to emerge both in Eastern and Western countries. Erika Fisher-Lichte, argues “whilst Western theatre increasingly turned to foreign [since the early 1970s], principally Asian, theatre forms the “Little Theatre Movement” [particularly emerged in Japan] declared a new awareness of their own, almost, it was believed, forgotten traditions.”45 Likewise, Korean dramatists started producing experimental plays by combining traditional performances with western forms of contemporary theatre.46 Before I examine some intercultural performances in Korea, a brief overview of intercultural theatre in the west is useful for a better understanding of how Korean theatre practitioners have applied the concept of intercultural theatre to their productions.

Interculturalism in theatre has been actively studied by western scholars and practitioners such as Richard Schechner, Eugenio Barba, Jerzy Grotowski, Peter Brook, E. Fisher-Lichte, Ariane Mnoushkine. Interculturalism is the thought that as human beings, people from diverse countries share cultural commonalities. These scholars have developed theories of intercultural theatre mostly by presenting or analyzing contemporary productions. However, their positive perspective on “universalism” in theatre has been reconsidered by post-colonial theatre scholars. Rustom Bharucha, an Indian scholar, has argued that the idea of utilizing different cultures stemmed from imperialistic perspectives of western practitioners who had the power to embellish their production by borrowing from eastern cultural elements without understanding their histories.47 Starting prior to the millennium, another Indian theater scholar Una Chaudhuri has also redefined the academic aspects of interculturalism in theatre, arguing that conventional

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western dramatists’ recognizing cultures “as existing alone and within the lines of demarcation” is dangerous for “reproducing the ideological structures which drafted those lines in the first place.” Chaudhuri also concludes that “well-meaning intercultural projects can unwittingly perpetuate a neo-colonialism in which the cultural clichés that underwrote imperialism survive more or less intact.” The general conclusion opines that the new trend of interculturalism is related to inserting “the entire self-body, soul, mind, ethnicity, sexuality, and ideology—into the postmodern matrix of mass media and global commerce.” Just as interculturalism has changed and transformed within western theatre, so has Korean intercultural theatre changed as well.

Based on western interculturalism theories, Korean theatre artists and practitioners created intercultural productions. The Wedding Day directed by Huh Gyu, was an adaptation of a traditional folk tale in the style of akgeuk and it participated in “The Third World Theatre Festival” held in Manila, Philippines in 1971. In 1977, Ahn Min Soo, took international tours with the two main productions: Tae (1974) and Hamyeoltaeja (1976) in the U.S., France, and the Netherlands, making forty-eight total performances. Tae was written by Oh Tae Seok, one of the leading theatre artists in Korea, about the tragic story of the corrupt royal family of Lee’s Kingdom in the Chosun dynasty. Hamyeoltaeja is an adaptation of Shakespeare’s Hamlet, and

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49 Chaudhuri, 196.
51 Kim, 414-418.
foreign critics especially acclaimed Ahn’s production of *Hamyeoltaeja*.\(^\text{54}\) Another intercultural performance, *Jilseo*, directed by Yoo Duck Hyung, was invited to be presented at the La MaMa Experimental Theatre in New York City in 1979.\(^\text{55}\) Yoo cast international actors and had them wear traditional Korean clothes.\(^\text{56}\) The actors used fewer Korean words and most of the performance was presented with acrobatic movements and gestured languages taken from traditional Korean mask dances.\(^\text{57}\) In sum, all these works promoted the uniqueness of the traditional aesthetics of Korean tradition and its universalism by following the trend of interculturalism in the west.

**Impact Of Globalization**

Korean theatre was influenced by the political policy of globalization and thus indulged in fewer experimental performances and in more intercultural performances. Some Korean theatre scholars argued that the time of globalization in Korean theatre was around the late 1988 and the beginning of 1990. Shim Jung Soon, one of the most prolific theatre critics in Korea, argues that although globalization was introduced in the mid 1990s, it was during the mid 1980s when Korean theatre started inter-connecting with other countries.\(^\text{58}\) Another critic by the name of Kim Moon Hwan argues that it was after the 1988 Summer Olympics in Seoul that Korean dramatists and scholars began to facilitate international theatre festivals and conferences.\(^\text{59}\)

The term "globalization" began to emerge in Korea in the mid 1990s under Young Sam Kim’s presidential administration from 1993 to 1998. During this period, globalization

\(^\text{54}\) “Big Compliments from 18 Presses in the U.S. and Europe: 48 runs with 80,000 audiences” *KyungHyang Daily*, 1 Jun.1977.
\(^\text{55}\) Shin, 252.
\(^\text{56}\) Shin, 270.
functioned as an ideal social vision that encouraged economic development and re-established democracy by challenging the long lasting military dictatorship that prevailed from the 1960s to the 1980s. In November 1993, President Kim introduced “internationalization” as the key policy to boost the competitive level of the nation under the unlimited competitive system in the world. A year later, he renamed his global policy to globalization, *segyehwa* in Korean, expanding the range of this policy from political and economic issues to include cultural issues and social boundaries. In the word *segyehwa*, *segye* means "world" and *hwa* functions like the English suffix "ization."^61^

While the government campaigned *segyehwa* as the national policy, it did not fully distinguish between the terms internationalization and globalization to public. President Kim claimed the necessity of the globalization was to increase Korea’s competitive power over other developed countries. However, Kim Yunchul, a research fellow in the Community of Korean Political Science, argued that this national policy focused to catch up to other developed countries, and that using the trendy term globalization would actually highlight nationalism just addressing world trendy term, globalization in order to highlight nationalism. Due to the government’s lack of understanding of the term, globalization, it rarely communicated with citizens and other political parties to demonstrate how they applied the policy to their social, political, economic, and cultural lives. Instead, the South Korean government tended to open


^62^ For more detailed contents of the president Kim’s official address regarding *segyehwa*, see the website of the Presidential Archives, http://www.pa.go.kr/security/security_display02.html.

doors of monetary circulation and commerce to foreign countries without speculation of financial loss. As a result, the policy directly affected the financial crisis of South Korea in 1997.  

Although Kim’s presidency exceeded the practitioners’ desire for making new forms of art under the idea of globalization, Korean theatre did not clearly define the global theatre yet, but kept performing new experiments before the millennium. The cultural and social changes under the policy of globalization emerged in the form of intercultural performances and revising tradition; at the end of the millennium, in the 1990s, theatre artists tried to create new forms of theatre by presenting traditions that were updated. From the 1980s to the 1990s, there were many West End and Broadway musicals that used all Korean cast and crew in Korea; Hyundai Theatre Company performed Jesus Christ Of Superstar in 1980, The Sound Of Music and Evita in 1981. Seoul Civic Singing and Dancing Company produced The Fantastics in 1981, Porgy and Bess in 1984, and Fiddler on the Roof in 1985. Hyundai Ensemble Theatre Company performed Annie in 1985 and The King and I in 1987. Pan Musical Company presented Cats in 1990. Lotte World Art Theatre produced Man of La Mancha and West Side Story in 1992 and Les Misérables in 1993. In particular, in 1983, Guys and Dolls was co-produced by the three prominent Korean theatre troupes, Theatre Gangjang, Minjong Theatre Group, and Daejong Theatre Group, which inspired the development of Korean musical theatre. Due to the lack of musical theatre infrastructure in Korea, these theatre groups collaborated to increase the technical and artistic value of their productions. Those foreign productions performed in Korea were commercially successful musicals in the U.S. and U.K. As a result, Korean audiences and

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64 For more information about the financial crisis of South Korea in 1997, see the musical’s 1998 U.S. tours in the chapter 3.  
practitioners believed Broadway styled mega-musicals or British hit musicals were standard styles of the “authentic” or “original” musicals. 67 In the beginning of the 1990s, Korean practitioners tried to find a way to perform their own version of western mega-musicals following Broadway and British theatrical templates. 68 The Last Empress is a production that represents the influence of this cultural and social phenomenon of globalization in Korean theatre.

Considering the phenomena of globalization, there were major changes in Korean theatre. Acknowledging the significance of cultivating a cultural product to expand beyond the national market into the global one, the Korean government encouraged holding international theatre festivals. 69 It was during the mid-1980s, when Korean theatre began to participate in international theatre festivals, opening new possibilities to Korean theatre. 70

The Korean government continued to support traditional performing arts to entice tourists who visited Korea for the 1986 Asian Games and the 1988 Summer Olympic Games. The government also invited Asian groups to present their traditional or contemporary dances, music, and theatre. In particular, the Suzuki Company of Toga (SCOT)’s production The Trojan Woman by Euripides was well received because of its Suzuki Tadashi’s style of production, which was similar to what Korean theatre artists had been working on. It contemporized traditional performances within western theatrical elements. 71 Not surprisingly, many theatre practitioners discussed the possibility of presenting contemporary Korean productions abroad.

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70 Lee, 38.
While Korea hosted another world-gathering event at the 1988 Summer Olympics in Seoul, the government organized the Seoul International Theatre Festival in 1988. During President Noh Tae Woo’s administration, one of his political agendas was to make peaceful relations with North Korea and other communist states. For this festival, theatre companies from all over the world were invited, including two from the then-communist Czechoslovakia and Poland. This was the first time productions from communist states were displayed for Korean audiences. The Korean government used this international event to present to the rest of the world its democratic desire to join the post-cold war movement.

As Czechoslovakia and Polish theatre groups presented their artistically profound productions to the Korean audiences, the productions challenged the Korean audience’s assumptions that the communist productions would be promoting political propaganda. Korean audiences are especially sensitive to political messages from their communist neighbor North Korea. For example, a theatre group from Czechoslovakia presented the show Crash, which was performed as comic mime. The main plot of the play centers around two injured drivers who fight with each other for ridiculous reasons in a hospital room. Lee Mee Won, a theatre scholar, emphasizes that the themes of the two countries’ productions were not communist or ideological but had more humanist ideas. (Czechoslovakia dissolved into the democratic Czech Republic

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74 The Society an Culture of the 50-year-separation between North Korea and South Korea, Ed. Laboratory of the Far East Issues at Kyungnam University, (Masan: Kyungnam UP, 1996) 9.
75 Jung Ok Shin and Hyun Sook Shin, Western Theatre in Korea from 1900 to 1995 (Seoul: Sohwa, 1999) 230.
77 Lee, 203-204.
and Slovakia in 1993, but this festival was held in 1988. In Poland, the fall of communism occurred in 1989.)

Although the government aimed to arrange these theatre festivals partly for political reasons, the festivals not only exposed Korean practitioners to foreign theatre culture but also provided a chance for foreign theatre artists to evaluate Korea’s contemporary theatre productions. For example, Martin Esslin, one of the most prominent English theatre scholars and dramatists, visited Seoul to attend a forum at the Seoul International Festival. He praised the excellent quality and insightful interpretation of Lim Young Woong’s *Waiting for Godot* by Beckett.78

During the 1990s, under the official slogan of globalization, Korean theatre started moving forward by solidifying an international theatre festival and becoming a leading force of international theatre conferences. In 1994, Korean theatre artists and scholars founded the first annual Asian centered theatre festival, the BeSeTo Theatre Festival.79 The term BeSeTo comes from taking the first two syllables from the words Beijing, Seoul, and Tokyo. This festival was conceived by the three Northeastern Asian centers of the International Theatre Institute: China, Korea, and Japan. The festival was a first step towards establishing a cultural community in the region.80 The first festival was held at the Seoul Arts Center in Seoul. The main objective of the festival was to combine traditional staging and western forms.81 All four productions (i.e., one from Japan, one from China, and two from Korea) were contemporary creations that were able to do this.

The opening of the Seoul International Theatre Festival commenced in 1988 and invited many foreign theatre companies to participate. However, due to financial hardships, the festival was to cease after the 1999 event. In 2001, funded primarily by the Korean government, it was renamed The Seoul Performing Arts Festival (SPAF). It is significant to note that the year of 2001 was when Korean government completed repayment to the IMF (International Monetary Fund). Since then, SPAF has presented over 60 productions annually including offerings from China, Japan, Canada, Russia, Lithuania and other European countries. The festival has been well received by western critics and dramatists. Jim O’Quinn who attended the 2002 SPAF argued that Seoul was best suited for holding an international theatre festival because the city exemplifies coexistence “...between rural and urban, ancient and contemporary, Buddhist and Christian, traditional and progressive.” Overall, the influx of globalization with political and financial interventions by the government has encouraged Korean leadership in many international festivals both within Korea and abroad. This provided many opportunities to broaden its experience, witness other cultural productions, and forge closer relationships with foreign companies.

At the start of the millennium, intercultural collaborative theatre projects were actively presented in Korea. Some Korean theatre artists tried to create new ways of expressing the value of intercultural projects by working with foreign artists. Many theatre artists were aware of these intercultural theatre productions and participated in international theatre festivals and conferences. Supported mostly by the government and private patrons, the Seoul Arts Center

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82 For more information, see the website, http://spaf.or.kr/2013/spaf/history_2001.php.
83 The official homepage of SPAF is http://www.spaf.or.kr/english/.
projected and produced most of these intercultural collaborative performances, and thus became the biggest performing arts center in Korea.\textsuperscript{86}

In 2002, the FIFA World Cup was held in Korea and Japan; it was the first World Cup in Asia.\textsuperscript{87} Accordingly, the Korean government proposed to produce an intercultural theatre production created by both Korean and Japanese theatre artists in order to proclaim their friendly relationship to their homelands and other countries. \textit{Somewhere Over the River} was presented in both Japan and Korea, celebrating their co-hosting relationship.\textsuperscript{88} Artists from each country participated in this joint effort to create the production.

The plays plot portrayed Japanese and Korean students coming to Korea to study Korean language, and as part of the class experience, the Korean teacher takes the pupils on a picnic along the riverbank of the Han River. The students begin to understand differences in their cultural backgrounds and societies through interchanging conversations in Korean and Japanese. For the production, the Seoul Arts Center commissioned Kim Myung Hwa, one of the most renowned female playwrights in Korea, and Hrata Oriza, a famous Japanese female playwright to co-write the play.\textsuperscript{89} The actors and the production's creative staff were both Korean and Japanese as well. The play was presented in Japan a month before the World Cup was held. And later, it was presented in Korea a month after the World Cup ended.\textsuperscript{90}

In 2004, the Seoul Arts Center invited Grigori Ditiyatkovski, a Russian director, and Emil Kapelyush, a Georgian Stage designer, to present Chekhov's \textit{The Seagull} with Korean actors in

\begin{footnotes}
\item[86] For more information, see the website, \url{http://www.sac.or.kr/}.
\item[87] The FIFA 2002 World Cup was held from 31 May to 30 June, 2002 both in South Korea and Japan. For more information, see the website, \url{http://www.fifa.com/worldcup/archive/edition=4395/}.
\item[89] Kim, 403-404.
\end{footnotes}
Ditiyatkovski held an audition to cast fresh Korean faces to create a new interpretation of the drama. During the rehearsal period, he worked with actors without texts and observed the actors’ personal characters and tempers through their improvisation and journals. For stage design, Emil Kapelyush created an elegant and symbolic stage by adapting Asian theatre conventions with baroque-styled European antiques as props. This production was commercially and artistically successful and marked the history of a successful case in intercultural theatre, which still resounds throughout Korean theatre society.

It is certain that the collaborative production systems broke down the cultural and socio-cultural boundaries between Korea and other nations. By exchanging and intermingling with varying cultural differences through theatre, Korea experimented with artistic hybrid cultural experiences. It is significant to note that these intercultural productions have been commercially successful, quenching the audience's thirst for a new taste of drama.

**The Global Debut of The Last Empress**

Globalization influenced the rapid development of musical theatre in Korea. Many British and American musicals were imported to Korea at nearly the same time that they were presented in their respective home countries. Since the 1990s, under the governmental policy of globalization, a growing interest in importing cultural products in the form of mega-musicals from London in U.K. and Broadway in the U.S. proved commercially successful. At this time, the original Korean musical, *The Last Empress*, had the world premiere in Korea in 1995 and received mixed critical reviews on both its domestic and international tours. The musical theatre

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92 Kamarish’s stage was the mixture of Japanese Noh stage (inside Hanamichi) and symbolic empty stage with a mirror and a chandelier. For more information, see Sandra Lee’s production notes in the production program of *The Seagull*, 2004.
business in Korea became a hot topic for those who wanted to export their interest into the global market.

Why is *The Last Empress* significant in developing potential theories of global performances in Korea? Until the late 20th century, most Korean theatre productions performed abroad were short presentations for cultural expos, which shared Korean theatre culture, both contemporary and historical, with the world. Some Korean directors presented their intercultural productions overseas by using well-known western content and embedding strong notions of Korean cultural exoticism (i.e. *Jilseo* based on similarity to Greek tragedies and *Hamyeoltaeja* based upon a similarity to *Hamlet*).

Unlike these productions that contained so-called aesthetic universalism or commonalities between East and West, *The Last Empress* did not reinvent or transform Korean culture into modernized western forms of theatre. Instead, the musical directly followed presentational forms of the western mega-musicals, including Broadway-style plot structures, emphasis on spectacles, and operatic musical numbers along with a realistic narrative as the content. Because the musical was set in the late 19th century, the visual aspects, such as costumes and set designs, were reflective of Korean traditional culture. The musical style of *The Last Empress*, borrowed from western style mega-musicals, veered from intercultural forms that used western themes in a Korean traditional cultural presentational format. This new genre uniquely employed a Korean historical theme presented with authentic setting and costumes, and applied the West End and Broadway style mega-musical singing and acting, and hence became the first Korean mega-musical.  

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Premiered in 1995, the musical was praised by domestic audiences who called it “kookmin musical (in English, the people’s or the national musical),” and “tojong musical (in English, an indigenous musical).” These terms were coined because of the unique characteristics of The Last Empress. Unlike the previous intercultural productions that usually mixed the style of Korean traditional drama, changgeuk or pansori, with western text, Greek tragedies, or Shakespearean plays, The Last Empress directly borrowed the western musical style to present one of the most controversial stories in Korean history. Since ACom’s homecoming performance in 1997, Korean media agencies called the musical “the national musical” or “the indigenous musical” because it was produced by Korean artists and practitioners and performed with the globalized genre of theatre (i.e. mega-musical) to present the Korean contents that address across-the-board messages.

The musical was the first to reach the global market with intercultural elements, combining western mega-musical style with Korean traditional and historical elements. Although the Korean government encouraged a tour abroad and even financially sponsored the production, the musical received mixed reviews during its international tours.

The musical’s director Yun Ho Jin believed that Korean theatre had the potential to make profitable mega-musicals that not only exhibited cultural entertainment for foreign audiences, but also equally competed with other mainstream western musicals. Fortunately for Yun, the musical became a big hit in Korea and went on to tour in New York and Los Angeles in the U.S.,

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London in the U.K., and Toronto in Canada for seven years. Although the international tours had to be suspended in 2004, the musical is still presented every year in Korea.97

The musical continued to be revised by the creative team while the production toured from 1997 to 2004. Although the creative team used knowledge of western musical theatre to create the premiere in 1995, they used ongoing critical reviews from foreign media as a way to gauge public opinion as they sought to develop this novel format of connecting with global audiences. Thus, most of their revisions were based on critical comments from foreign reviewers and their own experiences with the foreign stages. As the Korean pioneer exporter of musical theatre abroad, ACom did not have any previous cases or productions that it could use as a reference point. Thus, it directly investigated the reactions from the international audiences and took them as significant sources to revise the musical.

In The Last Empress, historical characters and events were reinterpreted with a global perspective. Parallel to the new observation of the Empress argued by revisionist historians, the progressive value implicit in the musical has a strong connection to globalization in the twenty-first century. As the Empress encouraged opening the gate to foreign influences to increase the quality of life socially, economically, and politically, so The Last Empress can be seen as a vehicle moving Korean theatre into an international dimension, importing western mega-musical style while intermingling it with a Korean theme, and then exporting the Korean revisionist history in a globally legible package.

The historical content of The Last Empress was influenced by plays that were popular in Korea during the 1980s, when most dramatic subjects were derived from domestic mythologies

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or ancient stories about heroes. During that time, playwrights attempted to use stories that allowed respite from the harsh reality under the oppression from the Japanese government.  

In contrast to historical plays that promoted national pride in the 1970s, the 1980s saw writers presenting an overview of epic stories encompassing the lives of great people. However, this long time frame, which spanned from birth to death of characters began to change in the 1980s. Principally, neo-national historical plays were made with the purpose of rediscovering the history of the nation. Kim Sung Hee, for example, analyzes that that the main characters of those plays were reinterpreted figures of the political or social traitors and they now appeared as heroic contributors for Korea who fought against corruptive ideology in society.

Previously, performances portrayed the life of historical figures as a method of accusation for political wrongdoing within Korean society, especially focusing on the ruling class. The Last Empress likewise used a historical figure by portraying the life of a Korean queen; however, she was described using the revisionists’ rediscovery of her in light of global perspectives. In the musical, the image of the queen, formerly disliked as the one who ruined the nation, now became known as the "mother of the nation” since her rediscovery under the notion of globalization. Consequently, the chaotic and heartrending life of the queen does not function to accuse past harsh treatment of the Japanese people. Instead, the presentation implies relief from dominating forces through global expansion.

The value of the production is not merely in its history, but in the fact that the boundaries between nations are less marked now, which is an underlying vision implied in The Last

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101 Suh, History, 151.
Empress’ storyline. The historical events provide an “excuse” giving credibility to the story by highlighting the current perception of globalization in society through the respectful and generally acceptable form of musical theater. These complex aspects have helped the musical to develop into a new theatre tradition in Korea, termed a "national theatre," and to represent a contemporary Korean performance even while borrowing features from the west.

Consequently, the Korean musical The Last Empress left a legacy in its attempt to join the global market by producing an intercultural piece, combining western styles of theatre with Korean traditional and historical elements. For example, Nanta (1997) was conceived as a Korean version of Stomp, and Jump (2002) was a comic martial arts performance that mixed traditional Korean martial arts such as taekwondo and taekkyon.103 The aforementioned productions continue world tours, which include the U.S., Europe, and South Asia. Another endeavor to impact the global market was Dancing Shadow (2007), produced by both foreign and Korean artists in collaboration with private businessmen.104 This musical originated from a Korean realistic play, Forest Fire, written by Cha BumSuk in 1962. The music was composed by Eric Woolfson, who wrote the commercially successful musical Gambler. Ariel Dorfman, a Chilean playwright, adapted the Forest Fire play into the musical play, Dancing Shadow, and collaborated with Mamma Mia!’s director, Paul Garrington. The creative team for the project was made of both Korean and British designers.105 Notably, this musical did not use traditional elements or historical tales in the production and, though the intercultural collaborative project

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was widely advertised, it was not well received in Korea perhaps due to cultural misinterpretation.  

In summary, globalization inspired many theatrical artists to create a new form of intercultural production introducing new styles of global theatre. It appears as if many Korean artists employed a trial-and-error method, attempting to implement and establish concepts of global performances. In light of this view, ACom's new theories and processes provide an example of a potential research source to evaluate global performance endeavors that attempt to satisfy an audiences’ endless demand for new theatre.

**Review of Literature**

The academic research on *The Last Empress* is scarce in Korea even with the musical's widespread reputation in its homeland. Some Korean graduate students studied the musical to examine its significance to the Korean cultural industry in their theses but the contents were less scholastic and unprofessionally focused on subjects. For example, Lee Yoon Sun studied whether the musical can be made into a cultural commodity by analyzing “the factors for the success.”  Yet Lee simply concluded the musical’s success was due to its ticket sales and its spectacularism. Choi Ju Hwan aimlessly selected four musicals performed in Korea and examined the musicals’ marketing strategies and domestic advertisements without any productive arguments on the development of Korean cultural industry in musical theatre. Whereas Choi and Lee overlooked the dramatic analysis of the musical script, Mi Young Choi observed the main characters of the musical in her thesis, “A Study on the Teaching Method of

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the Musical *The Last Empress*." Mi Young Choi’s thesis, however, only used one text from a high school literature textbook to define the entire musical’s literature quality without connection to its genre of the musical theatre.

It is worthwhile to note that some theatre scholars and critics criticized this musical’s distortion of actual historical backgrounds and characters. Shim Jung Soon, a Korean theatre scholar, pointed out the musical’s chronological plot might block the artistic value of the historical musical because the epic story bothers the dramatic tension and the conflicts between the characters made the story dull. In this regard, Shim argued the main character, the Queen Min, was not effectively reborn as the new type of a heroine whom the current society has longed for. She suggests, “The male writers should open their hearts to the other gender and remove the dichotomy of male/female to create more realistic women characters.” Lee Hae Kyoung, another Korean theatre scholar, agreed with Shim’s ideas that Queen Min’s character lost its significance due to “too much in narrating the historical events.” Lee also argued that Queen Min was written by Korean men “who are still struggling with the ideology of feudalistic nationalism” by explaining that Yi Munyol, the writer of *Foxhunt*, stereotyped the Queen as a mother of the nation to emphasize Yi’s male-controlled patriotism. Lee notes “Yi’s denial of the Japanese view of Queen Min and the praise of her as mother of the nation are other ways of solidifying his nationalistic ideology at the expense of denying a woman’s identity and desire.”

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111 Shim, 108.
112 Shim, 102-108.
114 Lee, 90-109.
Likewise, American theatre scholar, Sue Ellen Case pointed out that some of the musical numbers, such as “State Examination for Military Service” and “Wish for a Prince” performed in the 2003 L.A. tour, contained a gender-specific nature. She critiqued the male actors performing “State Examination for Military Service” by comparing them to the superior power of the female dancers who played shamans like dragon ladies, a previously stereotyped female depiction in Hollywood films. Case concluded that the male-centered creative team had portrayed Queen Min from a patriarchal perspective, which mirrored the current social situation of Korea.

However, both scenes were created under historical research in order to exhibit “Korean beauty.” An alternate contemporary nonsexist presentation would diminish historical accuracy and detract from the presentation of typical scenarios, which most likely surrounded Queen Min's life.

Case additionally argued that The Last Empress borrows theatrical elements from western mega-musicals to promote economic success within the nation, and uses historical tales to lend the appeal of Korean traditional values to global audiences. She argued that the musical lost its global approachability while the musical’s nationalism was revealed. She illuminated too much focus on historical visual presentations and too much emphasis on Queen Min’s motherhood made the entire musical conservative and less global. Lee Hyunjung, a Korean theatre scholar, exposed the irony of the desire to produce a global musical by noting that The Last Empress was utilized as a reference point in the discourse of nationalism versus globalization. She argued that the musical presents Korea's lack of global sensibility by interplaying the concepts of

\[115\] Ho Jin Yun, Personal interview on July 12, 2011.
globalization and nationalism. She noted that the Korean media overstated the result of the 1997 tour when calling it a global success by emphasizing positive reviews that promoted Korea’s nationalism under the rubric of segehwa. As a result, Lee argues, “the inflated domestic coverage of the musical’s global impact is revealed to be an ‘empty signifier’” i.e. “exaggerated impressions meant to promote and validate the show’s alleged global success.” Yet, Lee oversimplified her review of The Last Empress; the emphasis Lee placed on the government's distorted concept of globalization presented a limited scope by which to ascertain the musical's fame or impact. Compensation for the naissance of ACom's production development and its understanding of a western mega-musical genre's particulars would prove to be a valuable factor in making a broader assessment. Lee presented the musical as an "empty signifier," concluding it failed, basing her assessment solely on critical reviews and financial problems. Once again, it is important when reviewing The Last Empress to focus on not only the critics' reception and monetary status, but also the cultural, historical, and global factors that are impacted when less dominant nations enter an established realm such as Broadway. In actuality, interviews with Yun Ho Jin, the director of the musical, show that his intent was deeper than merely selling Korean exoticism abroad. He also exported Korean history and cultural spirit to the western palate via traditional western mega-musical theatre methods, replete with spectacles, costumes, dance, and music.

Since many scholars analyzed the musical in terms of its sociopolitical and gender aspects, they barely discussed the musical’s artistic and dramatic efforts. Yet, with the agreement

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119 Lee, 62.
120 Lee, 17.
121 Yun, Personal interview.
of some feminist scholars’ notions that the Queen’s depiction in the musical was patriarchal, this dissertation provides Yi’s controversial case with Korean feminist novelists in Korea and explores the musical’s lack of character development due to the emphasis on the Queen’s motherhood.

The local researchers and scholars along with foreign scholars were interested in the West End and Broadway style mega-musical in the contexts of cultural commodities, feminism, and globalization as an alternative way to highlight nationalism. Yet, they barely analyzed the musical’s production values. Hence, I explore the musical’s practical value, regarding it as a more historical and artistic documentation. In addition, since there were no documents discovered specifically about the musical's tours abroad, I dissect the musical’s theatrical condition in terms of its cultural and historical functions in the era of globalization. For this study, I scrutinize the production value of the musical by situating it as a cultural pioneer in contemporary Korean theatre. As the first production to solicit global reception through its international tours, this musical provides a model for composing global productions in Korean theatre. The development process of this novel prototype can be examined and evaluated with respect to the effectiveness of communicating with foreign audiences.

Methodology

Focusing on the reception and reviews from media agencies, this dissertation emphasizes how the musical has shifted the paradigm of theatrical convention of Korean theatre under media influence. This study scrutinizes the production value of The Last Empress in terms of its process of revisions, adaptations, and translation under the critical reviews from domestic and international critics. Primary sources for the content analysis and the archival research include the following: production scripts; visual recordings of the production; program notes; poster ads;
leaflets; interviews with the director, the producers, and the chief of the marketing department; and domestic and international reviews documented in magazines, journals, particularly, newspaper sources including publications from Korean immigrant communities in the U.S., U.K, and Canada. All translations are the author’s except where otherwise noted.

Limitations

This dissertation has a lack of data in audience reception. Since ACom’s continuous revisions of *The Last Empress* were mainly modified through the practical experiences in its international tours along with the reception from foreign critics and journalists, the study limits its analytical examination merely to the reception in reviews and articles from the press.

To explore *The Last Empress*’ value more precisely in intercultural and global settings, the fundamental theoretical framework of the dissertation employs Richard Schechner’s concept of interculturalism- “the culture of choice.” According to Schechner, real exchange among cultures is important to artists. They crave something that could be done by individuals or by non-official groups, and this interchange is not constrained by national boundaries. Schechner argues that if people set up a particular culture and attempt to stop exchanging cultures, it might lead to the end of history or extermination of the world.  

It is true that his concept of interculturalism tends to emphasize universalism of theatre, which has been criticized due to its ignorance of power dynamics that contain neo-colonial perspectives. In this dissertation, however, such neo-colonial or postcolonial approaches have a tendency to assure that “global elements” describe how the local community negotiates with or confronts the inevitable foreign force of globalization. This dissertation focuses more on the revision process along with the production history during *The Last Empress*’ international tours, rather than the comparison

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between the basic elements of the West End and Broadway style mega-musical theatre and the Korean traditional drama, especially, the sung-through musical drama. Additionally, this study observes interculturalism within Korean theatre, which structures the new paradigm through the aesthetic interconnection with other cultures, and the discourse of nationalism vs. globalization is briefly considered.

**Chapter Breakdown**

The second chapter includes the historical and theatrical analysis of *The Last Empress* by observing how ACom planned to create and export it as a global musical. Beginning with the initial motivation led by the director and the establishment of ACom, the chapter examines three main scripts: the original closet drama of the musical, *Fox Hunt* (1995) by Yi Munyol; the preliminary adaptation of *Fox Hunt*, by Kim Kwang Lim; and the main script for the 1995 production, *The Last Empress: Yi Munyol’s Fox Hunt* by Yang In Ja. It investigates how much the creative team compromises, maintains, and controls the cultural and aesthetic values while revising the original based on their consideration of global audiences.

The third chapter describes the analysis of two versions of *The Last Empress* for the U.S. tours in 1997 and 1998, examining issues in marketing strategies, adaptation, translation, and reception. The two versions are the 1997 version for Broadway, and the 1998 version for Broadway and Los Angeles. The objective of this chapter is to discover how the creative team continued to transform the production based on feedback from foreign audiences by expanding the social, political, and economic concept of globalization. By using various sources from newspapers, magazines, journals, and personal interviews, the analysis on the pivotal points of the international reception of each tour are carefully explained. Detailed dramatic comparisons between the two versions in terms of lyrics, supertitles, music, and production scenes are also
analytically studied. This chapter examines how ACom’s creative production team tailored the performance and even shaped it in light of the global response in order to embed adaptable elements for a more internationally acceptable performance.

The fourth chapter examines ACom’s 2002 London tour, the first tour fully performed in English. The English version for the 2002 tour was completely rearranged and changed in terms of the musical score and lyrics. Like the previous chapters, this chapter analyzes the discrepancy between the previous 1998 Korean version and the 2002 English version focusing on lyrics, character development, and delivery of the musical’s theme. Lastly, the chapter investigates how ACom’s production team, the Korean media agencies, and the London critics disagreed on the effectiveness of the Korean cultural presentations. This chapter explains that ACom admits that the musical has weaknesses in its storyline and music, and that the translation to English lyrics is not the main key to pleasing global audiences.

The fifth chapter examines the reasons why Yun, the musical's director decides to return to the previous 1998 Korean version for the 2003 and 2004 tours. Questioning ACom’s choice to return to the 1998 version, the chapter dissects the minor changes in the revision of the script and the newly arranged English supertitles. The chapter also explores how Yun chose the Korean community as the primary marketing target. Also the chapter explains how ACom became less dependent on foreign reception to earn a profit.

The sixth chapter introduces the three-outreach programs that were produced from 2007 to 2009. Essentially, the outreach programs consist of a tour to a certain historical place related to Queen Min, and the appreciation of the production afterwards. This chapter traces the outreach programs that were held in the Geoncheong palace where Queen Min was assassinated; at Yeoju, the birthplace of the queen; and on the Japanese island of Kumamoto the hometown of
the majority of the assassins. This chapter observes each outreach program to inspect ACom’s desire for promoting the global project while embodying the queen’s spirit by performing selected scenes and arias from the musical in actual historic places. Lastly, the chapter determines the musical’s contributions to Korean musical theatre history by its coining of the term, the indigenous musical. It also argues that the domestic activity (i.e. the outreach programs in Korea) is the paradoxical culmination of its international tours.
CHAPTER 2

THE CREATION OF THE LAST EMPRESS

The Last Empress was born out of the director Yun Ho Jin’s desire to present a “global musical” in Korea. Specifically, this meant creating the first large-scale musical in Korea capable of being exported abroad. During the four years of preparation, the creative team visited New York City's Broadway and London’s West End to view commercially popular musicals. The team sought to learn how commercially viable musicals are produced.

Yun Ho Jin chose the story of Empress Myeongseong (1851-1895), referred to by the Japanese as Queen Min and notably one of the most controversial figures in Korean history, for his musical production. Japanese historians during Japan’s occupation of Korea in the early twentieth century had restored Queen Min to her creditable place in history. However, Korean revisionists then began presenting new interpretations of her life. Yun objected to the Japanese historical account regarding Queen Min and suggested the revisionists’ ideas, rather than Japanese renditions of her life, be included in his musical.

Receiving much media attention, Yun’s musical, The Last Empress, was a commercial success in Korea, and Yun was acclaimed for his emphasis on spectacular staging and special effects. As a result, Yun’s production of The Last Empress helped to popularize musical theatre in Korea. In fact, a critic called it “the masterpiece that upgrades the quality of our musical theatre.”

This chapter will explore how Yun established ACom, the first commercial musical company in Korea, in order to create productions of global stature. Yun and his writers applied western musical theater styles in representing the story of the Korean Empress Myeongseong, developing the final script from a winding process starting with an original book, progressing

\[123\] Jung Ho Yoon, “The Masterpiece that Upgrades the Quality of Our Musical Theatre” Chosun Ilbo. 6 Jan.1996.
through multiple adaptations of the original version. This examination will include the means by which Korean traditions and western styles of musical theatre were integrated in creating and performing Yun’s production. Also, decisions made by the director, writers, actors and all associated with the production will be analyzed in terms of meeting the goal of achieving popularity among audiences around the globe.

**Art Communication International Inc. (ACom)**

Yun is of the opinion that domestic artists in musical theatre should produce musical productions for exporting abroad to expand the marketplace. There was no particular musical theatre company capable of presenting state-of-the-art musical theatre with Korean artists and practitioners until ACom was established in 1991. Although domestically made musical theatre productions were actively performed from the 1960s to 1980s under the motto of recreation of tradition, as mentioned in the previous chapter, West End and Broadway musicals such as *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *The Sound of Music*, *Evita*, and *Guys and Dolls* also evidenced popularity. Kim Woo Ok, a theatre practitioner and scholar, compares the number of musicals from Broadway and domestic musicals from the 1960s to the 1990s in the table below:

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125 For more information about the West End and Broadway musicals performed in Korea from the 1980s to the 1990s, see the chapter 1.


Table 1
The Number of Musicals From Broadway and Domestic Musicals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time period</th>
<th>The total number of musical productions</th>
<th>The ratio of creative musicals (local musicals)</th>
<th>The ratio of translated musicals (foreign musicals)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1962-1971</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972-1981</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982-1991</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


According to Ok’s figures, from 1982 to 1991, the foreign musicals mostly consisted of British and American musical productions, which outranked domestic musical shows. During the 1990s, the popularity of western musicals including Guys and Dolls, Les Misérables and 42nd Street was influenced and encouraged by the social mood in Korea, which spotlighted western popular culture like Hip-hop and commercial mega-musicals.\(^\text{128}\)

A brief review of the historical climate in Korea from the 1980s to the 1990s assists in comprehension of artistic development in musical theatre and the creation of organizations such as ACom. During the 1980s, the structure of Korean society was in flux; political protestors rejected the incumbent governmental power, creating a condition of drastic changes within Korea.\(^\text{129}\) In June of 1987, the discontented public, which included college students and common people, arose from the 10th to the 29th of the month to confront governmental injustices, forcing changes in the status quo and ushering in democratic reforms and elections.\(^\text{130}\) This pressure upon the existing ruling class opened the floodgates for average citizens to participate in major decision-making processes throughout the country. Since the 1990s, the Korean citizenry began to experience freedom expressible in government, art, press, and all facets of culture, which were inextricably linked to global economy. This began the era of a free market society in which


\(^{129}\) Chang Nam Kim, and et al. Understanding Popular Culture. (Seoul: KNOU Press, 2010)

\(^{130}\) Young Tae Choi, 5.18 and the History: from Their Nation to Our Nation.(Seoul: Gil Publication, 2008)
culture could be publicly expressed, developed, and exported to increase financial gains. As a result, professional musical theatre companies such as ACom arose, coinciding with the social and political changes and meeting the novel demand of popular culture advocates who began to develop and blossom under what is commonly called the Sixth Republic. ACom surfaced as an entrepreneurial venture presenting exportable musical art with a Korean theme.

The first Korean musical theatre company, ACom, was founded by a group of six executive producers that consisted of university professors, theatre artists, businessmen, and entrepreneurs who invested personal funds in accordance with their artistic interests. The entrepreneurial group venture opened business in downtown Seoul, Korea and immediately began producing western-style musical shows. Motivated by the motto “Global thinking, high cultural performing,” ACom aimed to reach domestic and international markets with equal vigor (i.e., equal to the West) by creating a musical containing both global and local aspects. After forming ACom, Yun planned to produce a Korean musical about Empress Myeongseung, which would reach the international acclaim of the musical Cats created by Andrew Lloyd Weber, the British composer in musical theatre.

What significance did the musical Cats play in Yun's approach to theatre, in particular, musicals? Yun enjoyed directing Broadway musicals in Korea, and was known as the “sold out ticket maker” in Korean theatre. He directed highly political and controversial plays such as Island by Athol Fugard, John Kani, and Winston Ntshona, and Agnes of God by John Pielmeier

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131 Kim, Chang Nam, and et al, Understanding.
132 Since ACom was officially established, many professional musical theatre companies have competitively emerged. They are Sinci musical company (1994), Seoul Musical company (1995), PMC (1996), and since 2000, Sul & Company, Odi Musical Company, Musical company, Musical Heaven Production, Shownotes, etc.
133 According to the official website of ACom, www.iacom.com, the first members of the executive producers of the company were Yun Ho Jin (a director/professor at Dankook University), Jung Jin Soo (a theatre scholar/Sungkyunwan University), Son Suk (an actress), Yi Munyol (a novelist), Lee Sang Lyul (a businessmen), and Lee Soo Mun (an entrepreneur) in 1991.
134 The official website of ACom is available: www.iacom.com.
during the late 1970s to the early 1980s. Because of his reputation, he was appointed Artist of the Year for the Korean Art and Culture Association in 1982. He then traveled to London, England for six months, where he first viewed the musical *Cats* and was amazed by its quality and sheer scale.\(^{135}\) Yun proceeded to study performance and stagecraft at New York University (NYU) to gain understanding of how a musical theatre company is operated. After graduating from NYU, Yun imported his personal experiences with American musical theatre to Korea. His knowledge and interest were catalyst leading him to collaborate with key Korean investors, who joined him ideologically and financially in the successful establishment of ACom.

Yun, having been enthralled by *Cats*, believed that the Korean people's existing love of singing and dancing would cause them to adore the genre of musical theatre.\(^{136}\) Yun became determined to mount a global production through ACom, and interestingly, he selected Myeongseong, one of the most controversial figures in Korean history. Yun stated that the story of Queen Min, consort of King Gojong, had reasonable enticements to attract the interest of global audiences; she lived and reigned during the Empire period in the late 19th century when powerful countries including Japan, Russia, France, Germany, the U.S., and the U.K. were expanding their boundaries. Korea, called the Chosun Dynasty at that time, became a victim of this bloody expansion, and the life of Queen Min exemplified this tragedy. He believed that not only her life, but also her gruesome murder by Japanese assassins, would attract international attention.\(^{137}\) Opportunely, 1995, the year Yun planned to open the production of Queen Min's life, was also the 100\(^{th}\) anniversary of her death. In memory of her tragic demise, Yun's goal was to complete the script for the production by the beginning of 1995. While preparing for the


\(^{136}\) Ho Jin Yun, Personal interview on July 12, 2011.

musical about Queen Min, ACom produced two musicals including one imported musical, \textit{Guys and Dolls} (1994), and one domestic musical \textit{I Will Be A Star!} (1995).\footnote{For more information about ACom, see http://www.iacom.co.kr/} Notably, Korean historians and scholars had begun questioning negative images associated with Queen Min and argued that her image had been distorted by Japanese historians.\footnote{The books about the revision of Empress Myeongseong were published in the beginning of the 1990s: Na, Hong Ju, \textit{The Assassination of the Empress} (Seoul: Miraemonhwasa. 1990); Moon Hyung Choi and el,\textit{Myeongseonhwanghu} (Seoul: Minum Publication, 1992); Soo Kwang Lee, \textit{I Am the Mother of the Nation} (Seoul: SaeMyung, 1994); Bae Yong Lee, “The Empress’s Political Roles During the Modernizing Period” \textit{Kuksakwangnonchong.} 66. (Seoul: Kuksakwan, 1995); Min Won Lee,\textit{The Emperor of Korea.} (Seoul: Daewonsa, 2001). Yi Munyol also mentioned in his preface of the book that he referred Na’s \textit{The Assassination of the Empress} and Choi’s \textit{Myeongseonhwanghu}.} Yun's theatrical involvement with Queen Min was a timely interjection. He advocated unifying a revisionist history with contemporary theatrical changes. Historical revisionist interpretations of the character of Queen Min would be marketed to an international audience through musical theatre\footnote{Yun, Personal interview.}.

Yun hired highly qualified and the most well known artists and theatre practitioners to create his Korean-generated musical. He chose Yi Munyol to write the script because Yi was one of the most famous Korean novelists in the 1980s. One of Yi's novels, \textit{The Poet}, has been translated into over ten different languages and was acclaimed by \textit{Le Monde} in France.\footnote{For more information about Yi’s debut in France, see Velter Andre, “Le poete qui se cachait du ciel” \textit{Le Monde.} 2 Oct 2, 1992; Soo Young Lee, “The Novel ‘The Poet’ was rearranged in seventeen years” \textit{Kangwaondominilbo.} 15 Nov. 2008.} Yun notes that Yi is the only writer capable of transforming an ordinary story into one that is historically and socially meaningful.\footnote{Sung Hee Lee, “To do my best to produce the international musical” \textit{Ilgansports.} 5 Jul.1993.} Moreover, two of Yi's novels had already been adapted and directed by Yun for stage productions.\footnote{Yun adapted and directed Yi Munyol’s novels \textit{Wild Ox} and \textit{The Son of People} in the 1980s. The two productions were commercially successful.} Yi accepted Yun’s request to complete his closet drama, (i.e., a play to read not to perform), \textit{Fox Hunt}, in 1994. The drama took three years to
create, and after its 1994 magazine publication, a subsequent book publication occurred in 1995.\textsuperscript{144}

While Yi was working on his closet drama, Yun attempted to work with theatre practitioners and technical staff from other countries to produce a project that could have an international appeal. Yun approached Claude-Michel Schönberg, the French composer internationally known for his box-office smashes such as \textit{Les Misérables} and \textit{Miss Saigon}, to collaborate on writing the music. After Yun asked Schönberg to compose music for the musical, he requested Schönberg to visit Korea to gain a better understanding of its culture before accepting ACom's proposal to participate in the project.\textsuperscript{145} After Schönberg visited Korea, he accepted Yun's offer to act as the project's composer; however, Schönberg's services were too expensive for ACom. Yun subsequently succeeded in hiring Peter Casey, a well-known musical director (e.g., \textit{Les Misérables}, \textit{The Sound of Music}, etc.) as an orchestrator for his musical.\textsuperscript{146} He also invited Willa Kim, a Korean-American costume designer, to discuss costume design for the production. However, eventually, contract talks with Kim failed.\textsuperscript{147}

Yun was not able to work with international artists, but this situation provided the key to facilitating the first large-scale musical created predominately by famous Korean artists. Yun asked Kim Kwang Lim, one of the most renowned playwrights in Korea, to arrange the closet drama \textit{Fox Hunt} into the script for the musical. After numerous discussions about the plot and characters with creative team members, Kim finalized the adaptation that became the basis of the

\textsuperscript{144} \textit{Fox Hunt} was first published in a literary journal, \textit{Saegaeui Moonhak} 71 (Spring 1994). Then it was published as a book by Salim Publications in 1995.


\textsuperscript{146} Peter Casey’s personal website is available: http://www.petercasey.com/.

script for the production.\textsuperscript{148} This first adaptation was handed to Yang In Ja and Kim Hee Gab. Yang, according to the program notes, is one of the best lyricists for popular music in Korea, and Kim, Yang’s husband, is considered a 1970s and 1980s Korean pop music legend. Yang and Kim referred to the script written by Kim Kwang Lim and proceeded to use this as a basis to compose 61 musical numbers for ACom's musical production. Park Dong Woo was known as the stage designer who meticulously analyzed the text and brought his accurate interpretation of the piece to the stage. Park Hyun Sook, known for her ravish costume design, was appointed to the production staff. The choreographer, Seo Byung Gu, who had worked with Yun on previous ACom productions, was reappointed to the project.

Attempting to generate a state-of-the-art Korean-made musical, Yun searched for accomplished crew and cast members. Yun used “a star system” for the musical leads. Yoon Seok Hwa, one of the most famous musical actresses in Korea, who had worked on previous sensational plays with Yun, was cast in the title role of Queen Min. Hong Kyung Min, another famous actor who gained fame in the 1994 hit TV series \textit{Hourglass}, took the role as King Gojong.\textsuperscript{149} The rest of the cast was selected through public auditions.\textsuperscript{150}

Yun and the creative team, including the writers, the executive producers, the composer, and the lyricist, travelled to Broadway in New York City to learn how internationally popular musicals are produced.\textsuperscript{151} During the period of two months, they viewed several critically acclaimed musical theatre productions hailed for artistic value.\textsuperscript{152} Yi Munyol performed a month of research on such “well known musicals” as \textit{Kiss of the Spider Woman}, \textit{The Phantom of the

\textsuperscript{148} Yun, Personal interview.
\textsuperscript{149} Eun Joo Lee, “Their Perfect Chemistry Transcends 20 years of Age Difference and Experience on Stage” \textit{Joongang Ilbo}. 27 Dec. 1995.
\textsuperscript{150} “Seven to One: The highest competition rate in History” \textit{Sports Chosun}. 10 May. 1993.
\textsuperscript{152} Yun, Personal interview.
Opera, Miss Saigon, Carousel, and Blood Brothers as he went to London, Paris, and New York to see musical productions from January to March in 1993 with staff members. According to ACom, the creative team believed that the trip was helpful in understanding and framing the most up-to-date musical productions because they practically gained knowledge of musical theatre in the real fields of the commercial musical industry in the U.S. and U.K.

_Fox Hunt (1995)_

After returning from this trip, Yi wrote poetic dialogues for the musical production, _Fox Hunt_, with the latest historic perspectives regarding Queen Min. The title _Fox Hunt_ is derived from the secret code used by the Japanese assassins who murdered Empress Myeongseong in 1895. Since many aspects of the final script for the musical production are different from the original book, an examination of the brief storyline of the book is deemed useful to observe how the director and the performers have applied it to create scripts for the stage. The following chart is a summary of each scene in _Fox Hunt_:

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| ACT 1 | Scene 1 | The assassins are acquitted of Queen Min’s death at the Court in Hiroshima and General Dye, a chief instructor of National Guard of Chosun, recalls his life and the queen’s death in Chosun. |
| Scene 2 | People of Chosun talk about social and political background in the late 19 century in Chosun |
| Scene 3 | The Queen asks for a shaman rite to cure the Prince's illness |
| Scene 4 | The King Gojong holds an imperial conference to set up a national policy. |
| Scene 5 | Okamoto visits the Regent to make a wedge between the Queen and the Regent. |
| Scene 6 | General Hong recognizes the queen’s insight and traps the false killer. |
| Scene 7 | People of Chosun break out the Donghak Movement. |
| Scene 8 | The king and the Queen meet foreign ambassadors to suppress the Donghak Movement. |
| Scene 9 | The Queen requires the king to appoint General Hong as leader of the national military. |
| Scene 10 | The Queen and king discuss requirements for foreign military support. |
| Scene 11 | General Hong negotiates the end of the battle with Jun Bong Joon, leader of the Donghak Movement. |
| Scene 12 | The Regent and Ohohdori, the Japanese diplomat, meet the king to discuss Japanese interference in domestic affairs. |
| Scene 13 | The king declares his direct rule over the nation. |
| Scene 14 | Inoue, Japanese legation, threatens the Regent to cooperate with Japan in order to end the Donghak Movement. |
| Scene 15 | Japan finally interferes with Chosun affairs and the Queen begins to seek a solution. |
| ACT 2 | Scene 16 | The Queen and the king celebrate the triple intervention. |
| Scene 17 | The Queen suggests ideas to protect the nation from Japan. |
| Scene 18 | The Queen is suspicious of Inoue’s conciliatory policy. |
| Scene 19 | Inoue decides to eliminate the queen. |
| Scene 20 | Miura’s secret meeting to kill the queen. |
| Scene 21 | General Hong announces the failure of the training military to the king and queen/Inoue’s audience. |
| Scene 22 | The king orders to dismiss the training military and celebrates the triple intervention to the Chosun/Miura, the new Japanese legation after Inoue, introduces himself to the king and the Queen. |
| Scene 23 | The foreign ambassadors neglect Japan’s interference in domestic affairs and General Hong asks the Queen to reverse the dismissal of the training military and confesses his love to her. |
| Scene 24 | The Regent arrives at the palace realizing Japan’s deception/the death of General Hong. |
| Scene 25 | The assassins look for the Queen, capturing foreign ambassadors including General Dye. |
| Scene 26 | The death of the Queen |
| Scene 27 | Lamentation from General Dye watching the queen’s burning body. |


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In *Fox Hunt*, Yi portrays Queen Min in a positive light by breaking the old convention of negative images that were created by Japanese historians during their colonization of Korea from 1910 to 1945. Japanese historians had described Queen Min as a shrewd woman who recklessly misused her husband’s authority and disrespected the Regent (i.e., the King’s father). Kikuchi Genjo, a Japanese historian, in describing Queen Min, wrote that the Empress did not appreciate her status as the Queen of Korea. According to Genjo, Queen Min's background did not make her eligible for the royal position that she held. He expounded that she had destroyed herself by challenging her father-in-law's authority in matters of the state by influencing her husband to directly rule the nation and oust his father. Some historians argue that when the Japanese refer to the Empress as Queen Min, it is actually meant to belittle her for her disrespectful view toward patriarchal authority as well as her aggressive bent toward incorporating western ideas into Asia.

Yi has provided a positive reconsideration of Queen Min by describing her as a wise woman with savvy diplomatic skills in collaborating with other countries. Yi honored her by calling her the “Joan of Arc in Chosun.” In contrast to Japanese historical accounts, revisionist historians state that Queen Min was not of a lower social status, but rather descended

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156 Regarding the title of the Queen, consort of King Gojong, many Korean historians argue that Queen Min is not a proper title for Empress Myeongseong. When Chosun was renamed the Empire of the Great Han in 1897, Queen Min was posthumously granted the title Empress Myeongseong. Other queen consorts of kings in Chosun who were granted the title Empress are respected such as the Empress Sohyun (1395-1446) and the Empress Inheon (1667-1701). However, Japanese historians used the name “Queen Min” in books about Korean history. Nevertheless, in *The Annals of the Chosun Dynasty*, one of the most authoritative history books about Korea, it describes the consort of King Gojong as Queen Min. Also, in Yi’s *Fox Hunt*, ACom’s 1994 adaptation and the 1995 premiere script Yang’s lyrics, Empress Myeongseong is called “Queen Min.” Regardless of its controversial title of the Queen, in the dissertation, I use “Queen Min” to indicate her character and historical figure.
from royalty. Lee Bae-Yong claims that the interpretation of Queen Min’s brilliant political intuition and ability in history has been distorted due to the influence of Confucianism in Korea:

One reason was that women’s political participation was not favorably seen from the Confucian historical perspective. Also, her staunch anti-Japanese stance has incited hostile assessments from Japanese academic circles in their attempts to justify Japan’s assassination of her from their colonial standpoint.158

Lee also argues that Queen Min’s political role was limited under “the male-centered Confucian monarchy” and that her political talent would have contributed more powerfully to the renewal of Korea if King Gojong had utilized “his political ability more boldly.”159

Yi portrays Queen Min as a female politician and maternally minded mother; however, the queen’s maternal portrayal is emphasized more strongly than her political expertise. His intent is to illuminate her inner life based on the fresh portrayal.160 Yi also said in an interview that “I will depict the Queen as a figure whose tragedy was caused by her instinct for self-preservation.”161 Yi’s characterization of Queen Min is echoed in Yun’s musical, which shows her as the mother of a nation and a woman who bravely fought against Japanese imperialists. Yi’s portrayal of Queen Min in Fox Hunt (1995) was met with controversy among some feminist scholars and novelists in Korea the following year. When Yi’s publication of Choice appeared in a serialized novel in World Literature, a Korean literature magazine, in 1996, a group of Korean feminist novelists furiously complained about his feminist perspectives in the novel.162 It appears that the main reason he received criticism from feminists was that he parodied contemporary radical feminist novelists’ titles of novels to portray stereotypical female

158 Bae Yong Lee, Women In Korean History (Seoul: Ehwa Womans UP, 2008) 186.
159 Lee, Women, 192.
162 Jae Sook Jang, “‘Choice’ is the obstacle of half of the world” Hankyoreh 21 Mar 21, 1998: 198.
characters from the Chosun dynasty. Furthermore, he is known for writing criticism of the contemporary feminist movement in Korea. Kang Jun Man, a professor in communications at Junbook University, deprecates Yi’s anti-feminist tendency, calling him an “extreme essentialist.” Since the case of Yi’s conflict with the feminist novelists occurred, some female theatre scholars pointed out Yi’s “essentialist” perspective on The Last Empress.

Consequently, Yi describes Queen Min in the essentialist perspective by highlighting the queen’s image of a mother (i.e. Queen Min) who bravely protects her children (i.e. people of Chosun) from their enemies (i.e. foreign powers). Yi compliments the queen’s active works as a mother, and wife of the King, whereas the revisionists interpret Queen Min a wise woman who intelligently manipulates the nation’s critical situation as a female politician in spite of women’s social and political restrictions in the late 19th century.

Yi’s concept of global performance was to interpret the Chosun dynasty's history through the eyes of a western character residing in Korea during the reign of Queen Min. This is evidenced through Yi's employment of an objective narrator who does not possess Korean citizenship but is nevertheless involved in the history of Chosun. General William McEntyr Dye, an American military advisor to the King, narrates the play. General Dye served the King for eleven years and received strong commendations from him. Throughout the play, the American general stands on stage and functions as “a spectator on stage,” mostly observing, but at times even participating in the scenes and moving props and even assists with moving

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163 Jung, 198.
166 For more information about feminist scholars’ criticism in the musical, see the section of review of literature in the chapter 1.
props. In Act 2, Scene 16, the King listens to General Dye’s advice about Japanese schemes because he respects the General’s professional experience and wisdom garnered from having served in other countries.

GOJONG. (toward General Dye who sits next to him) Your age is over sixty and you've had work experience abroad. And you are the only military soldier from the U.S. who has been working with me and for this nation for six years. Let me ask you something, based on your knowledgeable experience and loyalty. Japan has almost annexed this nation and they haven't asked for any money. But this time they suggested that they are willing to lend three hundred won to us even if we haven't asked them to borrow it. What do you think motivates them to make this suggestion?

GENERAL DYE. (hesitating) As just a military soldier, I’m afraid to make any trouble with their [Japanese] diplomat. But, when I was in Egypt, England tried to buy Egyptian palatial loyalty. Yet in the end, that money became an excuse for England to patriarchally protect the nation of Egypt. Maybe the Japanese are using England's precedent as a role model to subjugate…

General Dye observes the schemes of Japan in the country's interaction with Korea and presents analytical strategies in response to the King’s questions and concerns. Likewise, in Act 2, Scene 23, the general comments on the decision of the palace regarding the discharge of the Japanese training military seated on Korean soil. According to General Dye, discharge of the Japanese forces was premature, as Korean forces were at a military disadvantage to defend

168 Yi, *Fox Hunt*, 29. Unless otherwise noted, all translations of Korean texts are my own.
169 Yi, 129.
themselves against the foreign artillery. The General was of the opinion that the Japanese forces should leave, but not until a strategic plan that favored the Chosun dynasty was in place. He mourns the future of Chosun.

DYE: I feel nervous about the future of Chosun. The Queen won politically but the triumph does not have any persuasive evidence. The triplet intervention is like a corpse that has been waiting for its cremation. Russia and the U.S. are not close at all to the Korean nation. Even if the palace recovers its sovereign power, the power is useless without military power.\textsuperscript{170}

In Act 1, Scene 1, and in Act 2, Scene 27, General Dye witnesses Queen Min’s death and thus recounts the entire story from his point of view.\textsuperscript{171} General Dye, in evaluating the death of Queen Min, describes her as “Chosun's Joan of Arc” and thus acts as the character that presents the theme of the play. In the beginning of the play, he describes Chosun as “an old boat that has been broken by a storm” and Queen Min as “a cleaver woman who helped the captain of the boat fight against the rough wave.”\textsuperscript{172} Then at the end of the play, he describes her as “a woman who disappears in the fire after fighting against a powerful foreign enemy” and condemns the people of Chosun for not saving Queen Min from the tragic death.\textsuperscript{173} Han Myung Hee, a theatre scholar, posits that General Dye could have been portrayed as a character preventing the production from leaning toward the theme of nationalism.\textsuperscript{174}

The following excerpt from the play's stage direction appears to evidence Yi's overstatement of world history when describing domestic historical events. To create a global

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Yi, 170.
\item According to the historical book, General Dye was caught by the Japanese soldiers when Queen Min was killed.\textsuperscript{172}
\item Yi, 28.
\item Yi, 198.
\item Myung Hee Han, “The Change of the Storytelling from the Play ‘Yeowoosanyang to the Musical Script of ‘Myeongseongsanyang” Bekyomunhak. 51. (Jun 2010):139.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
production, he strategically places domestic historical sequences within the final events associated with WWII history. The play begins with dramatically shocking visual effects that screen the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, Japan in 1945.

*When the play begins, only the screen located upstage is spotlighted. The bombing of Hiroshima, accompanied by realistic sound effects, is presented. A huge mushroom cloud. The supertitle reads, “1945 Hiroshima.” The screen is stopped and the number 1945, which is projected on the screen, starts a count down, one by one. 1945, 1944, 1943... Then the counting stops at the year 1896. Stage lights up. The place is a district court in Hiroshima in January 1896.*

Yi foreshadows Queen Min's death by connecting the shocking scene of the bombing of Hiroshima to what the Japanese assassins did to her. For Koreans, the Chosun Empress' death and the nuclear bombing bookend the history of Japanese imperialism in Korea. Yi emphasizes that Hiroshima is the location where the Japanese judiciary declared the Queen's assassins innocent, and the horrid bombing can be seen as a retribution against WWII Japanese imperialists. Hiroshima, in Yi's eyes, in the end, is depicted as the place of both violation and justice.

Yi utilizes the Hiroshima bombing scene to expose international power games and the inevitable demise of the Chosun dynasty. By starting the play with the dramatic bombing of Hiroshima, Yi draws a connection between Korean, Japanese, and world histories. There is irony in the fact that the devastating bombing, which occurred in Japan, serves as the introduction to the Korean play, which is narrated by a U.S. General. Since the narrator of the play is from the U.S., the question arises as to whether audiences should interpret him as a hero

175 Yi, 23.
who tried to save Korea or blame Americans for their lack of interception or prevention of the cruel and tragic death of Queen Min. In Act 2, Scene 27, General Dye blames the people of Chosun, rather than the U.S. government, for not recognizing her effort to protect the nation until the moment of her death. This projection of blame could be symbolically interpreted as a foreign power player, General Dye, exercising what is seen as his superior right to scold the populace of a weaker nation, in this scenario, Koreans.

The main catalyst in the plot development of *Fox Hunt* is drawn from historical information regarding the Donghak Movement in Korea. The movement was a citizen led revolution directed toward the Chosun Dynasty's mismanagement of economic, political, and social policies. Since the King declared his direct rule in Chosun, he replaced the Regent’s policy of national isolation and opened interaction with foreign governments. Thus, many powerful nations’ interference in the internal affairs in Chosun caused the financial depletion of agricultural resources. At the same time, due to Japanese involvement in the Korean economy, the government’s power weakened and the once strong and ethical line of command of the Korean feudal system became corrupted by political mismanagement and unethical foreign infiltration. At that time, a new school of ideology, Donghak, rose in popularity among commoners, especially with the growing merchant class because of its emphasis on fair treatment for everyone. United, the people fought against the upper class and their corrupt social practices.

According to the historical background, the people’s discontent erupted as a reaction against the confiscation of personal belongings and valuables by an unjust feudal lord who had been appointed by the King. Citizens were also angered about the influx of Japanese merchants within Korean borders, who apparently cheated Korean residents by selling inferior products and laundering money. The Korean subjects of the Chosun dynasty believed Queen Min was
responsible for opening Korea to external control. In *Fox Hunt*, Yi uses the Donghak Movement to elevate General Hong’s faithfulness to the nation: General Hong is loyal to the palace, but he evidences skillful communication with his countrymen by averting the citizen led riots of Jun Bong Jun. Simultaneously, to dismiss the movement, the King elicited assistance from the Japanese and Chinese to deter internal riots by Korean nationals. Also Yi evaluates the King and the queen’s decision of this foreign assistance which facilitates a strong external foothold leading to eventual overthrow of the Chosun dynasty.

The history associated with the Chosun dynasty is very intricate, weaving national and international players in and out of economic, political, and social events. During this time period, the numerous atrocities against Korean citizens resulted in the death of innocent people. However, Yi’s repetitive narrative pattern tends to present a monotonous drama rather than elicit reader empathy. The narrative pattern is as follows: 1) something is happening; 2) the Queen and the King discuss the matter and reach a solution; 3) the King declares a certain policy for the nation based on the solution; 4) the protest or rejection against the policy occurs. This narrative repeats and continues to the play's end, and results in an anticlimactic portrayal of the death of Queen Min. In addition, the use of cyclical repetition lessens the historical impact of Japan's gradual increasing pressure within Korea. Furthermore, the ambiguity surrounding Queen Min's personal life and connection with General Hong lacks sufficient explanation and leaves too much for the reader to surmise. The Chosun dynasty is a major link in successively increasing international conflicts preceding WWII and Yi’s script demands thorough investigation as well as accurate portrayal.

In Yi’s plot development, there are scenes depicting the social background in Chosun; however, the supporting characters are stereotypical merchants, politicians, and soldiers who are

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presented in group settings. Furthermore, few of these characters have names and in-depth communication is rarely expressed. Ongoing shallow interaction in numerous crowd scenes and generalizing historical nuances result in disconnection of the story flow. At times, crowd members present specific historical details, but the information, presented without reader connection, detracts from the plot focus. In Act 1, Scene 7, Yi explains that the Donghak Movement occurred in 1894.\textsuperscript{177} A group of citizens enter the stage, some carrying placards with verbiage written in Chinese characters. The signs are meant for the Chosun dynasty government to view; however, Korean as well as international audiences in 1995 were most likely unable to read the writing. Especially, younger generations would find the letters difficult to understand, which would cause an interruption in plot flow. Yi set up Mobs 1, 2, 3, and 4, who orally present questions and receive answers from a voice from the speakers without actual actors on stage. The voiced responses to the crowd seem to represent the palace; however, the stage directions are vague.

Prior to Yi's Fox Hunt, the historically accepted view of Queen Min was disseminated via a Japanese viewpoint of world history. Queen Min, prior to revisionist research, was seen as a greedy woman bent on removing her father-in-law from his position as Regent of the Chosun dynasty. Since the early 1990s, many Korean revisionists published books about Queen Min with new perspectives. Yi Munyol notes in the preface of Fox Hunt, he refers to Na Hong Ju’s Assassination of the Empress (1990) and Choi Moon Hyung’s Meongseonghwanghu (1992) to present a newer image of Queen Min aligning her persona with those books and academic papers accepted among today’s scholars.\textsuperscript{178} Yi portrays her as a woman engulfed by tragedy, situating

\textsuperscript{177} Yi, 64-69.
\textsuperscript{178} Yi, 2.
her in the center of dynamic changes in economic, political, and social events during the worldwide imperialist expansionism of the late nineteenth century.

The Adaptation

Due to the nature of *Fox Hunt*’s written format as a closet drama (drama meant to be read but not performed), key elements in transference of information from a closet drama to a musical genre must undergo an adaptation process not only to distort historical plot accuracy but also to format the plot in a more entertaining way. Yun arranged the creative team that consisted of the head writer, a director, an assistant director, a lyricist, a composer, a music director, a general manager, and other literary interns to adapt *Fox Hunt* in 1994 (ACom’s 1994 adaptation hereafter). The format of the adaptation was not a musical script with lyrics but a standard play with two acts with dialogue and stage directions. Korean playwright Kim Kwang Lim is the head writer of the team. Under Yun's direction, one assignment given to the team was to reshuffle the story to shorten the production's running time to two hours. Yun claimed that if *Fox Hunt* were to be performed in its original version, the production would last approximately four hours. He reiterated the importance of the historical revisionist view of Queen Min's character established in Yi's script but emphasized the need for a globally relevant musical for an international audience. After collaborative meetings with the creative team were finished, Kim rendered a completed adaptation for production.

Another mandate given to the creative team was to emphasize the spectacle in stage design. To increase the spectacle, Yi’s original play was expanded into an epic story about

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179 There are a couple of revisions for the adaptations and they are not officially published. The manuscript of the adaptation that I use in this dissertation was received directly from Kim Kwang Lim. In the adaptation, each scene has a brief description of the plot and characters.
181 Kim, 332-333.
182 Yun, Personal interview.
Queen Min. While Yi’s script covers the time period ranging from 1894 (the year prior to the assassination) to 1896 (the year the assassins received a court sentence for murdering Queen Min), the adaptation spans thirty years of her life. The latter begins with the time Queen Min entered the palace for her wedding with the King in 1866 to the year of the assassination sentencing in 1896. Yun changed the original writing to an epic story in order to present more compelling visual scenes such as the royal wedding, funerals, and group dances within the palace.

Table 3
Scene Titles in ACom’s 1994 Adaptation

| Prologue | Scene1 | Young queen and the King |
| ACT1     | Scene2 | The Rule of the Regent   |
|          | Scene3 | The King's Direct Rule through the queen’s Political Intervention |
|          | Scene4 | Rebellion                 |
|          | Scene5 | Queen Min’s Return        |
| ACT2     | Scene6-1| Prince Chuck, queen, and the King |
|          | Scene6-2| Japan’s Discussion about the Invasion of Chosun |
|          | Scene7 | The Wind of Modernization |
|          | Scene8 | China and Japan's Intervention in the Donghak Movement |
|          | Scene9 | Japan’s Intervention in Domestic Affairs |
|          | Scene10 | The triple intervention and Japan’s retribution |
|          | Scene11 | Fox Hunt                  |

Epilogue

Source: Manuscript of The Last Empress arranged by Kim Kwang Lim, 1994.

In ACom’s 1994 adaptation, the creative team added new historical events in Act 1, and shortened Yi’s rendition in Act 2 (See the table 3). Inserted in Act 1 were additional historical events including the royal wedding of Queen Min and the King; the political, social, and economic backgrounds during the regent’s ruling period; the battle with American military soldiers called Shinmiyangyo in 1871; and the 1882 Imogunran which is the rebellion among the military soldiers (Military Mutiny of 1882 hereafter). The Regent’s conservative policy regarding abolition of the religious palaces, elimination of Catholics, and battles with French and American soldiers were minimally portrayed. In ACom’s 1994 adaptation, Kim illustrates the
historical events in a rather monotonous list of bullet points. For example, Act 1, Scene 2 shows the Regent’s rule of the nation and how he ordered his policies while the King sat in silence beside him. During this scene, which Kim added to his adaptation, the Regent’s ten-year (1860s to 1870s) policy plan related to isolationism is introduced with events occurring in a matter-of-fact chronological order. The policies included the abolition of temples, Christian persecution, the battles at sea with American soldiers, another with French soldiers, and land battles with England and Germany. In ACom’s 1994 adaptation, rather than depicting the events in an atmosphere action, the enacted policy moves are merely announced by the Regent and cast members responded by verbal reiteration of the commands. The lack of dramatization of the events detracts from the historical impact and minimizes the intensity of the Chosun dynasty members.

In Act 2, once again, the main characters are less developed compared to Yi’s script due to the shortening and elimination of various scenes. Many scenes about the Donghak Movement were deleted even though they contain significant information that reveals the political partnership between the Queen and the King such as the humanist leadership side of the King and the perceptive counselor attributes of Queen Min. In ACom’s 1994 adaptation, new scenes were added by the creative team to express a more melodramatic relationship between Queen Min and General Hong compared to the portrayal in Yi’s closet drama. For example, General Hong orchestrates Queen Min's escape from the military riot in Act 1, Scene 4. Towards the end of ACom’s 1994 adaptation, Queen Min meets General Hong to observe a royal military training, where he abruptly confesses his love to the unsuspecting queen in Act 2, Scene 10. The previously mentioned scenes are interjected by Yun without adequate linking to an ongoing
subplot of General Hong’s one-sided love. These scenes are superfluous and unnecessary since the two characters never open their minds and emotions to each other throughout the play.

Major differences exist between Yi’s script and ACom’s 1994 adaptation which was intended for an international audience. In Yi’s script, General Dye, an American, acts as the narrator, but the epic story is presented through the eyes and flashbacks of the Korean Regent, Daewongun. The creative team kept the dramatic device of the flashback because it creates suspense in a story and helps character development. The narrator change, from the American General to the Korean Regent, shifts the story frame from international to domestic, as the narrating Regent (the antagonist) is seen as having been directly involved in Queen Min’s (the protagonist's) life. In the beginning portion of Yun's script, the Regent looks at the scene where the assassins are waiting in the court to hear the final verdict for their murder of Queen Min. Right before the judge announces the result, the Regent recalls the moment when the King married Queen Min and the story is narrated chronologically until the assassins kill the queen. The Regent also witnessed the assassins' receipt of a not guilty verdict. As in the case of General Dye in Yi’s script, the Regent is not involved in every scene, but moves in and out of his role as narrator and actor. In Yi's script, General Dye introduces himself and mourns Queen Min’s death twice, once in the prologue and once in the epilogue. However, General Dye's character is omitted from ACom’s 1994 adaptation. This integral role, an American General on Korean soil at this juncture in history, prior to Japan's invasion, is absent in ACom’s 1994 adaptation. This omission of the American increases the domestic interests rather than drawing sympathy from non-Korean audiences, especially those of the west.

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183 The narrator was removed in the production script in 1997 while ACom prepared for the first international tour to New York. Yet, the conflict between Queen Min and the Regent becomes stronger. I will explain more about this in the chapter 3.
The conflict between Queen Min and the Regent intensifies as he openly objects to her social policy of modernization, evidenced by his support of Korean revolutionists in ACom’s 1994 adaptation. In Yi’s script, the conflict between Queen Min and the Regent shows the Regent's faithfulness to the Queen despite their differing political views. Even as the Japanese are attempting to drive a wedge between the Regent and the Queen, the Regent remains loyal to the dynasty. Although he blames the Queen for her seemingly disloyal political involvement with the Japanese over her Korean subjects, he never belittles Queen Min in Yi’s script. However, in the adaptation, the Regent participates in Military Mutiny of 1882 and discusses the retirement of Queen Min in pursuit of his personal desire to rule the nation. In ACom’s 1994 adaptation, a new sequence of scenes about the Regent’s exile to China and Queen Min’s escape from hiding are inserted in Act 1, Scenes 4 and 5 to emphasize their reversed positions. In ACom’s 1994 adaptation, when the Regent realizes that the Japanese government is using him to conceal their direct plan to kill Queen Min, he, unlike in Yi’s script, does not actively stop the Japanese soldiers from invading the palace. In Yi’s script, the American, General Dye, is poised as a foreign influence capable of averting the Queen's demise, whereas in the revision, a Korean national, the Regent, by not alerting the Queen or his compatriots, unwittingly participates and has partial responsibility for the demise of the Chosun dynasty.

Another variation between Yi’s script and ACom’s 1994 adaptation concerns Queen Min's femininity and motherhood; in ACom’s 1994 adaptation, these elements are emphasized. In Act 1, Scene 1, the wedding scene, Queen Min attempts to turn the King’s attention from the numerous court ladies by singing a song about her longing for his attention.

QUEEN. (…) If you’re apart from me, how are you going to like me? Why do you keep avoiding me? What am I to you? Who is prettier than I am
among the girls? Who is more intelligent than I am? You are blind. Please look at me once. Even for one time, please gaze at me directly.

King turns from the palace girls to the Queen listening to her song.\textsuperscript{184}

The youthful femininity of the Queen is expressed in the beginning of Act 1, where she begs the King to love her. This soft and fragile side of her character is not displayed in Yi’s script. Admittedly, in ACom’s 1994 adaptation, Kim dramatically presents the contrasting aspects of Queen Min's character development from the age of 13 to 30; however, the queen’s character maturation in many instances has little relationship to the play's theme centered around a revisionist historical perspective that focuses on her political sense and position.

In ACom’s 1994 adaptation, Queen Min eventually has guardianship of a biological son, and she is portrayed in a maternal light. Her relationship with the prince evokes a melodramatic plot with emphasis on her motherhood. While Yi’s script describes the Prince's “weakly pale face showing autism or mental disease,”\textsuperscript{185} the heir in the adaptation is cheerful and intelligent. In ACom’s 1994 adaptation, the young royal runs around the palatial garden and is depicted as learning French very quickly. At the end of Act 2, the assassins “pull him from somewhere and push him to the ground to view a slain body in order to confirm if the dying woman is Queen Min or not.”\textsuperscript{186} In this scene, the Prince cries out to the woman calling her “mama.” He then falls onto his mother's dying body while the passing Queen sings self-defacing lyrics, which declare her a “terrible mom” who begs forgiveness from her “beloved sons in Chosun.”\textsuperscript{187}

As an example of differences in portrayal of matrimonial dynamics, in ACom’s 1994 adaptation Kim Kwang Lim describes the relationship between Queen Min and the King

\textsuperscript{184} Kim, 3.
\textsuperscript{185} The Prince only appears in two scenes in Act 1 Scene 3 and Scene 13 and has no dialogue throughout the play.
\textsuperscript{186} Kim, 29.
\textsuperscript{187} Kwang Lim Kim, Adaptation of The Last Empress. Manuscript, 1995: 30
changing from a convenient political partnership to one of conjugal love. In Yi’s script, the main
dialogue between the royal couple revolves around politics; they are shown arguing and reaching
conclusions respective to social issues. Through political conversations, Yi reveals Queen Min’s
savvy diplomatic skills and her wise behavior as the wife of the King. In Act 1, Scene 10, the
scene presents positive chemistry between the royal couple while the King is deciding to request
military assistance from China to stop the Donghak Movement. Queen Min successfully
influences the King's decision to obtain military help from China, exemplifying wisdom to sway
her husband politically.

GOJONG. The Donghak Movement has proclaimed that they fight with the
Japanese and foreign enemies. If our soldiers in the palace don’t stop them, is
it inevitable that the foreign armies will launch forth our battle? If this must
happen, I would rather call in the Chinese military than other foreign
governments (…)

QUEEN. But, why are you going to massacre your own people with borrowed
foreign military?

GOJONG. (with gloomy voice) Would you give the five hundred year old
palace to a mob? (looking painful ) How is it possible that I am the owner of
this palace and land in trouble?

QUEEN. (suddenly with a firm voice) My lord, don’t be disappointed. You do
not have to call the Chinese army; have the traitors call the army. No matter
how thoughtful and deceivingly convincing their insistence appears, there is
time for everything (…) Please call Yuan Shikai tomorrow to ask assistance from the Chinese army.\textsuperscript{188}

After Queen Min helps persuade the King to follow through with his decision to call the Chinese army to stop the Donghak Movement, she pacifies his conscience by reminding him of his power as the leader of the people. She then arranges a casual dinner with foreign female aristocrats from Britain and Russia.\textsuperscript{189}

On the other hand, in ACom’s 1994 adaptation, the relationship between Queen Min and the King is portrayed as love between a domestic couple. In ACom’s 1994 adaptation only three scenes out of approximately 20 have Queen Min and the King discussing politics: “The King’s Direct Rule of the Nation” and “The King’s Conference” in Act 1, Scene 3, and “Miura’s Audience” in Act 2, Scene 10. Contrastingly, in Yi’s script, the couple discusses politics in 11 out of 27 scenes: Act 1, Scenes 4, 8, 9, 10, 13, and 15, and Act 2, Scenes 16, 17, 18, 19, and 21. Therefore, in Yi’s script, 40 percent of the story consists of scenes having political discussions between the royal couple, whereas the adaptation includes only 15 percent. In ACom’s 1994 adaptation, the conversation lacks sufficient detail to portray the King and Queen's partnership:

QUEEN. What is stopping you from calling on foreign powers for help? If you use them well, they will benefit the nation. Why do the conflicts between the fractions deepen and why don't the people stop complaining? The King should take care of everything in his kingdom. Why do you just sit by and watch all the nation's issues be dumped on the Regent?

GOJONG. But the Regent is in such good health and active and so how could I as a son turn down the wishes of my father?

\textsuperscript{188} Kim, Adaptation, 92-93.
\textsuperscript{189} Kim, 94.
QUEEN. Turn him down? Nonsense! You are the King of Chosun. This is a matter of course as a king. Declare direct rule.

GOJONG. Direct rule?

QUEEN. Direct rule!¹⁹⁰

The scene above is about the King’s first official declaration to rule the nation after his father's (the Regent's) resignation from power in 1873. A similar scene in Yi’s script depicts an 1894 scenario where Queen Min actively intervenes in the political issues of modernization. Although this scene was a new addition in ACom’s 1994 adaptation, the creative team follows the same conversational pattern as Yi provides to describe the King’s direct rule of the nation in Act 1, Scene 13. In ACom’s 1994 adaptation, without providing any persuasive reasons, Queen Min seems to force her husband to rule the nation as its official king. Consequently, the adaptation's changes that appear to elevate the royal couple's conjugal love, simultaneously simplify the Queen's character while minimizing the King's role.

The characters of Queen Min and the King as well as most of the main characters in ACom’s 1994 adaptation are less developed respective to their economic, political, and social interaction in the Chosun dynasty's history. Despite inherent differences between the closet drama and the musical theatre genres, the creative team could have conveyed greater depth and integration within characters as well as between actors' parts in ACom’s 1994 adaptation. Intriguing foreign characters' roles such as Inoue, Okamoto, and General Dye are shortened and/or omitted. General Hong is another character that loses his complexity as a war hero in the adaptation. In ACom’s 1994 adaptation, he becomes more romanticized, faithful to his forbidden love for Queen Min, whereas he is portrayed as a brave and strong soldier who has keen military insight in Yi’s script. In ACom’s 1994 adaptation, the creative team inserted two

¹⁹⁰ Kim, 7-8.
motivations to provide the reason for his one-sided love for Queen Min: he helps her to escape from the military riot and confesses his love to her before he fights with the assassins. In Yi’s script, the loosely connected encounter between Queen Min and General Hong is explained in Act 1, Scenes 6, 9, and 17: he recognizes the Queen's intelligence and beauty through her managing the nation with her insightful decisions throughout the play. However, Yi presents General Hong’s sudden confession of his love to Queen Min at the end of the story in Act 2, Scene 23. To weave a stronger connection between the Queen and General Hong, the creative team attempt gradual development of their relationship in ACom’s 1994 adaptation. Yet, the revision appears unnatural and artificial. For example, in Act 2, Scene 11, Queen Min visits General Hong in the royal military training camp to encourage the soldiers with gifts but their conversation about the military is meaningless and unnecessary to the plot. Furthermore, the Regent's character is presented as one dimensional, obstinate, and dogmatic, through focused presentation of his fight with foreign enemies and jealousy of Queen Min. Yi, however, describes the Regent as a sympathetic politician who has complex thoughts about his relationship as a father to his son, while trying to maintain his political philosophy against the Queen.

An interesting twist in ACom’s 1994 adaptation is the creation of satirical characters in the form of four Japanese merchants employed to foreshadow the pressure of Japanese power on the Korean nation. The four merchants' comic roles metamorphose into that of Japanese military soldiers, merchants, and tourists who degrade the people of Chosun, cheating them with shrewd tricks throughout the play. Although the creation of the group of characters is theatrical, their sarcastic images and bombastic dialogue affects the entire story, underscoring the play's anti-Japanese theme. In both Yi’s script and ACom’s 1994 adaptation, the inevitable death of the Queen is the central theme; however, in Yi's script, the Queen's demise is a result of several
foreign powers, whereas in ACom’s 1994 adaptation, the Japanese methodically orchestrate her destruction.

The Last Empress (1995)191

The official Korean title for the premiere was *Myeongseonghwanghu: Yi Munyol ui Yeowosanyang* (English translation: Empress Myeongseong; Yi Munyol’s *Fox Hunt*). 192 The press spotlighted Yi’s script to discuss the premiere in light of the author’s renown. The media emphasized Yi’s penning of the basic storyline for the musical and called him “the international novelist”193 and “one of the country’s most popular novelists.”194 Without the expert historical depiction of Queen Min’s revisionist image written by Yi, the musical *The Last Empress* would have proved daunting to complete. On the coattails of Yi, ACom’s 1994 adaptation was converted into a script form with lyrics by Yun and the creative team in 1995. The 1995 première script contained 61 musical numbers and was first performed at the Opera House of the Seoul Art Center, Seoul, Korea in December 30, 1995 to January 9, 1996.

Yun, in order to advance musical theatre in Korea, suggested to ACom members, which included the creative team drafting the script, that the musical follow the trend of foreign musical productions through primarily presenting music and songs.195 Kim Hee Gap, a composer, collaborated with Yang In Ja, a lyricist, on the musical numbers. They attempted to eliminate the dullness of previously performed American musicals presented in Korea, and used the

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191 The original title of the premiere of the production is *Empress Myeongseong* in English, but ACom has used the English title of *The Last Empress* since their western tours in 1997. In this dissertation, I will use “The Last Empress” to signify all revised productions including the premiere.
192 For the world premiere in 1995, ACom subtitled the musical, “Yi Munyol’s *Fox Hunt*” but the subtitle has been removed since the year of 1996.
variation forms of Korean folk music mixed with western scales. Peter Casey, chosen as the orchestrator, was at first “embarrassed” by the Asian style of music with the pentatonic scale. However, he familiarized himself with Korean melody and rhythm and discovered the duality of its passion and tranquility.

Accurate incorporation of Korean musical style necessitated a Korean music expert. Park Kolleen, who has a Lithuanian father and Korean mother, was chosen by ACom as the music director for the musical premiere of The Last Empress. Her work was to oversee orchestra accompaniment, recording, and sound effects. She also taught singing and acting to the actors.

Park's involvement in The Last Empress launched her into spearheading the role as music director for musical theatre in Korea. Finally, stage design was accomplished by Park Dong Woo, acclaimed for his “full usage of the entire space of theatre with three dimensional descriptions of scenes,” his use of two doubled revolving stages, and practical application of a two-story stage in The Last Empress. His stage orchestration displayed smooth connections between scenes for the entire running time of 2 hours and 30 minutes.

The 1995 première script of The Last Empress (the 1995 première script hereafter) appears to follow the same plot structure and characterization found in Fox Hunt with an emphasis on visual aspects. The story of Queen Min commences with the scene of the nuclear bomb in Hiroshima and concludes with the rebirth of Queen Min’s soul. The following is a

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197 Yoon, 23.
198 Sae Won Kim, “The Music Director, Park Kolleen” Dong-A Ilbo, 21 April, 1996.
chronological list of the musical numbers for the première in 1995. I refer to the list of the musical numbers and lyrics in the official production program of *The Last Empress* in 1995 as I quote the excerpts of scenes and lyrics in the 1995 première scripts. All English translations are my own unless it is specifically mentioned.

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202 The information about the musical numbers is from the production program in 1995.
Table 4
The List of Musical Numbers in the 1995 Première Script

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<tr>
<th>PROLOGUE</th>
<th>ACT2</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Prelude</td>
<td>Scene 8 1. The Grand Banquet</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Japan Has Chosen</td>
<td>2. The Sun Is Rising in Chosun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 1</td>
<td>4. You Are Queen Elizabeth in Chosun</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Prelude</td>
<td>5. Diplomatic Talks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Japan Has Chosen</td>
<td>6. It’s Strange Snowflakes Are Falling</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scene 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Regency’s Rule</td>
<td>Scene 9 1. The Grand Banquet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Soft is the Breeze</td>
<td>2. The Sun Is Rising in Chosun</td>
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<td>7. You, the Beautiful Person</td>
<td>3. Come Celebrate Our Reforms</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. The Star in My Heart</td>
<td>4. You Are Queen Elizabeth in Chosun</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scene 3</td>
<td>5. Diplomatic Talks</td>
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<td>9. Song of people</td>
<td>6. It’s Strange Snowflakes Are Falling</td>
</tr>
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<td>10. Four Japanese Merchants I</td>
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<td>11. Fight in the Marketplace</td>
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<td>12. I’m Hong Gye Hoon</td>
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<td>13. Please Open the Door</td>
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<td>14. The Song of Soldiers</td>
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<td>Scene 4</td>
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<td>Scene 10 1. Prelude</td>
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<td>16. Please Grow Healthily</td>
<td>2. Japan Has Chosen</td>
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<td>17. You Are the King of Chosun</td>
<td>3. Sigh of the Regent</td>
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<td>4. You Are Queen Elizabeth in Chosun</td>
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<td>Scene 5</td>
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<td>19. King Gojong’s Imperial Conference</td>
<td>5. Diplomatic Talks</td>
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<td>20. Everything is Just about Strategies</td>
<td>6. It’s Strange Snowflakes Are Falling</td>
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<td>21. Seven Foreign Envoys</td>
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<td>22. Four Japanese Merchants II</td>
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<td>23. Itoh’s Ambition</td>
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<td>24. Revolution of Old Soldiers</td>
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<td>25. Dolsuk Goes to the WoonHyun Palace</td>
<td>Scene 11 1. Prelude</td>
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<td>26. Military Munition of 1882</td>
<td>2. Japan Has Chosen</td>
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<td>27. Back to Power</td>
<td>3. Sigh of the Regent</td>
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<td>Scene 7</td>
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<td>30. Yuan Shikai and the Regent</td>
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<td>31. The Regent’s Exile to China</td>
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<td>32. Inoue Threatens Gojong</td>
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<td>33. Queen Min Has Returned</td>
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<td>34. We Shall Rise Again</td>
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<td>35. Japan’s Chosun Policy</td>
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<td>Scene 8</td>
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<td>36. Experiencing Such an Extraordinary Day</td>
<td>Epilogue</td>
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<tr>
<td>37. Rise, People of Chosun</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Various historical events were simplified in the revised script texts, but are elaborated on in the presentations of visual staging, costumes, and sound effects. On at least five occasions, Yang uses Yi’s script to embellish her lyrics. “Welcome to the Queen” in Act 1, Scene 1 in the script, quotes court ladies and servants’ lines that are extracted from Yi’s script in Act 1 Scene 3; Yang creates lyrics for the people who celebrate their new Queen’s entry to the palace. In addition, Yang uses the Regent’s first two lines of Act 1, Scene 5 text from Yi’s script, “Why is the night of the nation so dark? Why does the day dawn in the palace so slowly?” and adds them as the first two lines for the Queen’s aria, “Shine My Dark Night” in Act 2, Scene 20 in the script. In particular, the most spectacular scenes such as Act 1, Scenes 1 and 3, and Act 2, Scene 8, emphasize Korean traditional culture by presenting traditional music, costumes, and stage designs. Historical events in Yi’s script are arranged event by event, dramatically weaving Queen Min’s story, whereas in the 1995 première script, events are listed more objectively and relatively devoid of dramatization. In Act 1, there is a grand spectacle in almost every scene and each of these scenes contains many characters. For example, in Scene 1, a royal wedding scene, Park Dong Woo, creates miniature royal palaces as a background. After meticulous research of the traditional royal costumes by Park Hyung Sook, the costume designer, Queen Min is arrayed in authentic royal wedding gowns and accessories, which are enhanced to be larger than the actual sizes to captivate the audience’s attention.  

In Scene 4, during the battle with America, France, and German military soldiers, “Please Open the Door,” Park Dong Woo posits three battle ships on center stage, one upstage and the others stage right and stage left, respectively, and made the entire stage appear as the ocean through the three dimensional structure. In the beginning of Act 2, Scene 8, a mass of Korean female dancers, porting ornate fans and wearing

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203 Yun, Personal interview.
elaborate costumes for the royal court dance, is presented. They dance a royal court dance gracefully to the accompaniment of Korean traditional instruments. *The Last Empress* creatively translated Korean history into a novel theatrical presentation.

The press highly acclaimed the musical in terms of its amplification of spectacle, emphasizing that the production broke the banality of a heavy historical drama by using these spectacles. *Chosun Ilbo* states that although the story of Queen Min itself is dramatic, it is wonderful to make the story into a big scale musical with spectacles.205 Another article argues, “the burdensome historical contents” have been transformed into a “shocking and moving performance” due to “the stage that was filled with visual effects”206 According to the media, the musical provides “entertaining and touching aspects along with tragic beauty.”207

A prophetic song, “It’s Strange Snowflakes Are Falling” which is translated into Korean as “cham-yo,” is added in Act 2 of the script to foreshadow the death of Queen Min. This song increases the dramatic intensity related to the tragic death of Queen Min by musically euphemizing the cruelty of her death and pausing the dramatic intensity. As a result, ironically, the scene of the song provides subtle theatricality of Asian theatre within the genre of musical theatre. Park Sang Hyun, an assistant director for the production since 1995, created the song while the actors prepared for rehearsal with the director.208 Park, a promising theatre artist in Korea, to enhance the theatricality of the production, proposed the prophetic song, “It’s Strange Snowflakes are Falling.”209 This song, which appears two times in Act 2, is first staged with a young child singing in one spotlight without any instrumental accompaniment at the corner of

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208 Sang Hyun Park, Personal interview on September 3, 2011.
209 Park, Personal interview.
the down stage area.\textsuperscript{210} This scene is a contrast to other scenes that contain a mass of people singing in chorus to an orchestra accompaniment. The prophetic music is first located in Act 2, Scene 8 after Queen Min and the King celebrate the triple intervention of Russia, France, and German forces. After the song is finished, Miura, Japan's Minister Plenipotentiary in Chosun, plots to kill Queen Min in Scene 9. The song is also sung in Act 2, Scene 12, between the scenes where Miura and the assassins hold the riot before the assassination and the scene where Queen Min teaches French to the Prince:

CHILD. It’s strange, snowflakes are falling. Snowflakes are covering the plum blossoms. The snow melts away, and the plum blossoms are gone.

Spring without plum blossoms is not spring at all!\textsuperscript{211}

The lyrics for the song are metaphoric. In traditional Korean literature, the plum blossoms usually symbolize a pure and noble man who is faithful and is never affected by disturbances from the outside. Mokeun Yiseak (1328-1396), a Korean politician and scholar, was worried about the current king who was in the middle of social turmoil at the end of the Goryeo dynasty (918-1392) and first used the plum blossom to describe the king.\textsuperscript{212} Further historic parallels are evidenced in the song; “It’s Strange Snowflakes are Falling” also implies the dreadful destiny of Queen Min and employs the imagery of the plum blossom. The snow signifies an outer distraction, Japanese power, in particular, and spring symbolizes the life of the nation.

\textsuperscript{210} The location of the songs changed while ACom revised the musical script for their western tour in 1997. According to the interview with Park Sang Hyun in 2011, Park, an assistant director for the production in 1995, created this song and added it in Act 2.

\textsuperscript{211} All the Korean lyrics of the 1995 première script are referred to the Korean lyrics in the official production program of \textit{The Last Empress}, 1995. All English translation of the lyrics of the 1995 première script, the 1997 New York version, the 1998 U.S. version, the 2002 London version, the 2003 L.A. and the 2004 Toronto scripts are my translation unless otherwise noted.

\textsuperscript{212} For more information about Moken Yiseak, 목은 (牧隱) 이색 (李穡) (1328-1396), see the website: http://user.chol.com/~chungyy/chungyy/09_giftfile/01_giftfile1/42_gift/42_gift.htm.
Because character development was weak in Yi's script, ACom's adaptation remedies this by portraying her as more feminine by highlighting the love she enjoys from the King and General Hong. Several scenes are added to emphasize the femininity of the queen; the King misses his wife as a female partner, not merely a political sounding board, while she escapes from the military riot in Act 1, Scene 6. Another male character, General Hong, exhibits a desire to protect Queen Min, whom he had fallen in love with at first sight. During the military riot, General Hong helps Queen Min to escape the riot by fleeing to the countryside with the Queen disguised as General Hong's sister. General Hong admiringly describes her with the lyrics “You're too beautiful to be so sad.” Lastly, he confesses his love to her before he dies by the assassins' swords in “You Are My Destiny” in Act 2, Scene 12. Though General Hong's sentiments toward Queen Min are exposed, Queen Min, the King, and General Hong do not have a triangle relationship because Queen Min's romantic and political attention is upon her husband, the King.

Ambiguity arises respective to the adaptation's utilization of the Regent, the story's narrator, due to artificial dramaturgy, as it is debatable whether highlighting the conflict between the Regent and the Queen overshadows the Regent's political conflict with Japan. In response to the aforementioned variation between Fox Hunt and The Last Empress, Yun argues that the conflict between Queen Min and the Regent illustrates the outcome of suppression of weaker civilizations by powerful foreign nations. In the 1995 première script, it is confusing how the conflict between Queen Min and the Regent initiates, as they do not directly confront each other.

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213 According to the interview with Yun, he notes that the conflict between Queen Min and the Regent is a “miniature” version of the conflict between Chosun and other powerful nations.
throughout the play.214 The power game between Queen Min and the Regent appears to surface when Queen Min persuades the King to rule the nation without his father’s power influence in “You Are the King of Chosun” in Act 1, Scene 4. The Regent resigned as king, but began ruling the nation again after his involvement in the military mutiny in 1882, “Back to Power”, depicted in Act 1, Scene 6. Though Queen Min was still alive, the Regent, after resuming power, ordered an official funeral be conducted for Queen Min. When the Regent was exiled to China in Act 1, Scene 7, the Queen returned to the palace and reassumed her former political position.

Interestingly, in ACom’s 1994 adaptation, there is no specific information about who initiated or enacted the exile of the Regent, or the Regent’s awareness that Queen Min was still alive. If their conflict were due to external power from foreign nations, their conflict would have to contain oppression from foreign powers. The political preferences of the Regent, however, were forcefully objective due to his dual role as narrator. The court scene in Act 1, presented by the supertitles of the Judge’s announcement of the final sentence, omits significant information about how the Japanese plotted against the Regent. In Yi’s script and ACom’s 1994 adaptation, the Judge’s sentence explains the Regent’s involvement in the assassination. Similarly, in the adaptation, the Judge accuses Miura for the plot to kill the Queen unveiling the assassins' secret plan (originally code named 'fox hunt' in Yi’s script), in the beginning of Act 1:

JUDGE. The defendants stated that a discussion with the Regent occurred after the dismissal of the royal training military and took this conversation as a motivation to follow through with the Queen's assassination. The defendants disguised as guards of the Regent entered the palace…. (The sound fades.)

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214 This ambiguous relationship between the Regent and Queen Min has been changed since ACom prepared for their western tours in 1997. Yun also put the two characters in the same scene having them stand with each other in contrasting directions since the production in 1997.

215 Kim, Adaptation,1.
In the script, however, information about the Regent in the Judge's sentence in the prologue is missing:

CAPTION 2. In 1895, defendant Miura Goroh was Japan's Minister Plenipotentiary in Seoul. Miura met a number of Japanese military officers, in the Japanese Consulate to address the impending dismissal of pro-Japanese officials in the Chosun government, and he conspired with them to assassinate Queen Min in order to put an end to her manipulation of Chosun's affairs.

The script does not contain the facts about the involvement of the Regent, omitting that the Regent was a scapegoat for the assassins of Queen Min. Thus, the conflict between Queen Min and the Regent becomes domestic and marginal in the script.

In the 1995 première script, other characters are also simplified and stereotyped. Four main Japanese characters in Yi’s script, Inoue, Ohodohri, Miura, and Okamoto, are compacted into two characters, Inoue and Miura. Inoue appears mainly in Act 1 and keeps interfering with politics in the palace in Chosun; Miura smoothly approaches the palace while hiding his secret of the assassins in Act 2. The process of extending Yi's script appears to result in stereotypical depictions of foreign as well as group characters.

In ACom’s 1994 adaptation, portrayal of four Japanese merchants, who appear in a group scene and act as showstoppers by breaking the serious mood of the story with a bombastic and sarcastic presentation of Japanese culture have a more diminished presence in Act 1, Scenes 3 and 5 of the actual script. The people of Chosun are naively tricked by the Japanese characters' manipulative skill with language and cruel fakery in both scenes. These scenes are juxtaposed to the Court scene where the assassins are found innocent despite their cruel killing of Queen Min. Ku Hee Seo, a Korean theatre critic, argues that the musical has to maintain a “balance” with fair

\footnote{\textit{The Production Program of The Last Empress}, (Seoul, ACom, 1995).}
evaluation of the history. Ku attests that the musical took too much time to describe “the thieves [the Japanese]” and these presentations are “the chronic mistake” for Korean artists who misunderstand a “balanced” evaluation of the history.²¹⁷

Despite numerous discrepancies between *Fox Hunt* and *The Last Empress*, the 1995 première was a big hit in Korea in terms of its commercial results and artful presentation. The statistics show that within a ten-day period, 35,000 people viewed *The Last Empress* and the popularity is attributed to ACom's ability to retell *Fox Hunt* according to Korean taste in entertainment; viewing the musical is especially beneficial for secondary school students to assimilate Korean history.²¹⁸ Another review by Kim Yun-Cheol, an influential theatre critic and scholar in Korea, notes ACom made history through the production of *The Last Empress* by promoting the characteristics and reputation of Korean musical theatre.²¹⁹

On the other hand, mixed reviews focus on examination of musical elements, characterization, and plot. For example, Yoon Jung Ho acclaims the actors’ professional ability to sing the musical leads and perform. Yoon also states that despite the quality of the actors, the music is disappointing due to its lack of memorable arias, static orchestration void of interesting variations, which eventually cause lack of distinction among characters and decrease the interest of the entire production.²²⁰ Lee Eun Joo argues that the national spirit is expressed magnificently throughout the production. The numerous spectacles are amazing, but still the lyrics are unnatural.²²¹ Kim Hee Won in *Hankook Ilbo* reiterates that the spectacles are great but adds the main characters are not very astonishing. Moreover, the songs sung by the chorus are sarcastic

and the Queen and the King’s songs do not engage the audience's attention. Respective to the overall plot presentation, the first act, which traditionally hooks an audience, is dominated by narration of historical background. The second act jumps abruptly to Queen Min’s assassination and by the time the audience is taken to the final scene, the lack of key historical events results in a conclusion that is anticlimactic.

In reiteration and analysis of the aforementioned, the pioneer of professional musical theatre companies in Korea, ACom, prepared its first global project, The Last Empress, and finally presented it in Korea in 1995. The Korean audiences who were familiar with western musicals were excited about the big-scaled domestic musical. ACom affirmed to the audiences that musical theatre is not just a western genre to import for enjoyment, but rather it can be universally produced to provide entertainment.

When revising the production, the creative team preferred to emphasize the visual spectacles of the musical. Although Yun hired Yi Munyol, the best-selling novelist to book the musical, the team gave more attention to visual aspects such as the mushroom cloud over Hiroshima to make it more appealing as a mega-scaled musical with the hopes of garnering the attention of global audiences. They also added new historical events in Act 1 and arranged shortened versions of Yi’s story in Act 2. Meanwhile, the omission of the Donghak Movement and other important historical events reduces the clarity of the characters and their conflicts. At last, characters appear underdeveloped economically, politically, and socially, and the plot loses its intensity. General Dye, the original narrator was replaced by the Regent, lending more national and domestic perspectives to the entire plot line that once contained more global flavor.

ACom’s effort to make a global production appears to have fallen short on the western

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front in terms of its deliverance of literal coherence; the revisionist history surrounding Queen Min, meticulously researched and included by Yi, was displaced by enhanced theatrical components. However, artists and practitioners for *The Last Empress* made an effort to define their own versions of a global production within a rather nascent and limited working knowledge of musical theatre. The musical, nevertheless, has influenced the growth of Korean musical theatre and has provided a launching point to exponentially increase professional theatre troupes and institutions focused on musical theatre in Korea. ACom’s quest to define a global production has continued, commencing with the company’s North American tour in 1997. ACom’s challenge of mainstream western musical theatre will be explored in Chapters 3 and 4. Given the production's commercial success, ACom demonstrated and continues to prove the potential to approach global audiences by presenting a western styled musical produced by Korean staff and artists.
CHAPTER 3


In *The Last Empress*, Queen Min's desire to expand the boundaries of Korean influence abroad and to import external ideologies and assistance in order to advance her nation economically, socially, and politically, is also embodied in ACom's export of this first westernized Korean musical. Not only did the musical broaden the expansion of musical theatre within Korea, but also all participants of the musical production of *The Empress* gave sacrificially of their time and finances to export this revised history and national bravery with a collective vision of impacting an international frontier.

Prior to *The Last Empress’* nascent 1997 voyage with staff and cast to test the waters on Broadway, Yun Ho Jin, the director, conveyed the following to Korean journalists:

For the success of the New York tour, all performers and staff members agreed to work for the production without pay for the duration of the tour […] Like the lyrics in the musical, we proceeded this production with the perception that the brave go forward no matter how difficult a situation may be, and eventually their achievement under hardships would make history.\(^{223}\)

In his comments, Yun emphasized the sacrifices made by his staff and cast that served to lessen the financial deficit that this first international tour would later experience. Despite the financial dilemma, his team had one simple purpose for going to Broadway: to test ability to join mainstream musical theatre in the West. The musical director of *The Last Empress*, Kolleen Park, reiterates Yun's sentiments during an interview with *New York Post* journalist Ward

Morehouse III, stating their performance tour was more like “a test” of the Broadway market.\textsuperscript{224} However, she recalled Yun’s concept of “less profit but more experience” when reflecting on this first theatrical venture of performing the musical on Broadway by saying, “It’s not so much the money but doing it with our hearts.”\textsuperscript{225} The local organizers as well as the cast and crew found it meaningful to launch their musical experiment on Broadway. Yun considered performing a show on Broadway as the opportunity for “fair competition with other Broadway musicals,” deeming his musical competitive enough “because of its solid storyline together with dongyangjeok (oriental or Asian) contents.”\textsuperscript{226} Yun believed historic relevance of his story, combined with exotic presentation, would have universal theatrical appeal.\textsuperscript{227}

ACom’s perception of the western musical goer’s preference was two-fold. Firstly, ACom believed western audiences preferred large-scale performances and, secondly, it expected exotic Eastern insertions and the display of Korean traditional culture to attract spectators. ACom’s presumptions appear legitimized due to pervasive western influences within Korea and the export of Korean minds and talent abroad. It appears that a marginalized country, such as Korea, strives to present its cultural identity in a “globally noticeable and approachable” form of theatre (e.g., the West End and Broadway style musical theatre) by challenging the mainstream western culture, which seems to drive globalization.

In the following section, I argue that the musical’s first tour on Broadway in 1997 was rearranged and produced in light of ACom’s unilateral assumption about the U.S. culture. By exploring how ACom planned to produce the musical and how it revised the production for the

\textsuperscript{225} Morehouse III, “Korean.”
\textsuperscript{226} Kim, 22.
\textsuperscript{227} Yun, Personal interview.
U.S. audience, I analyze elements of ACom’s presumptions about western culture's musical expectations, specifically concerning the West End and Broadway-style musicals.

Road to Broadway: The 1997 New York Tour

In Korean society, the West End and Broadway-style musical theatre has been widely accepted as the highest level of commercial theatre in the world, and many Broadway productions were imported together with casts and staff, from the United States, Australia, and Japan in the 1990s. The Gate Musical Company visited Korea to perform *The Sound of Music* in 1992 and the musical was the first Broadway musical on record performed by the Broadway theatre company in Korea. Many other Broadway and the West End musicals performed by foreign musical theatre companies followed, including *Cats*, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, and *Guys and Dolls*, with most of them experiencing financial success. Major Korean newspapers, and art journals including but not limited to *The Hankook Ilbo*, *The Dong-A Daily*, and *Seoul Shinmun, Auditorium*, regularly updated and reported news about Broadway theatre in a weekly column or cultural section.

Many Korean theatre practitioners pointed out that domestic musicals were not comparable in quality to imported musicals. In 1993, some practitioners established the “Musical Day of October 26” in order to develop globally competitive Korean musical theatre by supporting Korean musical productions. Kim Seung Won, Yoo In Chon, Yoon Book Hee, Jung Hyun, and Lee Kyung Ae held the day’s activities in the Seoul Art Center on October 26, 1993. October 26 was chosen in the memory of the premiere of “Saljagi opseoye,” the first

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domestic musical in Korean theatre which ran from October 26th to 29th in 1966. The event, scenes with singing musical numbers from *Cats, Guys and Dolls, Nonsense, Westside Story, The Sound of Music, The Gold Medal of a Salary Man, The Eulogy of Dong Soon Dong,* and *Les Misérables* were performed. The core members of the “Musical Day of October 26” decided to appeal to the government for financial support and to encourage the theatre practitioners to awaken the passion for musical theatre. Thus, by founding “Musical Day of October 26,” the organizers inspired the gathering of artists and practitioners to keep up with current musical trends that contained diversity, professionalism, and globalization.

Since its inception ten years ago, "Musical Day of October 26" has gained significance for theater practitioners in Korea.

Yun is one of the practitioners who was encouraged by the establishment of the “Musical Day” and went on to develop a Korean musical with a global perspective. As the pioneer of exporting the Korean musical on Broadway, Yun and his team interpreted the first tour of *The Last Empress* on Broadway as “their heart to help the nation” with “no guarantee” of financial compensation. After the completion of its 1997 tour, ACom continued to receive attention

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231 Jeon, 11.
232 Jeon, 11.
from the international media for what it promoted as its sacrificial and patriotic endeavor to introduce the Korean-made musical to the audience in New York. The musical, termed by the Korean press as “the national musical” and “the first exported cultural product in Korea,” appealed to the strong sense of nationalism among the Korean population. Consequently, the production became more renowned in its place of inception, Korea.235

ACom, however, presumed that non-Korean audiences would have different preferences and therefore rearranged the musical's script, music, dance, setting, costumes, and lighting. Pointing out the shortage of diverse subjects in current Broadway theatre, ACom proceeded with its plan to go to Broadway and assumed that the musical would bring a fresh topic to the audience in New York.236 In fact, from 1990 to 1997, Broadway musicals consisted of predictable repertories and long-run revivals; nevertheless, the profits from Broadway musicals continuously increased. Despite the revivals, the actual number of repertories did not increase.237

Song Kyung Ok, the former marketing manager of ACom, noted that the company had conducted only limited research of the New York theatre market and the diversity of the audience for the 1997 tour.238

Preparation

In preparation for the tour, ACom contacted numerous musical and non-profit theatres that had over 2000 seats and an appropriately sized stage. The Lincoln Center Theatre, a

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236 Yun. Personal interview.


238 Kyung Ok Song, Personal interview on July 22, 2011.
prominent theatre in New York\textsuperscript{239} that is unofficially viewed as a “national theatre in America,” was one of them.\textsuperscript{240} The Lincoln Center responded, informing ACom of its availability, albeit limited, during the summer season, due to prior engagements.\textsuperscript{241} ACom believed that it needed a period of longer than a week to collect reviews from the critics. The musical was scheduled to perform at the Lincoln Center from August 15 to 24 in 1997, and would run twelve times in ten days with 25,000 in the audience, far exceeding ACom’s expectations.

As the date for the tour approached, ACom was still trying to borrow money to cover its budget. Yun diligently sought financial support from big Korean companies. Although the Arts Council of Korea and Korean Air financially supported the production, ACom continued to have financial problems. The estimated budget of the tour was $150,000 of which they borrowed $90,000 from a local bank.\textsuperscript{242} Kim Young Hwan, the representative producer for the U.S. tour in 1997, who ran an architectural company in Korea, borrowed money against his house to support the production.\textsuperscript{243} The financial concerns surrounding the production were not lost on Western audiences, as Glenn Collins from \textit{The New York Times} reported on the musical’s “extremely thrifty advertising campaign on a relatively small budget” aimed at a growing Korean population in the state of New York.\textsuperscript{244}

ACom's budget problem may have been caused by the marketing team's advertising shift from a global audience to local Korean communities. Han Dong Shin, a producer hired by ACom for the New York tour in 1997 and a founder of The Open Work, a New York-based organization that promotes Korean arts in the United States, admitted that she targeted Korean

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\textsuperscript{239} The more information about the Lincoln Center can be found at its website, www.lct.org.
\textsuperscript{241} Song, Personal interview.
\textsuperscript{243} Kim, 28.
communities in New York, New Jersey, and the Connecticut area, especially focusing on Flushing, NY, and Fort Lee, NJ. She asserted, “More and more Americans today are learning about Korean culture and food, but are still ambiguous about Korean art.” Although the ACom’s marketing team included non-Koreans in their marketing campaigns, their primary focus was on Korean communities. The production team promoted the musical to Korean daily and weekly newspapers, four Korean television stations, and handed out flyers and posters in Korean supermarkets, churches, restaurants, video stores, and college campuses. Song recalled that the marketing team discounted tickets for the musical for those who bought a promotional round-trip bus ticket to New York City. As a result, many Korean immigrants went to see the show, and the last three days of the performances were sold out including the groundling seats. According to ACom's press release document about the 1997 tour, a non-Korean audience filled 40% of the seats and the Korean press interpreted this as a possible acceptance by a non-Korean audience. The musical marked history on Broadway as the first Asian-created musical performed there and drew lively attention from the audience in New York.

Renaming Korean Culture

While ACom’s Broadway debut marked an accomplishment for Korean theater in the West, there were many changes that went into the staging of the musical before it was brought to U.S. audiences. Yun changed the musical’s title, historical contents, characters, and casting in order to make the musical more appealing to a non-Korean audience. He assumed that the

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245 Bill Ervolino, *The Record* (New Jersey) 17 Aug, 1997:y02
246 Ervolino, y02.
247 Ervolino, y02; Collions, 8.
248 Song, Personal Interview.
249 Yun Ho Jin and Song Kyung Ok mentioned about the seats during their interviews.
international audiences would prefer the presentational quality of the production over an accurate portrayal of local Korean historical events. To the non-Korean audience, the marketing team emphasized the big budget and “exotic” styles of the musical. The edited poster designs for the 1997 New York tour proved the assumption made by ACom regarding the non-Korean audience’s reaction to their musical. ACom believed that the western audience would enjoy different styles of musicals within their familiar and preferred form of musical theatre.

Yun’s change of the original title, Myongseonghwanghu, to The Last Empress is neither literally translated, nor historically correct. In fact, according to the Encyclopedia of Korean Studies, the last empress in the Chosun Dynasty was the Empress Sunjeong-hyo (1894-1966), who was the second wife of King Soonjong (“Sunjeonghyo whanghoo”). Despite his knowledge of the historical error, Yun renamed the musical The Last Empress in order to attract a non-Korean audience. He linked the English title to The Last Emperor, the 1987 movie about the final emperor of China, Pu-Yi, directed by Bernardo Bertolucci. Yun argued that the characters of the two productions shared a similar fate based on the fact that both royal figures were threatened by foreign forces. Sue Ellen Case pointed out Yun intended to join the global multi-million-dollar market by titling the musical The Last Empress to attract the western audiences who were already familiar with the movie The Last Emperor (1987) and its display of “Asian traditions of dynastic opulence.” Case noted that the musical was also made to promote “nostalgia for ‘the last’ of such magnificent individuals” (i.e. the Empress Myeongseong) and the glorious moments of a nation in the past (i.e. the golden days of the

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253 The heading on the production poster was “Exclusive Engagement of the Award-winning Korean musical” with the description “‘Groundbreaking’ say the critics.” “This extravagant, all-Asian musical, with a cast of 40 thrills audiences with its exotic blend of music, theatre and dance from both East and West.”
254 Yun, Personal Interview.
255 Yun, Personal Interview.
256 Case, 10.
Yun explained that no other queen was actively involved in politics during the Chosun Dynasty, and Queen Min’s death immediately preceded the Japanese colonial period. The renamed title of the musical provided a more dramatic sense of the “fall” of the nation and made the character of the Queen more intriguing.

The title was not the only aspect of The Last Empress that lacked authenticity. The interpretation of the supertitles also proved problematic. ACom provided the English lyrics for the supertitles, but it did not pay much attention to the literal and cultural translations. The translators, Jung Ha Yeon and Park Kolleen, were not professionals. Jung was introduced to Yun by one of ACom's financial investors and Park was the music director. Critics rarely pointed out the translation problems but instead mentioned the supertitles' technical glitches. Some critics noted the difficulty of reading the supertitles while watching the production, while others said the supertitles were not a problem as they were accustomed to these from watching European operas, i.e. Verdi’s La Traviata (1853), and Puccin’s Tosca (1900).

Yun re-cast the main character of Queen Min, whose actress had premiered with the musical in Korea in 1995, assuming that the 1997 tour, aimed at a non-Korean audience, would consider actors’ vocal quality over their acting skill. For the international tour, Yun looked for actors who had experience performing abroad in order to enhance the musical to compete with other international productions. The media welcomed Yun’s expanded range of qualifications for musical actors. In recasting characters with actors that exhibited both musical and acting expertise as well as the ability to appeal to an international audience, Yun inadvertently tested the loyalty of the Korean audience while simultaneously treading upon new waters with a less-

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257 Case, 10.
258 Yun, Personal interview.
nationally renowned cast abroad. This major alteration of performing artists in the musical’s nascent production history, i.e. casting vocalists who had talented acting skills as well as an advanced and professional ability to understand musical numbers, was a calculated risk. Goh Hee Kyung, a former production director of the Seoul Art Theatre, wrote an article about Yun’s recasting of Queen Min in *Maekyung Economy*:

Yoon Seok Hwa, the lead actor, led the birth and growth of *The Last Empress*. The musical numbers required talented vocalists who had the fundamental knowledge of music rather than talented actors who merely had acting skills [...]. Yet, it rarely happens in Korean culture that a new cast, rather than the national contributor, would play in a major production in the U.S. 260

There is a short anecdote about Yoon Seok Hwa who played the role of Queen Min since the premier of the musical in 1995. As a celebrity, she contributed to the success of the musical because many domestic audiences came to see her perform on stage. When the director announced the new castings, Yoon sued the director for violation of the contract.261 She complained that the director scheduled the New York tour and cast new title roles without notifying her, thus breaking the contract.262 The conflict ended when Yoon dropped the charges. The struggle of recasting the Queen’s role was that at least one actor was upset about it.

Yun double cast two classical music sopranos, Kim Won Jung and Lee Tae Won as Queen Min for the 1997 tour. Kim had received an ‘advanced certificate’ from the Julliard School of Music, graduated with a master’s degree from the California Institute of Art, and

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262 Yoo.17.
performed operas in Italy, Germany, and the United States. Lee, who had graduated with both a bachelor’s and master’s degree from the Julliard School of Music, was a professional musical actress who played Lady Thiang in The King and I on Broadway. She also received the top award at the Metropolitan and Annapolis operas. In her interview with journalist Blake Green from Newsday, she was introduced as “the one who encountered two different situations.” She had played a stereotypical Asian female role in a Broadway production, The King and I, and the historical heroine of Korea in a Korean global production, The Last Empress.

Many New York journalists noted that Yun’s casting these two actors based on their vocal talent is insightful. The reviewers emphasized the women's educational backgrounds and admired their talented voices. Anita Gates claimed Kim’s vocals demonstrated a remarkably powerful, emotion-filled voice. David Lipfert, a theatre critic praises her voice as an “ideal voice for musical theatre: a luscious top and a quite separate, more forceful bottom.”

The cast was not the only aspect of the musical that experienced drastic changes when it came to the West. Yun changed the design of the production poster for the 1997 tour, expecting to create an international icon of Queen Min by highlighting her relationship with foreign powers, especially Japan. In the previous production poster used for the 1995 and 1996 Korean performances, there is a portrait of Yoon Seok Hwa wearing a royal costume and other accessories, set in the background of a sepia colored photo of the royal palace, Gyeongbok Palace (See Figure 1-A). In this poster, Yoon sharply stares frontwards, playing not only the role of Queen Min but also the representative actress of Korea.

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263 The Official Production Program of The Last Empress, (Seoul: ACom,1997).
265 Green, B19.
In the production poster for the 1997 New York tour, on the other hand, Yun asked Lee Manik, a well-known creative artist of western style painting in Korea, to design “an art poster that would leave a deep impression on international people and that could be consistently used for every performance thereafter.” In the 1997 New York production poster, the entire piece of Lee Manik’s original oil painting, *The Last Empress* (1997) was used (See Figure 1-B). Queen Min is drawn with the five traditional colors of Korea (i.e., black, white, blue, yellow and red), while she grimaces. Many swords, with the marks of the Japanese flag on the handle, surround the upper half of her body. The very front two swords have the marks of the Japanese flag on the handle. The rest of the swords symbolize other foreign powers. Jeon Seung Hoon of the *Dong-A Ilbo* commented on the piece saying that the swords looked like feathered wings.

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attached to the Empress' back. The artist’s intent was to transcend her death dramatically. Additionally, floating yellow clouds in the red sky hint at the coming dawn, emphasizing the meaning of Chosun, the land of morning calm. Kim Hyung Soon described Lee as the contributor who globalized aboriginal Korean culture by delivering Korean ethnicity and, at the same time, by approaching international spirits as a humanist. The 1998 New York production poster, on the other hand, was designed based on Queen Min’s portrait in Lee’s piece (See Figure 1-C). Symbolizing the Queen’s direct confrontation of Japanese power, instead of being surrounded by numerous swords, the Queen’s face is placed to the left of one sword that has the Japanese flag on the handle. The single sword is larger than Queen Min’s portrait, and its placement on the right symbolizes Japan’s political ascendancy. In addition, Queen Min is positioned to the left of the poster and only the index finger of her right hand is visible. While the 1995 and 1996 posters superimpose the Queen focusing on her royal persona by positing her in the center front of the Gyeongbok Palace, the 1997 and 1998 New York production posters emphasize the Queen’s single battle with Japan.

Refining the Drama and Spectacles

Yun rearranged the original script used in 1996 and added the shaman rite and traditional folk dance to the 1997 tour in New York in order to make the musical more “fitting” to a foreign audience. The creative team, consisting of Yun Ho Jin, Lee Mon Lyul, and Yang In Ja, rearranged the script by revising lyrics, deleting some redundant scenes, inserting additional scenes along with new musical numbers, and switching musical numbers to different scenes to improve the structure of the plot. Yun noted that the 1997 version was produced and edited to

269 Jeon, 18.
270 Jeon, 18.
highlight the inner world of Queen Min, and that adding the shaman dance scene presented the mystery of Asia and foreshadowed the flow of power between Queen Min and the Regent.272

Yun intensified the conflict between the Queen and the Regent to emphasize the social and political climate during the Chosun dynasty at the end of the nineteenth century. The creative team omitted the framed structure of storytelling where the Regent recalled the past as a commentator in order to objectify the character of the Regent. The musical numbers “Sigh of Daewongun” in the Prologue, Act 1 and “Experiencing such an Ordinary Day” in the Epilogue, Act 2, which indicated the Regent’s opening and ending remarks in the 1995 version, were deleted (See Table 5). The creative team also omitted another musical number, “Dolsuk Went to the Woonhyun Palace,” in Act 1 Scene 6, for its superfluous remarks about the storyline:

REGENT. Why did you involve me in this riot? This is your job, so you should know what to do. Now I can fully control this riot and make it peaceful. After the riot is over, my power will be returned.273

In the 1997 version, the Regent appeared on stage leading the old military soldiers in “the Military Mutiny of 1882” in Act 1, Scene 6, directly declaring his return to the palace, singing “Back to Power.”

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<td><strong>PROLOGUE</strong></td>
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<td>24. Revolution of Old Soldiers</td>
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<td><strong>Scene 6</strong></td>
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<td>25. Dolsuk Went to the Woonhyun Palace</td>
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<td>26. Military Mutiny of 1882</td>
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<td>27. Back to the Power</td>
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<td>28. Missing My Wife</td>
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<td>29. We Will Be Back to the Palace</td>
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<td><strong>Scene 7</strong></td>
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<td>30. Yuan Shikai and the Regent</td>
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<td>31. Daewongun Who Is Taken to China</td>
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<td>32. Inoue Who Threatens Gojong</td>
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<td>33. Queen Min Has Returned</td>
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<td>34. We Shall Rise Again</td>
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<td>35. Japan’s Chosun Policy</td>
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**PROLOGUE**
1. Prelude
2. Japan Has Chosen

**ACT I**

**Scene 1**
3. Welcome to Our New Queen

**Scene 2**
4. Regency's Rule
5. Soft is the Breeze
6. You, the Beautiful Person
7. Who Is My Lover?

**Scene 3**
8. Song of People
9. Four Japanese Merchants 1
10. Fight in the Marketplace
11. I'm Hong Gye Hoon
12. Wish for a Prince (Shaman Dance Thereafter)
13. Please Open the Door
14. The Song of the Soldiers
15. Battle Against Western Countries

**Scene 4**
16. Please Grow Healthy
17. You Are the King of Chosun
18. Until the World Needs Me

**Scene 5**
19. Gojong's Meeting with Politicians
20. Everything is Just About Strategies
21. The Seven Foreign Envoys
22. The Four Japanese Merchants II
23. Itoh’s Ambition
24. Revolution of the Old Soldiers

**Scene 6**
25. Military Mutiny of 1882
26. Back to the Power
27. Missing My Wife
28. We Will Return to the Palace

**Scene 7**
30. Daewongun Who Exile to China
31. Inoue Who Threatening Gojong
32. Queen Min Has Return
33. We Shall Rise Again
34. Japan's Chosun Policy
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<td>1. Dance in the Banquet</td>
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<td>5. Diplomatic Talks During the Banquet</td>
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<td>5. The Sun is rising in Chosun</td>
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<td>6. It's Strange Snowflakes Are Falling</td>
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<td>8. Triple Intervention And Atami House</td>
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<td>9. It's Strange the Snow Flakes Are Falling</td>
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<td>Scene 9</td>
<td>10. Sigh of Hong Gye Hoon</td>
<td>Scene 10</td>
<td>10. Chosun's the Country of Dangun</td>
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<td>Scene 10</td>
<td>12. The Queen Studies French Today</td>
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<td>13. By the Time This Drink Gets Cold</td>
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<td>15. Ritual for Fox Hunt</td>
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<td>Scene 13</td>
<td>21. Don’t Hurt the Queen</td>
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<td>22. The Last of Hong Gye Hoon</td>
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<td>21. The Last of Hong Gye Hoon</td>
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<td>23. The Queen Is Chased After Wild Animals</td>
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<td>22. The Queen Is Chased After Wild Animal</td>
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<td>24. Find the Queen And Kill the Fox</td>
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<td>25. How Am I Supposed to Live from Now on?</td>
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<td>24. How Am I Supposed to Live from Now on?</td>
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<td>EPILOGUE</td>
<td>26. Experiencing Such an Extraordinary Day</td>
<td>EPILOGUE</td>
<td>25. Rise, People of Chosun</td>
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<td>27. Rise, People of Chosun</td>
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The creative team also rewrote the lyrics of the “Star in My Heart” and changed the song's title to “Who is My Love?” in the 1997 version. In the 1995 version, in Act 1, Scene 2, Queen Min talks to herself about her loneliness caused by King Gojong who spends time with other court ladies:

QUEEN. The sound of the dried leaves crunched by a night breeze is my longing heart. My longing heart to you will never disappear, like rain at night. My desperate song lingers around you but you don’t recognize it. Can you please think about it now? There is a person who keeps a star inside a heart, which cannot be taken by any power in the world. Although I don’t smile with love, I bloom brilliantly as a woman in my prayers.274

Unlike this platonic and introverted expression about Queen Min’s love for King Gojong, the Queen explains her isolated feelings more confrontationally in Act 1, Scene 2, in the 1997 version:

QUEEN. When I was summoned to serve as Mother of all people to the nation, I entered alone as a young maid into seclusion deep inside the palace. I am not an innocent maid anymore but still, no one looks for me. What shall I do for my empty heart, as I now possess the scent of a woman? Yet, you just chase those other wild flowers. Who could ever bring love to me? Is there anyone but you? But you?275

In the 1997 version, in the scene, “Who is My Love?” the creative team intended for the audience to feel sympathetic emotion from the Queen’s courageous character and melodramatic life story. She is portrayed as having been elevated from a lower class status to join the ranks of

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274 The 1995 Korean lyrics of The Last Empress is found in the official 1995 and 1996 production programs.
275 The 1997 Korean lyrics of The Last Empress is found in the official 1997 production programs.
the ruling elite. In reality, the historic Queen Min, had never served as a maid and her wealthy extended family had members who were even engaged to the Regent’s family.²⁷⁶

Yun rearranged some musical numbers to enhance the dramatic effect of the musical. At the beginning of Act 2, the opening chorus became “Come and Celebrate.” “The Sun is Rising in Chosun” was moved to the end of Scene 8 and was used as a closing chorus. Yun also moved the short musical number, “It’s Strange the Snow Flakes Are Falling,” to the end of Scene 8 and Scene 9 in the 1997 version to provide an early climactic event proceeding the Queen’s death (See Table 5).

Insertion of Traditional Shaman Dance

The creative team’s most significant work for the 1997 version was the inclusion of the new musical number, “Wish for the Prince,” along with a shaman rite scene. These transformed the storyline by fictionalizing historical narratives to increase the global quality of the musical through a display of modernized traditional culture. The creative team added “Wish for the Prince,” sung by the King, Queen Min, and the Regent in Act 1, Scene 3 to reinforce the conflict and to clarify the relationships between these three main characters.²⁷⁷ In “Wish for the Prince,” the Regent urged the King to take a royal concubine in order to guarantee a future prince, because he thought Queen Min was infertile. The Queen called Jinryunggun, the resident shaman at the palace, to ask her to perform a shaman rite.

The creative team had designed the shaman rite scene as an embellishment of the premiered version in Korea.²⁷⁸ Intricate details of shamanistic rituals engaged in by the Queen are not specified in revisionist historical accounts; however, Yun argued that the shaman rite was the only indigenous cultural trait that had the capability to present the “true” cultural spirit of

²⁷⁶ Bae-Yong Lee, Women in Korean History (Seoul: Ewha Womans UP, 2008) 34.
²⁷⁷ Yun, Personal interview.
²⁷⁸ Yun, Personal interview.
Korea. In his book, *Korean Shamanism: The Cultural Paradox*, Kim Chongho explains that “in *kut* (Korean Shamanism), Korean shamans empower spirits to speak through shamanic invocation.” He also notes that Korean shamanism has been “re-evaluated” as “a valuable indigenous cultural tradition” in the era of globalization. He further asserts that *kut* has been revived as a form of theatrical performance encompassing the areas of folklore, literature, visual arts, drama, music, and tourism.

Attesting to the uniqueness of the shaman ritual and its value as a performing art, Yun took the creative liberty to add the ritual to the musical. Yun had planned to include the shaman rite scene at the beginning of the adaptation process in 1994. However, he failed to present a “modernized version of a shaman rite on stage.” Yun continuously worked on creating “a modernized version of a shaman rite” and in the 1997 tour he added a scene where five female shamans wore splendid costumes and danced on a dark empty stage with minimal spot lighting. Jinryunggun recited an incantation using a similar voice tone to *chang*, a traditional type of Korean song. The music for the scene was played using western classical instruments along with Korean traditional ones.

Yi Munyol, the writer of *Fox Hunt*, insisted that the shaman rite scene was a crucial insertion in order to add background information explaining how the Korean people's perception of Queen Min evolved from a negative view to a positive one.

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281 Kim, 209.
282 Kim, 209.
283 ACom used pre-recorded rather than live orchestras. All musical accompaniments were pre-recorded and played via speakers on stage. For the shaman-dancing scene, ACom used pre-recorded background music, and some Korean actors played additional live sounds using Korean traditional instruments under the orchestra pit. After the New York tour in 1997, ACom completed musical recordings for the shaman rite scene and used it in the 1998, 2002, 2003, and 2004 tours.
for advice from Jinryunggun who Queen Min personally appointed as one of the resident palace shamans. According to his interview with the *Sangsaeng*, Lee argued that Japanese historians criticized the Queen for wasting a nation’s property for her own personal gain by pointing out one occasion where the Queen spent twelve thousand bags of rice as an offering to heal her son. Yi explained that the Japanese people covered up their behavior of pilfering vast amounts of rice from Chosun, saying that Queen Min frequently carried out expensive shaman rites, giving away precious rice. The Japanese used this reference to the Queen's actions to hide their devious crimes of taking rice from the Korean people and shipping it to Japan. In the scene “Fox Hunt,” Yi included the shaman rite held for the Prince in Act 1 Scene 3. Understandably, Queen Min’s cousin, Min Young Hwan, worries about the citizens' complaints regarding the Queen's spending on shamanic events. The Queen responds to her cousin:

QUEEN. Don’t say any more. They might suspect that I wasted money. I know how poor and starving they are [the citizens of Chosun] and I also worry about their pain and sorrow. How can I forget my people? The land is fertile but the heavens have ignored us for we have repeatedly had floods and draughts. Unfaithful and conservative politicians, under nepotistic rule, have harassed the Regent and our people for over ten and sixty years, respectively. People sent thousands of bags of rice to Japan, exchanging them for a mere piece of soap or a matchbox. That’s why people are starving and poor. I have served some bags of rice and clothing to god and my people will ultimately eat the rice and wear the clothes.

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286 Kim, 331.
287 Kim, 330.
288 Yi, 42.
Yi justifies Queen Min’s spending on her son by criticizing the way the Japanese embezzled rice from Chosun. Yi also explained that the Queen must have depended on shamanism because the national religion, Confucianism, did not believe in omnipotent figures, and the arrival of Christianity was too foreign for her to accept.\textsuperscript{289} The Regent proclaimed that shaman rituals were legally prohibited under national rules. In ACom’s 1994 adaptation, the Queen’s spontaneous encouragement of the shaman rites at the palace seemed to be her direct challenge to the Regent’s power. As a result, the shaman dance scene provided a new perspective of the Queen’s image, from extravagant spender to caring savior of the Chosun people. Queen Min’s involvement with the shaman rite appears to intensify the conflict between the Queen and the Regent. Historically, the Regent had ordered the closure of all religious temples and cessation of all participation in religiously oriented activities. Yet in Fox Hunt and subsequent musical tours, starting in 1997, the shaman scene occurs. Queen Min’s active participation in shaman rites displays a direct affront against the wishes and authority of her royal father-in-law, the Regent. The royal conflict between the Queen and the Regent was not emphasized in Yi’s version, but was developed in the 1997 tour. The shaman rite scene, added to the 1997 version, met Yi’s expectations of changing the direction of the plot and simultaneously empowering the role of women shamans. The creative team added the story of the shaman rite scene and followed it with “Wish for the Prince,” emphasizing the Queen’s image as “the mother of the nation” and her conflict with the Regent. The creative team even went one-step further to emphasize the physiological character of Queen Min’s motherhood. In the 1997 version, the Queen brought Jinryunggun to intercede with the spirit world in an effort to produce a son, while she merely called the shaman to heal her existing son in Fox Hunt. Yet, the scene received criticism in feminist circles from domestic and western

\textsuperscript{289} Kim, “How to,” 330.
scholars. Sue Ellen Case, a representative feminist theatre scholar in the United States, describes the scene as “one of the most powerful scenes of feminine and indigenous performance in the musical,” arguing that the female character of Queen Min had been depicted in a limited perspective - a figure of a mother.\footnote{Case, 15.} The shaman used “dark and threatening” power to reproduce an heir for the nation. As a result, the Queen did not receive justified and robust power, but negative and dark power, typical of a “dragon lady” depicted in Hollywood films.\footnote{Case, 14–16.} Case argued that Queen Min’s portrayal as a mother of a nation, and the shaman’s dark images illuminate male-controlled perceptions was still dominating force in South Korean society.\footnote{Case, 18–19.} Lee Hyun Jung, a Korean theatre scholar, argues that Yun’s main purpose with the shaman scene was to cater to the global market by focusing on the “exotic mood” in Asia. He did this by emphasizing the dichotomy between the East and the West “to secure the global market.”\footnote{HyunJung Lee, “Global Fetishism: Dynamics of Transnational Performances in Contemporary South Korea” (University of Texas at Austin. 2008) 61.} In actuality, based on interviews with Yun, his intent was deeper than merely selling Korean exoticism abroad.\footnote{Yun, Personal interview.} He also offered Korean history and cultural spirit to the western palate via traditional Broadway musical theatre methods, replete with spectacles, costumes, dance, and music.

**Production Reviews**

Critics’ analysis of the entire production varied, though reviews of the shaman scene were predominately positive. New York critics welcomed *The Last Empress* in terms of its spectacles and fusion styles, which were a mix of eastern and western sources. The critics considered the production not only a new style of musical from Korea, but one from Asia
influenced by western knowledge of the musical theatre. Some critics expected an atypical Asian style of music for the show's debut on Broadway, but contrary to their expectations, ACom made an effort to try and join the Broadway market. Before the opening of the production, journalists from local media agencies stressed the “Eastern” origins of the story. Michael Sommers, from the Sunday Star Ledger, introduced the musical as “the tragic Eastern saga of charismatic Queen Min of Korea’s Chosun dynasty, whose assassination by spies in 1895 eventually led to Japanese colonial rule of that nation.”295 Sommers’ summary of the plot emphasized an exotic and mysterious story of Asia. Ward Morehouse III in the New York Post noted that “the first big all-Asian musical” might take “a big gamble” by breaking away from the conventional stories about Asia contained in other big Broadway musicals, Miss Saigon, and The King and I, which were “on the Great White Way.”296 The article heading in The New York Daily News about the production was “The First Korean Musical about Queen Hopes to Reign in N.Y. Too.”297

Once the production opened, many critics evaluated the musical by comparing it to other big Broadway musicals. David Spencer, from Aisle Say, argued that ACom “innocently” misunderstood and “stole” the concept of another musical by replicating a specific scene from Pacific Overture.298 He claimed that the theme of The Last Empress resembled Evita in terms of its wishing "to open a revisionist view of its heroine and correct perceived injustices in the way she’s remembered."299 Aileen Jacobson argues, “The melodic, often heraldic score and the turntable are reminiscent of Les Misérables.”300

296 Morehouse III, “Korean.”
299 David, “The Last Empress.”
Other spectacles, including setting, lighting, and costumes, were highly acclaimed by critics. Blake Green from *Newsday* describes, “The costumes, set, and staging are gorgeous.” Joanne Lee from *The Asian New Yorker* acclaimed that the quality of the spectacle in the musical was like “a dramatic feast for the eyes” because it also had “the operatic element, along with fancy sets, costumes, and lighting designs” which had appeared in “all Anglo-American musicals.” From Yun's evaluation, the shaman scene, when compared to other scenes, was favored by Broadway audiences and critics. The splendid presentation of the shaman scene was noted as an “amalgam of Broadway operatic and Korean musical styles” utilizing “an unending array of outstanding, colorful, ceremonial costumes and lighting design.” David Lipfert described the shaman rite scene as an “entertaining interlude.” Robert L. Daniels from the *Variety* also singles out the scene by remarking, “most feverish is the shaman in a mystical ritual performed to ensure the birth of an heir to the throne.” Admittedly, the shaman scene not only presents Korean culture, but also exemplifies artistry in the musical genre.

On the other hand, some critics pointed out the sickness of too many spectacles by arguing that the musical followed “the disease of ‘spectacul-itis’” with “elephantine production values, bubblegum Euro-pop scores, and paper-thin storylines and characters.” David Patrick Sterns from *USA Today* notes “theater has become an international industry since Les Misérables and others were exported to non-English speaking countries. It’s now becoming a two-way trade.” Sterns implied that *The Last Empress* followed this trend of international

303 Lee, 12.
industry in musical theatre, despite its disappointment to attract the audience in New York due to its use of Korean lyrics with English supertitles rather than utilizing English lyrics.\textsuperscript{308}

ACom expected that the audience and critics in New York would enjoy the musical for its unique non-fictional story about the fall of the Queen in the form of a large-scale musical with outstanding spectacles; however, as previously expounded, the reviews were mixed. Another western review by Anita Gates from \textit{The New York Times} explained that the musical is “impressive by anyone’s standards” and described its luxurious spectacles and the story of Queen Min.\textsuperscript{309} On the other hand, Alexis Greene from the \textit{Star-Ledger} argued, “The work is disappointingly static,” pointing out its unbalanced western forms in music and plot, and “modeling a work on Western forms does not guarantee artistic success.”\textsuperscript{310} Some aspects of the musical did appeal to the western audience, and one example is the exotic nature of the shaman rite scene. However, some western viewers appeared to have resisted this Korean version of western musical prototypes. During the 1990s, off Broadway musicals and even smaller scale productions were also relatively popular by presenting their diverse and imaginative pieces.\textsuperscript{311}

\section*{Celebration Of Homecoming: The Post-Broadway Period}

\textit{The Last Empress} increased in profitability and renown in Korea after completing the 1997 tour in New York. Kim Yun-Cheol, a well-known critic in Korea, wrote an article in \textit{The Korea Times} describing the tour on Broadway. She likened its debut to the “Major League in theatre”\textsuperscript{312} and compared the success to Park Chan Ho, the first Korean baseball player scouted

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{308} Stearns, 8.
\end{thebibliography}
by the Los Angeles Dodgers.\footnote{Park won the game in the Major League on April 7th in 1996 as the first Korean baseball player scouted to the Los Angeles Dodgers (“Park Chan Ho’s First Victory: Joy for Korean Immigrants/ Expecting Re-Vitalization of Low Mood.”)} ACom used the 1997 version for domestic tours in Korea as a national musical promoting its revised version for the tour on Broadway. When ACom embarked on a second U.S. tour in 1998, it provided a summary of its profits accumulated during the domestic tours from November 1997 to March 1998. According to its report, ACom paid back its financial deficit from the New York tour in 1997, and even earned a profit of $800,000 with the total number of audience members reaching 100,000.\footnote{The musical had encore performances in November 1997 in Seoul and Inchun and had 40,000 spectators and the next year they had more performances in Pusan, Chunju, and Seoul in February of 1998, where 60,000 spectators saw the production. For more information, see the appendix of the Production History. The source is from the packet of the press release for the 1997 tour of The Last Empress by ACom, May 1997.}

The news agencies in Korea strove to justify the success of the musical as a global performance despite its early financial problems and the contents of the western reviews. Choi Byung Lyul from the Seoul Shinmun acknowledges that the musical intrigued the audience in New York, allowing him to term it a “success.” He admitted that the musical was “the first exporting musical made in Korea,” but the dark side of the popularity and fame is ACom's 9 hundred million dollar financial debt.\footnote{Byung Lyul Choi. “The Last Empress: Showy Outing but Debt-Saddled Returning.” Seoul Shinmoon. 13 Nov. 1997:14.} He accuses ACom’s ticket dumping during their encore performance in Seoul by degrading the value of the musical by lowering the price of the tickets in order to avoid paying back an exorbitant debt. In addition, he emphasized the financial loss of the tour, and that paying the debt back via profits gained through homeland productions would not render the Broadway tour a “success.”\footnote{Choi, 14.} On the other hand, Kim Seung Hyun of the Munhwa Ilbo mentioned it might be “too early to judge the success of the musical” as a “global production exported from Korea” and that more reviews needed to be considered to judge the
success of the production by the end of the performing period. In spite of the musical's mixed reviews from critics in New York, it became a national musical, establishing a watershed moment of exporting Korean global performances abroad.

**Conclusion**

Are the seemingly paradoxical musical issues (i.e., loss of revenue from the tour, but acclaim from the Korean homeland) an inevitable first step for marginalized cultures to join the mainstream culture? A pertinent question to pose at this point is whether ACom assumed a positive reception would be forthcoming from the foreign audience, because of the borrowed the West End and Broadway style cultural forms. Another point of interest surrounds the appearance of ACom acting defensively when adapting the script after mediocre receptions. What actually prompted the constant change in presentation formats over the years' tours? ACom's goal to enter the Broadway scene resulted in “expensive” lessons. ACom implemented the West End and Broadway styles because the company believed in the universally recognized genre of musical theatre, but perhaps miscalculated the western audience's desire for new theatre forms.

Although a financial deficit occurred and there were short running periods during the tour, these facts are a reflection of the entrepreneurial novelty being undertaken in a gradually expanding era of globalization. Both the nation of Korea and individual Koreans themselves, wanting to engage the world on a broader scale, spread their wings via the respected musical form of Broadway style. Media reports present the financial lessons learned by ACom's sacrificial approach to performing *The Last Empress* on Broadway. ACom may have used the attention generated by performing on Broadway to increase reception of the musical back in

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318 Choi,14.
Korea. However, to state this as the only reason for performing abroad appears a simplification of the cultural, historical, financial, and global aspects surrounding ACom's decision making. Essential to consider in appraising ACom's musical debuts is its process of developing legitimate practices for a global production. Exploration of the relationship between the Korean musical’s consistent transformation and its performance history of international tours under the name of globalization is imperative. Close inspection of all facets of the performance and reception provides a historical account. The subsequent sections of this chapter trace the 1998 U.S. tour to understand additional features of the Korean musical's evolution.

The 1998 N.Y. and L.A. Tours

The first international tour of *The Last Empress* in 1997 was produced to present the existence of a Korean musical to western audiences, whereas the 1998 tour was produced to make money. During the interview presented in *Hankook Ilbo*, Yun argues that in 1997 ACom considered the U.S. a “test” to examine its braveness of performing a Korean musical on Broadway, while the 1998 tour is arranged for “the business” of making a financial profit. One of ACom's producers, Lee Sang Yol, explains that the musical's 1998 tour would compete financially with other Broadway musicals.

The 1998 tour was influenced by the Korean financial crisis that occurred in December 1997. At that time, the Korean government needed to borrow $21 billion from the International
Monetary Fund (IMF). ACom, nevertheless, continued preparing for their 1998 U.S. tour and eventually performed the musical in New York and Los Angeles.

In this section, I explore how ACom revised the production, while negotiating Korea’s political, social, and economic climate, to secure additional funding of the musical. In addition, I explain how ACom redefined their definition of a global performance under socioeconomic pressure and, through the critics' reviews, discovered an innovative revision for the next international tour.

**IMF in South Korea**

An understanding of the social and economic situation in South Korea from 1997 to 1998 is crucial in order to analyze 1998 production. Since the show was performed in New York in 1997, many media agencies reported the musical as the representative cultural product in the era of globalization. Called *segyehwa* in Korean, the cultural policy of globalization during the South Korean presidency of Kim Young Sam (1993-1998) was a dominant force in Korean arts and entertainment. At the end of Kim’s administration, a drop in the Korean economy was evident and this dire situation prompted the nation to borrow from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in December 1997.

The Korean government politically encouraged the production’s international tours to emphasize nationalism and to provide a positive message to the Korean people that a cultural product, i.e. *The Last Empress*, could help mitigate the financial crisis. The government became politically involved in the arts, emphasizing a spirit of nationalism in the arts while

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simultaneously backing a globalist agenda in an effort to overcome the national crisis.\textsuperscript{324} Though nationalism and globalism appear as polar opposites, the Korean government funded nationalism on the wings of this global artistic export.\textsuperscript{325} The South Korean Ministry of Culture and Tourism helped support ACom's 1998 tours, contributing $500,000.\textsuperscript{326} In exchange for financial backing of the U.S. tours, ACom was to make a “social contribution” by promoting Korean culture and the advanced technology of Korean musicals to western audiences. The Korean press highlighted the overseas tour by advertising that \textit{The Last Empress} would contribute to the Korean economy while offering international respect.\textsuperscript{327} Kim Su Gil, the editorialist in \textit{Joongang Ilbo} claims that the musical has special value in that it contains Korean identity and aesthetics, calling it the product that sells the image of the nation as a significant player in overcoming the current financial hardship (IMF).\textsuperscript{328} The financial crisis in South Korea motivated ACom to assess its goals associated with \textit{The Last Empress} tours, and prompted a move from simply producing a unique Korean style musical on Broadway to commercializing the Korean culture abroad. In order to facilitate the new sales goals, marketing strategies needed to be adjusted.

**The Commercial Approach**

Even though the entire economic situation in Korean society had worsened in comparison to the 1997 tours, ACom received increased financial governmental support, i.e., a doubled investment for the 1998 tours. The Ministry of Culture and Tourism donated $500,000. In


\textsuperscript{326} “‘The Last Empress’ Will Go To America Again” \textit{The Seoul Shinmun}. 1 Jul, 1998.

\textsuperscript{327} Aae Ri Oh, “Making a Breakthrough of Recession abroad” \textit{The Munhwa Ilbo} 8 Jun, 1008:18.; “Globalizing Our Culture” \textit{Hankook Ilbo} 17 Jul, 1998:03.

particular, the government appointed the musical as one of eight governmental events in memory of the 5th Anniversary of the establishment of the Korean Government. Along with governmental support, large companies financially assisted ACom's 1998 tours with the condition of promoting company products. For example, Daewoo Motors, one of the largest motor companies in Korea, sponsored the musical on the condition that their new car, the “Leganza 2.2, would be displayed in the main lobbies of the Lincoln Center.” The model car was displayed in the main lobbies of both New York's Lincoln Center and Los Angeles' Shubert Theatre. *The Chosun Ilbo* evaluates Daewoo’s sponsorship of the musical as an ideal example of cultural vision that was initially mentored by the government.

Both the first New York tour in 1997 and the second one in 1998 were performed in August during the off-season. The 1998 New York tour began on July 31 and ran through August 23 in the Lincoln Center. ACom worked directly with Steve Levy, the general manager for the 1997 tour, deferring to his consultation on the performance location, as Levy had access to the artistic director of the Lincoln Center, who had been pleased with the musical's 1997 performance.

The last Californian tour of 1998 was performed in Los Angeles from mid-September to early October, which is the beginning of the main season. ACom reserved the performance spaces through a contact with Steve Levy. ACom obtained a total of 42 days for the 1998 U.S performances. For the L.A. tour, which began on September 11 and ran through October 4,

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331 “Our Car,” 19.
332 Song, Personal interview.
under Levy’s counsel, ACom contracted with the Shubert Theatre located in Beverly Hills, believing that the location of the theatre would appeal to wealthy residents in the area.\footnote{Song, Personal interview.}

In 1997, though focus was directed on the Korean-American community to obtain ticket sales, the marketing strategy was not overtly obvious. In contrast, Korean immigrants were directly targeted for the 1998 tours and constituted the primary market. During Korean press interviews, ACom admitted to its emphasis on attracting the U.S. Korean immigrant community, revealing its goal to evoke national identity and boost national artistic pride among the Korean expatriates. Intensification of marketing toward Koreans living in the United States and the $500,000 used in the advertising campaign resulted in 1998 having larger audiences compared to U.S. attendance statistics from 1997.\footnote{Ki Chul Kim, “Increased numbers of Reservation for The Last Empress: Positive Reception from the New York Times” The Chosun Ilbo. 7 Aug, 1998.}

Increased tickets sales in 1998 could also be partially attributed to extended performance dates. In 1997, The Last Empress had ten runs in New York, while in 1998, the production had fifty-five runs: 26 in New York and 29 in L.A.\footnote{The 1998 New York tour was held in the New York State Theatre of the Lincoln Center in New York, NY from July 28 to August 30 in 1998. The 1998 Los Angeles tour was held in the Shubert Theatre in L.A. CA, from September 11 to 27 1998.} Before ACom, Yun expected to earn $200,000 per each tour in New York and L.A. and spent four times more than the previous 1997 tour, $4 million.\footnote{“The Last Empress Visits the U.S. Audiences Again.” The Seoul Economy Daily. 3 Aug, 1998.; Jae Il Kim. “‘The Last Empress’ Reentering to Broadway.” The Korea Economy Daily 30 Jun,1998.} ACom advertised the musical to the major broadcasting networks such as ABC, NBC, and CNN, and the major press including the New York Times and the New York Post, etc. Furthermore, the company opened a bilingual Internet homepage specifically to introduce The Last Empress and had text in both Korean and English.\footnote{Song, Personal interview.}

Elaboration of Spectacles
ACom strengthened the spectacles of the 1998 tour, inserting elaborate Korean cultural settings in order to reinforce the nationalism emphasized by the current financial backers. Yun upgraded the 1997 staging, adding more intense color in the spectacles.

Park Dong Woo, the production's set designer, made improvements for the scenes taking place in the Gyeongbok Palace. To signify royal dignity, he installed a huge red awning in front of the previously used palace miniatures. The red awning, vaguely veiling the miniatures of the palace, supports a mystic mood surrounding the hermit kingdom of Chosun. Park also set up a double-leveled stage to visually reinforce the contrast between Chosun and Japan. In the upper level of the palace, Queen Min celebrates Russia’s political protection of Korea against Japan, whereas in the lower level, in the Atami House, Miura plots to kill the Queen. As Yun introduces this new setting change, he mentions that the double-leveled stage is also used in the Broadway musical, Sunset Boulevard. During “Seven Envoys” in Act 1, Scene 5 of The Last Empress, all characters that play foreign envoys wear big wooden feet to emphasize the tall image of Westerners and their power..

The revision of the script for the 1998 tours was influenced by the concurring financial crisis in South Korea. The contents were increased in nationalism to encourage Korean patriotism and to promote Korea’s readiness and strength to overcome the current crisis, while simultaneously appealing to the western audiences. The social, economic, and political crisis occurring in Korea prompted the company to divert from the original production goal, which was to create a Broadway style musical rooted in a unique Korean historical theme. The new focus was implementation of Korean culture and historical elements that would draw expatriates and

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generate renewed pride in the homeland culture and artistic ability. Furthermore, the elaborate spectacles were meant to also attract western audiences. During an interview with Lee Tae Won (the primary actress who played the role of Queen Min in the U.S.), a critic notes that one of the main purposes of the production is “to give to Americans a greater sense of Korean history and culture.”

During the interview with the Los Angeles Times, Yun argues, “we want to show the world that we have the capability of creating an artistic spectacle with a mixture of Korean musical and western production values.” He also claims that the choice of the project was derived from the following two-part question, ”What is Korea’s place in the world, and is Queen Min someone in our history who represents what the Korean contribution can be?”

Insertion of “State Examination for Military Service”

Yun explains that to solve the problematic parts in Act 1 that had been criticized due to the monotonous presentation in the narrative storyline, new spectacles were added. One of the most significant changes in the revision was to add a new musical number, ”State Examination for Military Service” in Act 1, Scene 8 (See Table 6). This scene is about the military exam where twelve military soldiers compete with each other, each trying to be selected as Chief of the Royal Guards. The choreography in this scene is based on one type of traditional martial arts, called taekgyeon.
Table 6
The List of Musical Numbers in the 1997 version and the 1998 Version*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Musical Numbers</th>
<th>1997</th>
<th>1998</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PROLOGUE</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Prelude</td>
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<td>1. Prelude</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Japan Has Chosen</td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Japan's Choice</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ACT I</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Scene 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Welcome to Our New Queen</td>
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<td>3. The Day We Greet the New Queen</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Scene 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Regency's Rule</td>
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<td>4. Regency of King's Father</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Soft is the Breeze</td>
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<td>5. Soft is the Spring Breeze</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. You, the Beautiful Person</td>
<td></td>
<td>6. Your Highness Is So Beautiful</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Who Is My Lover?</td>
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<td>7. There Is a Star in My Heart</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Scene 3</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Song of People</td>
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<td>11. Open the Door</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Four Japanese Merchants</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12. Soldier's Song</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Fight in the Marketplace</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13. Battle against the Foreigners (instrumental)</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. I'm Hong Gye Hoon</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Wish for a Prince</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. Open the Door</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. The Song of the Soldiers</td>
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<td>15. Battle against Western Countries</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Scene 4</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>17. You Are the King of Chosun</td>
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<td>15. You Are the King of Chosun</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Scene 5</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>19. Gojong's Meeting with Politicians</td>
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<td>17. King Gojong's Imperial Conference</td>
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<tr>
<td>20. Everything is Just Strategies</td>
<td></td>
<td>18. It's All a Scheme</td>
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<tr>
<td>21. The Seven Foreign Envoys</td>
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<td>19. Seven Foreign Envoys</td>
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<tr>
<td>22. The Four Japanese Merchants</td>
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<td>23. Itoh’s Ambition</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>24. Revolution of the Old Soldiers</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Scene 6</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>25. Military Mutiny of 1882</td>
<td></td>
<td>20. New Military Unit, Old Military Unit (added)</td>
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<tr>
<td>28. We Will Return to the Palace</td>
<td></td>
<td>23. How I Miss My Dear Queen</td>
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<tr>
<td>29. Wonsaegue and Daewongun</td>
<td></td>
<td>24. We Shall Return to the Palace</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Scene 7</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>30. Exil to China</td>
<td></td>
<td>25. Regent and General Yuan</td>
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<tr>
<td>31. Inoue Who Threatening Gojong</td>
<td></td>
<td>26. Regent Is Taken to China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. Queen Min Has Return</td>
<td></td>
<td>27. Inoue Threatens Gojong</td>
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<tr>
<td>33. We Shall Rise Again</td>
<td></td>
<td>28. Queen Min Has Return</td>
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<tr>
<td>34. Japan’s Chosun Policy</td>
<td></td>
<td>29. We Shall Rise Again</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>30. Meeting on Japan’s Policy in Chosun</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Table adapted from the original source.
Table 6 (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACT 2</th>
<th>1997</th>
<th>1998</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scene 8</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Dance in the Banquet</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Come Celebrate Our Reform</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. You Are Queen Elizabeth in Chosun</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Diplomatic Talks in the Banquet</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. The Sun is Rising in Chosun</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. It's Strange the Snow Flakes Are Falling</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scene 9</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. You Will Drink Miura's Wine</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Triple Intervention And Atami House</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. It's strange the Snow Flakes Are Falling</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scene 10</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Chosun's the Country of Dangun</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Miura's Audience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scene 11</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. The Queen Studies French Today</td>
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<td>13. By the Time This Drink Gets Cold</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. Welcome</td>
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<tr>
<td>15. Ritual for Fox Hunt</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scene 12</td>
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<tr>
<td>16. The Prince And the Queen</td>
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<tr>
<td>17. Where Did I See You?</td>
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<tr>
<td>18. You Are My Destiny</td>
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<tr>
<td>19. Shine My Dark Night</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scene 13</td>
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<tr>
<td>20. Don't Hurt the Queen</td>
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<tr>
<td>21. The Last of Hong Gye Hoon</td>
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<tr>
<td>22. The Queen Is Chased After the Wild Animal</td>
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<td>23. Kill the Queen And Find the fox</td>
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<tr>
<td>24. How Am I Supposed to live from Now on?</td>
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<tr>
<td>EPILOGUE</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>25. Rise, People of Chosun</td>
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<tr>
<th>ACT 2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scene 8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Dance at the Grand Banquet</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Come Celebrate Our Reforms</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Queen Elizabeth of Chosun</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Negotiations at the Grand Banquet</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. The Sun Is Rising in Chosun</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. It's Strange, Snow Flakes Are Falling</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scene 9</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. You Shall Drink the Wine Offered by Miura</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Triple Intervention And Atami House Conspiracy</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Isn't It Strange, Snow Flakes Are Falling</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scene 10</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. New Era for the Prince (revised)</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Miura's Audience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scene 11</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. The Situation Has Been Changed Fast</td>
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<td>13. The Queen Is Studying French Today</td>
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<td>14. By the Time This Drink Gets Cold</td>
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<td>15. Welcome</td>
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<td>Scene 12</td>
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<tr>
<td>17. The Prince And Queen</td>
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<td>18. Where Was It That We Met?</td>
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<tr>
<td>19. You Are My Destiny</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>20. Thunder and Lightning (added)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>21. Light up My Dark Night</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scene 13</td>
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<tr>
<td>22. Do Not Hunt the Queen</td>
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<tr>
<td>23. The Last of General Hong</td>
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<td>24. The Queen Is Hunted Down</td>
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<td>26. How Will I Live from</td>
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<td>27. The World After Death Now on</td>
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<tr>
<td>EPILOGUE</td>
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<tr>
<td>28. Rise, People of Chosun</td>
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</table>

Source: The Official Program of The Last Empress used in the 1997 New York tour, and the Official Program of The Last Empress used in the 1998 tours. *Note: Since Jeon Jun Tak newly translated English lyrics in the 1998 version, the titles of the musical numbers changed. Yet, the Korean titles of the musical numbers in the 1998 version did not change unless they were newly revised or added by the creative team.
Other changes that were made in the 1998 production include deletions of the songs “Fight in the Market Place” and “I am Hong Gye Hoon,” which were replaced by “State Examination for Military Service” in Act 1, Scene 2. Song and Yun noted that the “Fight in the Market Place” scene slows down the speed of the production by presenting the common life of citizens. This scene occurs while Hong (prior to his appointment as General) is on his way to take the military exam in Hanyang, the capital of Chosun. In the marketplace he witnesses the wrongdoings of the Japanese merchants and confronts them. The citizens have passively accepted the inferior products traded to them by the Japanese, complaining of the trickery amongst themselves, but refraining from direct confrontation. After Hong fights the Japanese merchants, he introduces himself, explaining that he wants to be a military general to protect his secret love (referring to, but not explicitly stating, Queen Min) in “I’m Hong Gye Hoon” in Act 1, Scene 3:

HONG GYE HOON I am Hong Gye Hoon, living in Yeo Joo. I can’t glance at any lady in town because I’m on my way to take the military exam in Han Yang to be a proud man for her. 345

In the 1997 version, Hong’s character is portrayed as witty, yet he displays integrity. He fights with the Japanese merchants, calling them “wolves in Chosun.” In the 1997 version, his character appears to be a type of Robin Hood, who relates to the general citizenry, evidenced in the “Marketplace,” which slightly hints at his brave character. As his character is not overtly displayed in other scenes, and Queen Min has not been mentioned as his one-sided love, his musical rendition of “You’re My Destiny” in Act 2, Scene 12, seems illogical. However, in the 1998 version, the insertion of the “State Examination for Military Service” clarifies Hong’s intention to apply for the exam, showing his physical masculinity along with his chivalrous

345 All lyrics in the 1997 version are from the official 1997 program of The Last Empress.
behavior. His passion to be the chief is to raise his social status, which would allow closer proximity to the Queen. Another interesting point in the 1998 scene is General Hong's increased attraction to the Queen and his personal purpose to gain greater access to her. This new presentation shows a lessening of his concern to represent the commoners. In the 1998 version, he fights for love rather than for the nation. Hong, after passing the examination, receives the sacred sword as a reward for achieving first place; here is where he first mentions Queen Min in “State Examination for Military Service” in Act 1, Scene 2:

HONG GYE HOON. By this sword given by His Majesty, I pledge to serve and defend the Throne, with all I have, 'till the end of the world. Heaven, please keep an eye on me! I will protect her. I will be her armor. Who will dare to challenge my blazing spirit? Nothing scares me; nothing will stop me from doing what I must do in my love for her. 346

Hong’s patriotism emerges in his mind, not because of his confrontational experience with the Japanese people, but because of his undying love for the Queen. This revision demonstrates the creative team's attempts to eliminate parts, resulting in reckless nationalism and the King and General Hong’s irrational praise to the Queen. 347

Notably, Queen Min sings, “Who is My Lover?” at the end of the Act 1, Scene 2, followed by the next scene, the "State Examination for Military Service” featuring Hong Gye Hoon. This dramatic structure provides the audience with the strong possibility that her “lover” might be Hong, and not the King. Overall, this new military exam scene strengthens Hong’s character and unveils a one-sided love relationship between Hong and Queen Min. The strategic placement of feminine, masculine, then mystic scenes (i.e., "Soft is the Spring Breeze," followed

346 All lyrics of the 1998 version are from the official 1998 programs of The Last Empress.
by "State Examination for Military Service," then "Shaman Rites"), transitioning from female dancers to male military exercises, then to female shamans, depicts the strict sexist roles which dominated the Chosun dynasty during the time of Queen Min. The spectacle of the military exam scene is a culturally harmonious balance, which reinforces the Queen’s character situated in the midst of Korean history.

An American theatre critic, Sue Ellen Case, analyzed the military scene, taking perhaps a more westernized approach to her evaluations of the 1998 version of *The Last Empress*, and comments on its gender-specific nature. In addition, Case opined the gender-specific aspects of both “Soft is the Spring Breeze” and “Shaman Rites.” Case aptly asserted that the military scene was made to express the power and skill of Korean soldiers. However, the scene not only depicts the role of masculinity in the Chosun dynasty, but also, according to Korean critics, simultaneously exhibits “Korean beauty.” The elaborate exposition in this scene replaced the previous 1997 Market Place scene, which had a predominant Japanese overtone. Rather than present a large dichotomy between Korean commoners and shrewd Japanese merchants, the 1998 version elevated the portrayal of Korean soldiers through elaborate military costumes embellished with luxurious and vibrant accessories.

In contradiction to Case’s argument and unlike the scenes in the “Fight in the Market Place,” the “State Examination for Military Service” functions as a bridge between “Soft is the Spring Breeze” and the “Shaman Rite.” The numbers were located in the beginning and the end of Scene 2, respectively. “Soft is the Spring Breeze” is sung by court ladies who serve the King, while the “Shaman Rite” is sung by a female shaman and her female assistant shamans who

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serve the Queen. “Soft is the Spring Breeze” presents “femininity” by displaying women dressed in pastel costumes with flower prints, performing a waltz-type dance accompanied by soft music. In contrast, in the “Shaman Rite,” female shamans display acrobatic dance movements, using jingling bells to make loud noises, and wearing flamboyant costumes. Although the “State Examination for Military Service” is placed between the two female numbers and functions as a “gender-specific” scene, the female-dominant scenes reflect the historical social climate of the Chosun dynasty. Specifically, during the late 19th century in Chosun dynasty, male dancers did not accompany court ladies, and women could not participate in military exams. Also, Korean Shamanism was considered a female practice. An alternate contemporary nonexist presentation would diminish historical accuracy and detract from the presentation of typical scenarios, which most likely surrounded Queen Min's life.

Other Deleted/Added Scenes

Unlike the “State Examination for Military Service” which replaced a 1997 scene, the 1998 creative team developed scenes containing longer songs accompanied by visual spectacles. “New Military Unit, Old Military Unit” in Act I, Scene 6 of the 1998 production presents a significant revision which combines the following four numbers into one, Act 1, Scene 5: “The Song of the People,” “Four Japanese Merchants II,” “Itoh’s Ambition,” and “Revolution of the Old Soldiers.” In “New Military Unit, Old Military Unit,” the creative team inserts a brief scene from the “Four Japanese Merchants II” and adds a new libretto at the end of the song. In the previous productions, it was not clear how Hong saved Queen Min during the military riot. Therefore, when Hong and the Queen performed a duet in 1997, “We will Return to the Palace,” the audience must make inference as to the reason Queen Min and Hong are together. This song

presents an explanation of the Queen's whereabouts after Hong helps her escape from the rioters. The original duet seems to be an abrupt introduction to an underlying love, not offering logical explanation as to why the two characters escaped from the riot. The 1998 revision, thus, added lines at the end of the song in order to draw a stronger connection to the plot line:

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HEAD COURT LADY KIM. Your Highness! We have to leave now!
GENERAL HONG. Please let me lead the way, Your Highness!
OLD UNIT. Let’s burn the Japanese Consulate! Search for the Queen! Let’s go to the Palace! Let’s bring the Regency back!
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According to history, Queen Min is disguised as a commoner, and Hong escorts her. During this scene, the Queen is physically protected by Hong, which provides vivid presentation of a potential romantic relationship between them. The escape dramatically leads the General and Queen Min into the duet, “We will Return to the Palace,” followed by hints of their relationship in the “New Military Unit and Old Military Unit” scene.

In addition, the creative team adds lines to the “New Military Unit and Old Military Unit” scene. This scene addresses the cause of the commoners' riots, portraying not only the cruel dominance of the Japanese soldiers, but also the Queen’s mismanagement of politics. In the previous 1997 productions, the lyrics of the military riot song do not mention anything about Queen Min. Thus, when the Regent is replaced at the King’s palace, his suggestion to prepare a funeral for the Queen sounds awkwardly illogical. Until the 1998 version was produced, the character of Queen Min was a bit propaganda-like and nationalistic. The critics point out that in the 1997 version the “interest of nationalistic sentiment” softened the Queen’s controversial character.352 Yet, Queen Min in the 1998 revision is different; people directly blame the Queen for her poor management of politics. She is attributed to processing Chosun's modernization

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352 Greene, 69.
policies, neglecting the voice of the people, and involving herself in nepotism by seating relatives in public positions. Therefore, in the 1998 version of *The Last Empress*, doubt is openly shed upon Queen Min’s character via the creative team's presentation of her as a primary cause of the riots, along with her controversial role in the "modernization" of Chosun. Although the 1998 version is more nationalistic, it also strives to preserve authenticity when presenting the Queen's realistic heroism.

“Itoh’s Ambition” is also deleted because the song does not add dramatic effect to the conflict between Queen Min and Itoh or to the Queen's relationship with Miura. In the 1997 version, “Itoh’s Ambition” reads more like simultaneous events spurted from a history book. In this number, consequently, the Japanese ambition to invade Korea reverberates throughout the nation and muddles the conflict between Queen Min and Miura.

The crisis in the entire plot occurs in Act 2, Scene 11. This scene is more dramatic and structured in the 1998 version. In this later version, Queen Min insists that the Royal Guard Unit be dismissed because they are “the hands and the feet of Japan.” According to the revisionists’ history, the idea of dismissing the Royal Guard Unit provoked Miura to schedule the assassination earlier than originally planned. The primary motivation for the Queen's assassination did not fully materialize on stage until the 1998 version when the creative team added a new number, “The Situation Has Been Changed Fast,” in the beginning of Act 2, Scene 11. Here, Miura not only explains the reason why he had changed the schedule for the assassination, but also confirms that the Regent should be involved in the murder:

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354 This musical exactly follows the conventional plot of the drama. According to Aristotle’s plot diagram, Act 2, scene 11, is part of the “Crisis”. I analyze the dramatic structure of the musical based on Aristotle’s plot diagram. For example, in the 1998 version, the starting point is the Wedding. Then, "Bearing a Baby Boy" is second. The Triggering point is the "Shaman Rite." The Exposition (3) is "The King Declares Direct Rule" and the second Exposition is the "Military Riot" scene. The third Exposition is "The Triplet Intervention", The Crisis is "Miura's Audience." The Climax is the "Fox Hunt" (Queen's assassination). The Falling Action is "Rise, People of Chosun."
MIURA. Gentleman, there is a sudden development. The Training Unit we plan to mobilize as the bait for the foxhunt will be dismissed tomorrow, which calls for immediate execution of Foxhunt. (…) The Regent by our side is critical for the operation. Deploy Japanese Garrison exactly as scheduled!

The musical numbers following “The Situation Has Been Changed Fast” present a dramatic contrast to each other. For example, while Queen Min studies French, Miura proceeds with the death ceremony for the plotted assassination. In the 1997 version, the Regent's involvement in the Queen’s assassination is not fully explained. With the 1998 insertion of “The Situation Has Been Changed Fast,” the Regent is shown to be fully aware of the Japanese plot to kill the Queen and is indirectly involved in Queen Min’s assassination through silence.

Act 2 contains numerous contrasting scenes utilizing the double stage, depicting peace and harmony in Queen Min’s private life versus the outside evil plotting by Miura. For example, in Scene 9, the Queen and the King celebrate their certainty that the triple intervention will prevent a Japanese invasion of the Korean nation. Meanwhile, on another part of the stage, Miura holds a meeting with the Queen’s assassins. In Scene 10, Queen Min and the King are happily enjoying their son when Miura pays the Royals a visit. In Scene 11, Miura leads assassins in a ritualistic ceremony that includes a shot of sake prior to the brutal slaying of Queen Min. Simultaneously, the Queen studies French and socializes with ladies from France, Russia, and America.

The lyrics, not the score, of the 1997 “Chosun is the Country of Dangun” in Act 1, Scene 4 were revised for the 1998 version and the title was changed to the song for the Prince, “New Era for the Prince.” Dangun is the founder of Gochosun, the first historically recognized nation of Korea. Chosun was named after Gochosun in memory of Dangun’s spirit, who is fabled as
the son between the god and Ungnyeo, a bear-woman who used to be a bear but transformed into a human being under the god’s order. However, in the 1998 production, the entire theme of the song revolves around the Prince, rather than the history of Chosun. The creative team's aim is to highlight the Prince as a next generation who continues to rule the nation. Park Sang Hyun, the assistant director of the musical from 1995 to 1998, who served as a member of creative team and contributed to the literary aspects, explains that the focus of this scene changed from Dangun to the Prince due to ACom's projection that Dangun is less known to the global audience. Therefore, the creative team replaced the history of Dangun with aspects of Confucianism. In the revised production, the scene commences with the Prince learning the four virtues of Confucianism from his royal tutor.

In Act 2, Scene 12, the creative team added a short scene entitled “Thunder and Lightening” between General Hong’s aria, “You’re My Destiny” and Queen Min’s aria, “Light up My Dark Night.” The scene is specially formed with librettos between the Queen and the Prince. In this scene, the Prince enters the Queen’s bedroom requesting if he could sleep next to her, fearful of the thunder sounds. In response, Queen Min persuades him to return to his room, explaining the inevitable facts of nature. The audience senses that the Prince is still young and Queen Min is an ordinary mother who wants to teach discipline to her son. With the insertion of this scene, Act 2, Scene 13, the relationship between the Queen and the Prince appears more tragic and sympathetic compared to the 1997 production. The thunderstorm foreshadows the life storm about to confront the Prince as the Queen is tragically killed soon after. Though Queen Min is presented as maternal and empathetic towards her son, Miura is a harsh bolt of lightening that forces the Prince to identify his dying mother’s mutilated body.

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356 Park Sang Hyun, Personal Interview on September 3, 2011.
The creative team adds more lyrics to the beginning of “Rise, People of Chosun” in the epilogue to increase the tragic mood of the musical. New York audiences acclaimed “Rise, People of Chosun.” Anita Gates from the New York Times argues, “The closing number is enough to stir people of any nationality.”357 Lee Hoo Nam from the Joogang Ilbo reported that audiences in New York appreciated the final number of “Rise, People of Chosun” with a standing ovation.358 Therefore, the creative team reinforced the power of the production's nationalist ending through increased dramatic effects. For example, the aria by Queen Min was lengthened from five to ten lines and the chorus repeated the reprise in a lower tone.359 Consequently, the number's dramatic intensity magnified. Additionally, the villainous presentation of Japan increased a nationalistic response. One Korean critic argued that The Last Empress commercialized the image of Japan to evoke Koreans’ anti-Japanese patriotism by stimulating the domestic audiences’ sentiment as a colonized people.360 Though the revised ending has come under criticism, it has remained the same in subsequent versions, though other numbers have changed. The inserted lines in “Rise People of Chosun” in the 1998 version are as follows:

PEOPLE. Lament! Her Highness the Queen! Her Flame is now extinguished!

QUEEN. Chosun is the land of the morning calm, with innocent and gentle people.

Will they try to protect their land against all the perils in the years to come?

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PEOPLE. Graceful land and fertile field were raped, and our dear Queen has left in our grief. This humiliation brought by wicked Japan; will they ever vanish from our minds?

When analyzing the aforementioned lyric addition from the 1998 revision, it seems the character Queen Min and the people are more unified than in the previous productions. With the addition of the citizens' lamentation of her death, the Queen becomes the “mother of the country,” a woman respected by the people. Queen Min changes from a pitiful woman in 1997, trapped by the chaotic moment of history, to the responsible Queen martyred to save the nation. Although Yun argues that he tried to “soften” nationalistic parts of the musical that had been criticized, the ending scene remains nationalistic. Another journalist argues that the enchantment of the Queen and forceful patriotism remain after their feeling of catharsis through her death.\(^{361}\) Although “Rise, People of Chosun” is musically magnificent, the revised lyrics comply with the Korean government and financial backers' political agenda to make *The Last Empress* more nationalistic.

**Translation**

The supertitles and lyrics of the 1998 version were entirely re-translated into English to deliver the precise meaning of the original Korean language with legible colloquial translations. Yun requested certain musical numbers be translated into English so that English-speaking audiences could better understand the 1998 production. He pointed out that the 1997 version generalized the contents of the lyrics and missed significant poetic expressions and background information nestled in the Korean lyrics.\(^{362}\) The English supertitles for the 1998 tour were


\(^{362}\) Yun, Personal interview.
changed to more easily facilitate the western audiences' understanding by using common expressions and richer vocabulary."\textsuperscript{363}

The new translator for the 1998 version was Jeon Jun Tak, a professor of English literature at Korea University. Jeon specializes in modern interpretation of Shakespeare and has published several articles in both the Korean and English language. For the 1998 version, he not only retranslated all of the supertitles but also rewrote the English lyrics for six musical numbers: “Your Highness Is So Beautiful” in Act 1, Scene 2; “Open the Door!” in Act I, Scene 3; “Seven Foreign Envoys” in Act 1, Scene 5; “Triple Intervention and Atami House Conspiracy” in Act 2, Scene 9; “Welcome” and “The Queen Is Studying French Today” in Act 2, Scene 11.\textsuperscript{364}

The English supertitles for the 1998 version were more exact than in 1997 because Jeon meticulously translated every word and expression into more accurate interpretations. The 1997 shaman’s song, “Shaman Rite,” in Act 1, Scene 2 was described in the supertitle as simply “She is Praying” without additional lyric lines, whereas its lyrics were entirely translated in the 1998 version. Park Sang Hyun states the last few lyrics in the number were significant because they provided the justification for the Queen’s rule of the nation.\textsuperscript{365} After the shaman’s incantations, the soul of King Taejo (the first king of the Chosun dynasty), possessed by the shaman's spirit, predicts the future of the nation:

SHAMAN. (…) Oh, I see now the ghost of King Taejo and I hear him exclaim! (…) Listen! Can you hear the baby crying? He will preserve the Throne for the thousand years to come. And the nation’s future is in the hands of the lady with a manly spirit!

\textsuperscript{365} Park, Personal interview.
In Jeon’s English translation above, the shaman foreshadows Queen Min’s greatness by foretelling that the nation depends on “the lady with a manly spirit.” This depicts the Queen as a heroine for the nation. It also shows that the Queen’s very presence marks an extraordinary social situation wherein a female-ruler has power traditionally attributed to males. During the late nineteenth century, during the Chosun dynasty, male dominance was considered the norm, and to have a female with male authority broke traditional role barriers in the Korean society.

Jeon’s 1998 translation, however, degrades the historical value of the production by misinterpreting some significant expressions without considering the historical perspective of the Chosun dynasty. Jeon translated the lyrics of a head court lady, Park, in “Your Highness Is Beautiful” to the following: “Your Highness, gather your feeling, and try to ignore what you see,” Act 1, Scene 2. The English translation of “gather your feeling” comes from 성정을 가다듬고, which is an old idiom used among royalty, meaning, “pacifying your temperament and mind” or simply, “calm yourself down” in English. Jeon separately interpreted the noun, 성정, into “feeling”, and the verb, 가다듬고, into “gather.” As a result, Jeon’s word-by-word translation delivers awkward expression rather than original meanings of the Korean lyrics, as his interpretations presented old Korean phrases into literal explanations. “King Gojong’s Imperial Conference” in Act 2, Scene 5, emphasizes the serious political conflict between the conservative group, “Sugu-pa,” and the liberal group, “Gaehwa-pa,” during King Gojong’s administration. Jeon simply interpreted both groups using two English words "isolationists" and “modernists,” though the Korean meaning is much more complex.

ISOLATIONISTS. Heaven and earth will erupt if our tradition is disturbed.

MODERNISTS. Even the moon changes its shape! Everything in this world changes. How can we live with our back to the sun?
Modernization is the way to go!

KING. Are isolationists and modernists arguing again? I am tired of their endless disputes. Modernization is now our policy and we shall not go back.

Stop arguing and discuss how to take advantage of the foreign powers.

In fact, “Gaehwa-pa” cannot be defined as merely “modernists” because the meaning of Gaehwa is to open the culture to others in order to have a “contemporized” or “civilized” society. This Korean meaning implies independence and spontaneity in “developing” or “thickening the cultural aspects for the nation.” The other group, “Sugu-pa,” is also translated differently by Jeon. “Sugu-pa” represents different branches of conservative groups in Chosun and its meaning is better represented as “one who carefully considers other cultural aspects” rather than strict avoidance of other cultures.

Jeon simplified poetic expressions of various Korean lyrics by overly explaining them in general words. Anita Gates from The New York Times notes that the English supertitles “weren’t always so poetic.” She points out one of Jeon’s English translations of lyrics in “New Military Unit, Old Military Unit” was written as “We have modern weapons. Your rusty guns are for the birds.” Although Gates rephrases them, she indicates the banality of the lyrics along with the simple descriptions. In the Korean script for the 1998 tour, in the translation of

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367 Shin, Hyung Sik and Lee, Bae Yong, 199.
370 Gates, “Domestic.”
371 The phrase that Gates quoted was originally written as, “You with old rusty guns, go shoot the sparrows. And admire our modern weapons glistening in the sun” (1.6. 4-6).
“New Military Unit, Old Military Unit” in Act 1, Scene 6, the lyrics of the number were formed with nouns to create sarcasm in the phrases used during the Chosun dynasty.


During this number, the Japanese military soldiers and the Korean military soldiers confront each other showing opposite circumstances. The following lyrics were the response from the old military unit of Korean soldiers:

OLD MILITARY. Empty salary for ten months. Finally, we got it. Half of rice. Half of sand. What happened?

Yang purposely uses nouns to display the historical situation that Japanese soldiers, due to Korea’s weakness under Japan’s social and political domination unfairly treated Korean soldiers. In Jeon’s translation, however, these literal expressions were ignored and rephrased as explanatory summaries of the meanings of the lyrics. Paul Hodgins from *The Orange County Register* also notes that the lyrics make it “hard not to giggle when a bravely belted melody is accompanied by supertitles.” He specifies the King’s line of the English supertitles in “King Gojong’s Imperial Conference” in Act 1, Scene 5, and notes that “Modernization is our policy and it is impossible go back” seems like “reading the text to a Soviet five-year plan.” In the Korean version for the 1998 tour, the same lines are written as “Gaehwa had already been endorsed in 1866, and we cannot go back to the previous policy” in Act 1, Scene 5. In Jeon’s 1997 version, the King is a stubborn character who forces people to adjust to the new policy.

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rather than someone who is wisely trying to reconcile the two political groups by using factual evidence. In an effort to deliver more precise and poetic meanings to western audiences, ACom attempted to upgrade the supertitle translations and even added English musical numbers. The critics did not grasp the lyrics' original meanings, however, and instead pointed out the inaccurate English expressions.

In summary, the creative team revised the 1997 script for the 1998 productions based on the reviews from both Korean and American critics. The 1998 tour, having received $50,000 of financial backing from the Korean government, and the government’s approval to borrow the total budget of $400,000 from national banks and other individual sponsors, responded to this support by including nationalistic revisions to the script. Enhancement of spectacles was a method to implement nationalism, which ACom hoped to garner approval from international audiences. In addition, unnecessary scenes were deleted, lines were added, and lyrics were altered to strengthen the plot and character development. Yun believed that the precise delivery of the Korean lyrics is also significant to convey the quality of the production. He hired a new translator for the 1998 tour. Though the musical was performed using the Korean language and utilized English supertitles, the professionalism and accuracy of the translations were still called into question by critics.

Production Reviews

When revising The Last Empress for its 1998 tour, ACom considered the global audience's visual appetite, adding cultural elements such as elaborate props (i.e., traditional costumes, dancers, ornate fans) and strengthening the flow of the storyline. Though visual improvements were attempted, the critics' comments were similar to those given to the 1997 tour. The focuses of critics in New York and Los Angeles were primarily on the mega-scaled
spectacles and weak dramatic production for both years. The critics from New York evidenced a more limited interest in the 1998 tour, perhaps because the musical had been performed only one year earlier in the same place. Reports from the Korean newspapers in both Korea and New York appeared favorable, as did reviews from Los Angeles regarding the 1998 production. Song recalled that the Korean immigrant communities in Los Angeles supported the musical, and most of the audience members during the running periods of the production were from the Korean communities.  

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The production reviews received from the New York critics were mixed. Unlike the previous 1997 tour, the 1998 version contained a considerable fusion of eastern and western cultures. The Los Angeles critics praised the visual aspects of the production: Paul Hodgins described it as “an unqualified success,” “even rarer spare-no-expense spectacle,” and a creation of “a tangible reality.”  

374 The reviews concerning the 1997 production showed the musical as bombastic, void of meaning, and imitating Broadway musicals with little originality. In contrast, the 1998 version increased fusion and spectacles, intertwining them with a more coherent plot.

Unlike the “interculturalism” (i.e., fusion of eastern and western styles) sarcasm from 1997, the U.S. critics from New York and Los Angeles observed the westernized flair of the musical as a positive progress of understanding western culture. For example, one critic analyzed The Last Empress as “a fascinating amalgam of East and West” in terms of its way of presenting spectacle and its truthful deliverance of cultural origins as well as the historical story, unlike other Broadway musicals that excessively emphasize extravaganzas.  

375 Rita Moran argues that the show was an “uneasy blend of Eastern and Western theatrical forms but fascinates

373 Song, Personal interview.  
375 Hodgins, F32.
nonetheless.” Nonetheless, she was amazed by the fusion of the authentic culture of Korea and its language and history within a Broadway-style extravaganza.

The nationalistic plot and lack of character development remained a review issue. *The LA Times* mockingly renamed *The Last Empress* as “The Lost Empress” due to Queen Min’s character portrayal as “no more than a resonant national symbol” and “an exhausting role” which follows documented deeds without revealing her personal emotion. For example, Jim Farber commented that the musical provides “ultra-patriotic glorification of Korean nationalism” by pointing out it is “short on character development and long on character assassination, with the Japanese as the primary target.” Similarly, the *Daily News* wondered how a non-Asian audience could understand the "sensitive subject matter between Japan and Korea” along with “anthem-like melodies.” The critics opined Kim Hee Gap’s music lacks uniqueness and merely imitates Broadway musical numbers. Reed Johnson of the *Daily News of Los Angeles* criticizes Kim for clichéd music that stems from his “Andrew Lloyd Webber-esque showmanship,” comparing it to the *Pacific Overture, Les Misérables*, and *Cats*.

While critics from New York and Los Angeles were pointing to the chauvinistic contents of the musical and discussing its superficial “westernization,” Korean communities were welcoming its national aspects, embracing the musical as a symbol of their identity. The press from the Korean-American community mainly reported the historical and social value of the musical, considering the musical as a point of national pride. *The Korea Times in New York* acclaims the certified quality of the 1998 musical, citing the huge financial support from the

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377 Segal, F-1.
380 Johnson, L17.
Korean government as well as from big Korean companies as stamps of approval. The Korea Times in New York also noted The Last Empress unifies the Korean immigrant community, providing the 'one point five' (teenage immigrant) and the 'second' (U.S. born and raised) generations of Koreans with a Korean identity. On the other hand, Che Soo Kyung argued that the musical should have applied more traditional Korean theatrical styles, suggesting use of either changguk (Korean opera) or talchum (mask dance) in order to present Korean culture to a western audience. For the Korean communities in New York, Korean traditional theatrical forms are not their focus; rather, the communities try to make the musical a mark in the Broadway theatre industry.

The Korean-American press in Los Angeles, including The Korea Central Daily, and The Korea Times celebrated the 1998 tour in LA with pride. Ahn Yoo Hyae, from The Korea Central Daily, titled her report “The Korean-made Musical that Surprised the World” and writes about the potential commercial success of the musical. Ahn argued that the musical balances the disadvantages of the historical drama by framing it in a western style musical.

The Korean press, on the other hand, addressed the possibility of the cultural product. Compared to the poor record of exporting commodities, the musical suggests the globalization of a cultural product. Lee Kwang Hyung, a reporter in the cultural desk of The Kukmin Daily points out that, after loosing its financial budget in the U.S., ACom earned its profit by performing the encore shows to Korean audiences back home. It is true: its marketing strategy

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was financially successful after going back to Korea. ACom emphasizes the value of the musical by highlighting its international experiences, especially its experience on Broadway. Consequently, the ticket sales in 1999 increased. Since the musical’s U.S. tours from 1997 to 1998, the ticket sale in South Korea has been up sharply: 69% increase in 1998, and 73% increase in 1999. Some critics argued that ACom’s strategy was not even global but more targeted at the domestic audiences, provoking their fantasy and convention of grand Broadway musical theatre.

Conclusion

The musical’s second tour in the United States in 1998 was revised in consideration of the political and economic situations in South Korea, whereas ACom modified the musical for the 1997 tour under the assumption that western audiences would enjoy the West End and Broadway style musical replete with Korean history and exotic components.

The 1998 tour, however, elicited responses from western critics concerning typecasting and stereotypical portrayal of characters (i.e., primarily Asian female characters and the female shaman viewed as a dragon lady). In addition, the musical has become a symbol of cultural identity and a source of pride due to its historical contents within Broadway-styled elements. Although The Last Empress set a new precedent for Korean musical theatre, reviews from the Korean immigrant press barely discussed the theatrical value of the production. Rather, the media agencies in the Korean community mainly portrayed its nationalized resonance. Since ACom's U.S. tour from 1997 to 1998, the musical has been acclaimed as the representative of a cultural project in Korea, being called “the national musical” by the Korean press due to its

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global contribution of announcing Korean culture to the West. Non-Korean critics, on the other hand, pointed out the musical's chauvinistic descriptions of the nation that appeared as propaganda that lacked dramatic aspects.

Although ACom enthusiastically promoted the musical by increasing running dates and actively advertising to the western audience in attempt to gain recognition as a competition in the 1998 tour, the western response did not match ACom's expectation. It appears that the adjustments made in the script and lyrics based on the 1997 tour reviews and western reception did not address the fundamental issues surrounding *The Last Empress*. In spite of numerous revisions, the western audience continues to view this Korean-made musical not as a novel musical from, but instead as a merely exotic one-time event.

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CHAPTER 4

TRANSITION: 2002 LONDON TOUR

_The Last Empress’_ third tour was in London in 2002, and it was the first and only tour fully performed in English. The 1998 version included just eight musical numbers with English lyrics amidst the otherwise exclusively Korean production. ACom expected to impress the London audience with its Korean original production presented entirely in the English language by Korean actors. Yun Ho Jin, the director of the musical stressed the necessity of performing the musical in English because the U.K is “the Motherland of importing musicals as well as the forward base of English language.” He stated that he sought to perform the English version in London to see how the musical would compete against mainstream mega-musicals such as _Phantom of the Opera, Cats, Les Misérables_, and _Miss Saigon_. The Korean press expected that the English translation of the musical would be a more accessible cultural product of Korea. _MBC News Desk_ reported on the musical’s London tour by noting that if this tour was successful, the musical would be appointed as the real cultural product of Korea. Na Jong Il from _The Munhwa Ilbo_ likened The Last Empress to _kimchi_ (one of the representative Korean style pickle that has exported to foreign countries) in that this London tour would introduce a new Korean cultural product to Europe.

Even though the Korean government financially supported the production and credible western artists and staff joined the creative team, the London production of _The Last Empress_ fell short of the elevated expectations of the Korean media. Having previously received controversial reception from London critics, ACom had rearranged the Korean scripts for

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390 Yun, Personal interview.
392 Jong Il Na “_The Last Empress’ Visit London_.” _The Munhwa Ilbo_ 5 Jan, 2002:06.
subsequent tours, including this one in 2002. What happened to the London tour? Was the English version not very appealing to London audience? Were the production reviews in London fair to some extent? In this chapter, I observe how ACom produced the English version for the London tour by collaborating with western artists and staff. I also analyze the 2002 London script by examining the discrepancies between the previous Korean versions and the 2002 London script in plot, character development, and themes. In doing so, I explore the new interpretations of the themes and characters that the problematic English translation brought to light. Lastly, the London critics’ reception and ACom’s reaction to the critics in London are examined.

Collaboration with Western Teams

The musical, performed in the Apollo Hammersmith Theatre in London, started its run on February 1 and ran through February 16, 2002, with nineteen performances. For the English version of the musical, ACom changed not only the creative team but also the production team to consist of British, Australian and American artists. The new creative team members were Georgiana St. George as the English lyricist and composer, John Rigby as the conductor, and Stephen Coleman together with Peter Casey as orchestrators. Lee Hee Whan had searched extensively for a regional lyricist and found St. Georgiana George. Born in Liverpool and educated in U.K., St. George went to New York and collaborated with many songwriters to create songs that were performed in cabaret venues. She wrote the music and lyrics for The Bar, a one-act environmental musical of her own concept in 1989. St. George, a composer as well

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393 “The Last Empress” ACom, 2002.
as a lyrist, was commissioned by Yun to re-compose some of the musical numbers. It took two years to complete the English lyrics along with the insertion of new musical numbers.\footnote{Gap Sik Kim, “The Indegeous Musical, ‘The Last Empress’ Will Perform in English: The Mother of Chosun Will Enter the Stage in the U.K.” The Dong-A Ilbo 9 Jan. 2002:47.}

Peter Casey, who had worked with ACom on the musical since 1995, worked with the orchestrator, Stephen Coleman, for the 2002 tour. Coleman received his Bachelor’s degree in Music Composition in New York, assisted many musical productions at Cameron Mackintosh, LTD, and orchestrated Oliver and My Fair Lady. The new conductor was John Rigby whose conducting credits include The King & I, Joseph and the Amazing Dreamcoat, and By Jeeves. He also worked as a music director for Starlight Express, Miss Saigon, and Napoleon.\footnote{The Official Production Program of The Last Empress for London Tour in 2002 (Seoul: ACom, 2002).}

Lee Hee Hwan, the general manager of the production, worked with Sue Hyman, a press representative, to arrange collaboration with western artists. Hyman arranged the “Press Night” on 5th and 6th of February, inviting over 200 musical theater critics and journalists from the Sunday Times, Independent, Times, Observer, Sunday Telegraph, and Guardian, etc.\footnote{“The Press Release Document for the 2002 London Tour” ACom, 2002.} Song Kyung Ok, an associate producer for the London tour, recalls that during the Press Night, these critics viewed the performance and participated in the post-performance reception led by Sue Hyman.\footnote{Song, Personal interview.}

For the 2002 tour, British companies led most of the work regarding marketing and advertisement. Sue Hyman introduced the British marketing and advertisement team, Dewynters, to ACom.\footnote{Dewynter’s official website is available: www.dewynters.com.} The company promoted Mackintosh’s productions including Cats, Les Misérables, Starlight Express, The Witches of Eastwick, and My Fair Lady.\footnote{For more information about Dewynter’s company www.dewynters.com.} They put advertisements of The Last Empress in over thirty of the media outlets in London, on building
billboards, and on bulletin boards of London's subway. The marketing team determined that the main target audience was people living in the areas of Kensington, Cheswick, and Richmond, as well as the subscribed members from National Theatre, South Bank Center, The Royal Albert Hall, Ticket Master, and Barbican Art Center. The marketing team targeted the diverse audience members from China, Korea, and India, as well as tourists and students in international studies.

Since Deywnters arranged the general marketing plan, the marketing team from ACom focused on specific contact with the Korean immigrant community in London through the London Korean Cultural Center. Additionally, many Korean students who were studying in London voluntarily helped ACom to promote the production to the Korean community. As a result of working with western artists and staff, ACom enjoyed a large amount of publicity and the productions were well attended. On average, the audience consisted of 40% Koreans and 60% non-Koreans in the West End, London, and more than twenty media agencies covered the musical over the five-day run. The Korean government, specifically the Korea Foundation and the Minister of Culture and Tourism, also financially backed the tour; its total investment was 1.7 billion dollars. The total number of audience members was 15,000, which represented the seats being 40% filled for each performance. The total ticket sale for the 2002 London tour was £376,000 ($701,400) and a total financial deficit of 3 billion dollars was the result. Besides the financial debt, ACom concluded that the tour was a noteworthy experience to comprehend the current climate of the London musical theatre market and the environment of

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403 Song, Personal interview.
405 “‘The Last Empress’ Debuts in the U.K.” Seoul Economy Daily. 8 Jan, 2002.
criticism among London critics. Nonetheless, ACom’s London tour dismantled the essence of the musical including plot, themes and characters because ACom and the western crews worked separately. According to Song, Yun did not work with St. George’s English script, but Lee Hee Whan, the general manager, commented on her scripts throughout the process of her revision. Did ACom simply trust western crews because of their western cultural background? Did Yun assume that the western creative and production teams would produce a more westernized version? Due to the weak teamwork between ACom and the western groups, the 2002 London production had controversial results.

English Lyrics

St. George’s adaptation of the English lyrics and inclusion of additional music ultimately changed the characteristics of the musical. St. George’s influence on the 2002 London tour was felt in three ways. First, she took the English supertitles originally used in the 1997 and 1998 tours and used them as a foundation for her complete English translation. This rendered the resulting adaptation problematic, as it was even further removed from the original. Next, St. George composed nine of her own musical scores, complete with new lyrics, and inserted them into the production. The result was musically inconsistent and disjointed. Finally she altered the entire plot structure. Unlike the previous versions, which had 2 acts and 13 scenes with a prologue and epilogue, St. George’s version consisted of a prologue, Act 1, Act 2, and an epilogue devoid of scene numbers (See Table 7).

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408 Song, Personal interview.
Table 7.
The List of Musical Numbers in the 1998 Version and the 2002 Version (St. George’s 2002 changes are in bold)

<table>
<thead>
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<th>1998</th>
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Julie Sanders, an English scholar, in *Adaptation and Appropriation* explains that “[adaptation] is achieved most often by offering a revised point of view from the ‘original,’ adding hypothetical motivation or voicing the silenced and marginalized.” St. George merely inserted musical numbers with new lyrics and altered content and themes. Her changes resulted in a neglect of the main themes, which brings into question her role as a lyricist. The lyrics St. George created were not “reinterpretations of established texts in new generic contexts.” St. George’s inexplicable work as an organizer of English lyrics and an adaptor of the production resulted in a lack of recognizable plot cohesion, which devalued the historical relevance and global impact of the Korean musical and left audiences confused.

St. George revised all numbers, merging some of them or completely deleting others from the 1998 version, resulting in the removal of significant dramatic actions. The two musical numbers, “Four Japanese Merchants” and “Itoh’s Ambition,” were rewritten and reinserted into the 2002 version. Yet, St. George rearranged the “Four Japanese Merchants” and “Itoh’s Ambition” again and placed them right before “Special Task Squad and Old Army” in the revised version of “New Military Unit, and Old Military Unit.” In the 2002 London version, “Four Japanese Merchants” and “Special Task Squad and Old Army” overlapped in content. In both numbers, the Japanese merchants manipulate the quality and price of their products to conceal their desire to conquer Korea. In the number, “Four Japanese Merchants,” in Act 1, the four Japanese Merchants sing:

ALL [Four Japanese Merchants]:

Buy here! Goods for sale! Come see exciting things on offer today!

Buy here! Half price sale! You have to buy to pass and be on your way!

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410 Sanders, Julie. 19.
We have an interesting selection that you’ve never seen before.

Once you have tested them, you’ll come to us and beg to buy some more.

Buy here! Quality. If you have no money, you can pay with your land!

Buy here! Nothing free. Your house and contents will be cash in our hand.

So learn your lesson! You come and buy! You keep us happy! Then you won’t die!411

After the completion of the number, they reappear on stage singing “Special Task Squad and Old Army” in Act 1:

JAPANESE [Four Japanese Merchants]:

We don’t like Chosun; we find the people really dumb.

We can sell them anything and that is what we’ve done.

If you have no money, you can pay another way.

Come and see what we can offer you this very fine day.

Welcome to the new elite – come and take your pick.

We do not sell “army surplus.”

Come and take a look at what we’ve got to offer you.

You old soldiers need to take a hike and go away - boo-hoo-hoo-. 

The selected parts above, from both numbers in 2002, emphasize that the Japanese people cheat by selling inferior or inadequate items to the Korean people. "The Japanese also belittle the people of Korea and see them has having "uncivilized ways." Both numbers express the same content, contributing to redundancy. Consequently, the plot dragged and was awkwardly structured, and the content appeared jumbled.

St. George also deleted the dialogue of the skit scene in which General Hong helps the Queen, disguised as a common citizen, escape from the fiery military soldiers who are chasing her. Though the escape is performed in mime in the 2002 version, the brief conversation between General Hong and Queen Min is omitted, which blurs the motivation that would have lent support to their duet, “Where Was It That We Met?” Additionally General Hong’s love song to the Queen, “You’re My Destiny,” is rendered nonsensical and unreasonable without this relational history. Presentation of this now shallow relationship portrayed with serious love songs is confusing as the scene lacks connective events on either side of it.

In addition to St. George’s inconsonant edition, her misuse of poetic expressions and omission of key critical phrases led to flat character performances, a vague storyline, and inefficient delivery. For example, “It’s All a Scheme,” in Act 1, Scene 5, is a critical scene in the musical because of its cultural and political relevance. In the 1998 Korean version, Queen Min explains to King Gojong the necessity of opening the diplomatic door to foreign countries:

QUEEN. […] A jackal and a wolf never share their prey. While they keep their eyes on one another, we will prosper and grow our strength and our days will come sooner than we imagine […].

In the lyrics above, the audience understands that the Queen sacrifices Chosun as “a prey” for foreign forces (i.e., the typology of a jackal and a wolf) in order to keep the nation together. Her diplomatic strategy is to rent her nation as a battlefield to foreign countries in order to increase awareness of advanced cultures and technology. Accordingly, audiences recognize her shrewd but risky strategies against Japan. However, in the 2002 version, St. George mistranslates the lines, omitting the symbolic expressions:
QUEEN. [...] they will not bring harm to us if we honor them with trust. Let them in, and set them free—just let them be! This way we open ourselves up to new growth and prosperity; our children will have wealth and security.

[...]

In doing so, Queen Min’s words lack the level of danger that comes with the savage images of the jackal and the wolf. In the 2002 London version, Queen Min persuades the King to simply “trust” foreign countries willingly and allow foreign powers to settle in the nation. Unlike the aggressive and brave expression used in the Korean lyrics, the Queen in the 2002 London version presents herself as a naive and gullible politician who adores foreign powers, believing in their perceived generosity.

Since St. George differently interpreted the main characters, the storyline of the musical in the 2002 London version is more melodramatic. The King and the Queen, in the 2002 version, are romantic and are presented as domestic partners functioning as representatives of historical and social figures in the Chosun dynasty era. In previous versions, the King and Queen's relationship centers on political discussions and Korean hierarchical family constructs rather than the presentation of intimacy. The increased domestication presents a more westernized view of the husband and wife partnership, attempting to create a universal theme that would be accessible to global cultures. In “My Wife,” one of St. George’s added musical numbers, the King is described as the Queen's a faithful lover. He misses his wife, expressing his pain “cuts like a knife,” and “he [the Regent] doesn’t understand I love my wife.” In the 1998 version, “How I Miss My Dear Queen,” in Act 1, Scene 6, the King laments over the chaotic society in Chosun, blaming unfaithful ministers and the people’s riots. He misses his youth and “good people” like Queen Min who used to provide intelligent advice to him. There is no
mention of the intense emotion that later appears in St. George's version. St. George inserted “In
the Moonlight,” the Queen's aria, into “My Wife” as a bridge in Act 1. In this musical number,
Queen Min misses her “husband’s touch” and his arms around her, while she is alone seeking
refuge in Chungju saga (a private house in the Chungju region). In previous versions, on the
contrary, her personal hardship is never mentioned, but instead, an aria and a duet are used to
describe her escape. The 1998 descriptions of Queen Min sung by the King, the Regent, and
General Hong imply her hardship in dealing with dull married life, inevitable conflict with her
father-in-law, and dangerous diplomatic relationships with triple intervention from Russia,
England, and France against Japanese forces. As a result, the 2002 London version contains St.
George’s melodramatic characters who long for love, which diverts from the musical's original
intent to utilize historical characters to portray Korea's political and social crisis through the
personal tragedies of diplomats and the foreign influences they extend and receive.

St. George not only typified the main characters but also simplified the themes of the
production. The Korean concept of han, which depicts a humble and slightly defeated aspect of
the Korean psyche, is the central theme of The Last Empress. The original storyline centers on
the misfortune of the Queen, who endures political and social upheavals, but is mutilated by
Japanese assassins. Her death is the essence of han: her tragic death is the ignominy of defeat in
Korean history. Despite her royal effort, her body squirms in agony like the prey of a hungry
fox. Karl Ivanovichi Weber, a Russian ambassador who witnessed the actual killing of Queen
Min by the Japanese assassins in 1895, sent a report to Emperor Nicholas II of Russia, describing
the Queen's horrific death. “As soon as the Queen attempted to run in the hallway to escape
from the assassins, they chased her and brought her down, trampling her breasts three times and slashing her body with their swords.”  

In light of the Queen's death scene, a Korean concept, han, merits explanation. Theologian Yoo Boo Woong defines the term han in his book on the intercultural history of Christianity:

Han is an underlying feeling of the Korean people. On the one hand, it is a dominant feeling of defeat, resignation, and nothingness. On the other hand, it is a feeling with a tenacity of will for life, which comes to weaker beings.  

This depth of feeling experienced by the Korean people results from continual occupation and oppression by foreign forces. Shim Jung Soon, a Korean theatre scholar, explains that han became further embedded in Korean thoughts after the Japanese occupation of Korea and the Korean War. Yoo also explains various roots of the term, not only Korea’s feeling of her suffering from numerous invasions by powerful nations, but also the suffering of Korea's common people under the tyranny of its own rulers with their hereditary slave system and strict imposition of laws discriminating against women under Confucianism. The study of han in this millennium has been expanded. For example, the book, The Interdisciplinary Studies of Han, dissects the meaning of han in religious, analytical, and phenomenological areas. By displaying the various images of han from literature and pop culture in Korea, the book claims that the definition of han fluctuates with time and generation by transforming the image of the cultural

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413 Boo-Woong Yoo, Korean Pentecostalism: Its History and Theology (Frankfrut, Germany: Verlag Peter Lang, 1998): 222.
415 Yoo, Boo-Woong, 221-222.
identity of Korea. Furthermore, the book also underscores that the feeling of han is an example of Korean culture and Korean feeling that has positive and self-healing characteristics by overcoming their negative experiences and its outcomes.

St. George simplified the multifaceted concept of han, a significant theme in the musical, by illustrating it as a feeling of “anger.” Korean lyrics for international tours used from 1995 to 1998, contain many metaphoric expressions and historical narrative that reveal the concept of han, whereas the English lyrics performed in 2002 misinterpret and simplify it. In the 1998 version, a duet demonstrating the reality of han is sung by the King and the Regent who bemoan the death of Queen Min in “The World After Death” in Act 2, Scene 13.

KING. What is the intention of Heaven and Earth? I wonder.

Thirty years as the Queen, she barely stayed alive.

With tasks beyond her reach, with dreams unfulfilled.

How would I ever come to see a day like this?

REGENT. A weary throne besieged by foreign powers...Why haven’t I died yet and witnessed a day like this?

In the lyrics above, han is expressed as the feeling of regret under oppression. The King expresses his sorrow at the Queen’s tragic death. He is also mortified that the Queen, from his knowledge of present and past history, alone challenges a seemingly hopeless threat of international powers that undermine and prevent Korean independence. Simultaneously, the Regent grieves the loss of his throne in light of his belief in predestination. His resignation to fate is a common han reaction. This reaction typical of han exemplifies self-contempt or self-

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417 Jin Kim and et al, 249.
destruction after oppressed people realize harsh reality and defeat under oppression, they appease their grudge by deploring their tragic situations.

In the revised 2002 version, as with the 1998 tour, St. George describes the Korean people’s anger as being rooted in their feelings toward foreign powers. However, the King and the Regent's anger focuses on the Queen's death in “How Will I Live from Now On” in Act 2:

KING. Now I find I’m angry with the fates. What is the reason for this?
Thirty years she served her country, thirty years she stood beside me.
Everything she did was for Chosun’s future. She was always loyal, and still.
She was everything to me and our boy!
REGENT. Never thought I’d live to see this. Our world torn apart. I believe the fates had reason, but this is testing my faith.

St. George expresses the Korean royals’ resentment of Japan as a whole, providing an anti-Japanese theme. However, han is not caused by the Queen’s political contributions to the nation, but by the impenetrable foreign forces that she could not influence. Furthermore, the King acknowledges Queen Min as the nation's heroine, admiring her contributions, while the Regent remains skeptical of her influences which loses the meaning of han. Because St. George chooses a more sorrowful and bitter finale, the resulting scene has a weaker han impact, as han is defined as “a complex mix of rather negative emotions such as frustrated desire, resentment, regret, and a sense of loss and sorrow”418 St. George’s simplistic interpretation of han increases chauvinistic aspects of the musical and misses its central meaning.

Lastly, St. George inserted new musical numbers with new lyrics and musical scores. Based on Kim Hee Gap’s original musical scores, she inserted eight new ones. Therefore, the

two different characteristics of musical scores are awkwardly performed without harmonizing with each other. Interestingly, since St. George worked on the musical scores, Kim Hee Gap and St. George never discussed their musical harmony or revisions together throughout the preparation of the 2002 London tour.\footnote{Song, Personal interview.} Yun recalls that the quality of the music for the London tour was “greater than he expected,”\footnote{Yun, Ho Jin. “The Last Empress’s London Tour Gain More Than Loss” The Dong-A Ilbo, 27 Feb. 2002:05.} while Song points out St. George’s additional musical numbers lack harmony with Kim’s.\footnote{Song, Personal interview.} Yun recalls that the quality of the music for the London tour was "greater than he expected," meaning he thinks St. George acceptably intermingled both the past and current musical lyrics and scores. Song, however, points out St. George's additional musical numbers lack harmony with Kim's.\footnote{Song, Personal interview.} In the previous tours, a few foreign critics mockingly likened Kim’s music to “Andrew Lloyd Webber-esque showmanship.”\footnote{Reed Johnson, "'Empress' Comes on Strong." Daily News of Los Angeles 18 Sep. 1998: L17.} However, for the 2002 London version, many critics pointed out the music’s lack of creativity because the music was too unoriginal and banal. For more detailed examples from the reviews, I will explain in the following section about the production review.

Reaction To The Contrasting Reviews

The reviews given in London in 2002 were controversial because they were not just focused on the production itself but stretched to the Korean culture in general. These reviews were also influential because they exposed ACom to the complex challenges of adapting a culturally specific Korean musical for the western audience. Song Kyung Ok notes that the musical received the harshest criticism from London critics during the course of ACom’s international tours.\footnote{Song, Personal interview.}
During *The Last Empress’s* tour in London, some critics who showed interest in the musical’s spectacles highlighted the costumes, stages, and choreography. Yun’s theatrical senses to create the attention grabbing spectacles received acclaim. Malcolm Richards praises that the splendid and luxurious costumes, the stage design, and the brilliant choreography made the price of the ticket worthwhile. Judith M. Steiner notes that the musical proves that Korea has stepped onto the global stage by presenting Yun’s excellent direction and Lee’s professional vocal sound. Darren Dalgish argues that “the musical is full of energy and power and has a tragic and emotional ending that certainly makes it worth seeing.” Dalgish also praised Park Dong Woo’s dramatic expression of the evolving stages and its relation to metaphoric themes of the musical. Kim Hyun Suk, a costume designer, is revered as a stellar artist according to some London critics. Her costumes “fully satisfied,” making her “the real star of the musical.” Sarah Hemming from *The Financial Times* explains that the costumes are colorful, the characters are able “to wield an astonishing array of headgear,” and the choreography provides active entertainment. The choreography in “State Examination for Military Service” by Seo Byung Koo is also highly praised for having active and powerful choreography relating to the military contents of the scene.

Other critics point out the weak adaptation of the musical by critiquing its bland English lyrics, its anti-Japanese contents, the disjointed music, and its visual description of Korean culture. When viewed simply as a Korean musical under western styled mega-musicals with

429 Rhoda Koening, “And Never the Twain Shall Meet.” *The Independent* 6 Feb, 2002; Steiner, Judith M. “The Last Empress.”
431 Hemming, 14; De Jongh, “Orient,”; Steiner, “The Last Empress.
English lyrics, some critics indicate the musical is a non-original creation, simply a replication of western musicals. Benedict Nightingale from *The Times* argues that the lyrics are not understandable due to “inscrutable accents” and suggests the insertion of supertitles. Charles Spencer, from *The Telegraph* in “Hats Off to a Lunatic Korean Extravaganza,” mocks the language problem of the musical stating, “choose a well-lit seat if you visit *The Last Empress* in London, because you’ll be able to follow the synopsis.” Nicholas De Jongh from the *Evening Standard* points out, “Georgiana St. George’s abysmal, illiterate lyrics, for which she’s responsible for Yang In Ja, sinks beneath criticism’s reach.”

The London critics pointed out Kim Hee Gap and St. Georgina George’s music was clichéd and disjointed. Since St. George inserted eight music scores, most critics assessed Kim’s lack of creativity. Kate Bassett from *The Independent Enjoyment* argues, “He [Kim] gave us haunting pentatonic melodies, but mostly they’re subsumed by a gushy, classic, string section and what sounds like tributes to Andrew Lloyd Webber and vintage Broadway.” According to the *Evening Standard*, Kim’s music clashed with Peter Casey and Stephen Coleman’s orchestration, sounding “ruthlessly Anglo-Franco-American” as “a distasteful, indigestible cocktail of Ivor Novello, Rodgers and Hammerstein, Lloyd Webber, Alain Boublil, and Claude-Michel Schonberg.”

The anti-Japanese subject in the musical was consistently highlighted by the critics in London. Rhoda Koening exemplifies the scene, which refers to the United States bombing of Hiroshima at the beginning of the musical as problematic for Japanese audiences, arguing that

436 De Jongh, “Orient.”
the musical is a “jingoistic pageant” which describes Japanese people as cruel evils and Queen Min as a brave woman. 437 Benedict Nightingale of The Times compares the politically established Ping-Pong diplomacy between the United States and China to the 2002 Soccer World Cup, in that both were designed to alleviate intensive conflict between nations. 438 He, however, argues the “unapologetically nationalistic and virulently anti-Japanese” musical proves that “their postwar history [in the musical] showed that it would be easier by far for East and West to meet than it is for these two Asian nations to bury hatchets.” 439

Some critics' comments sarcastically degraded the Korean culture and tradition in the musical without providing any evidence. Specifically, three British reviewers, Charles Spencer, Michael Billington, and Rhoda Koening denounced the authenticity of the presentation. In his review, Spencer introduces Korea as “a country where you are more likely to find Hound Dog on the menu than the juke box,” and Koening explains in her review, “what shows Korea’s great talent and tradition” is “the rainbow-striped kimonos.” 440

Billington argues that all the efforts to create a western style mega-musical in The Last Empress failed due to the creative team and the producers’ lack of speculation of western cultures, claiming “the production smacks of internationalized kitsch.” 441 He argues that the story, music, lyrics, costumes, and stage designs are controlled by western culture. He even insists that the musical’s rhetorical style suggests “a doomed attempt to become the Korean- Les Misérables” 442

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437 Koening, “And Never.”
438 Nightingale, 24.
439 Nightingale, 24.
441 Billington, “The Last Empress.”
442 Billington, “The Last Empress.”
Although he writes, “I have no wish to mock,” his review degrades the value of the production with his last comment being, “The show itself is the artistic equivalent of the process by which local Korean companies have surrendered to foreign control.”

Spencer and Koening scorn the characters’ hair accessories and hairdos. The Queen’s hairdo is described as “a thick braid that circles her head like an enormous coffee-cake and is hung with three Christmas tree ornaments” or “what looks like the chrome exhaust system of a Harley-Davidson balanced on her bonce.” The King’s crown is described as “a sort of matador’s hat turned on its side and topped with a gold TV aerial.” The Prince’s hat is depicted as “a huge container of McDonald’s fries pierced with a 2-ft long chopstick” or “a purple helmet which also provided a handy receptacle for his bright yellow toothbrush.”

With the release of the aforementioned reviews to media agencies in Korea, some Korean cultural journalists and scholars responded by questioning The Last Empress’ qualification as a global performance. Jung Jae Wal of Jongangilbo in Korea, February 20, 2002, added agreement to the British reviews, expressing that ACom did not develop a Korean styled literal convergence with aspects to attract western audiences. Shin Bok Lae from The Hankyoreh argued that the Korean government should have been more careful and knowledgeable before sponsoring a global production. Kim Seung Hee summarized the overall critical reviews.

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443 Billington, “The Last Empress.”
444 Koenig, “And Never.”
445 Spencer, “Hats Off.”
446 Koenig, “And Never.”
447 Koenig, “And Never.”
448 Spencer, “Hats Off.”
450 Bok Rae Shin. “We Need To Reconsider Why The Last Empress Received Negative Reception From the U.K.” The Hankyoreh 15 Feb. 2002:18.
given by London critics, implying that ACom “recklessly” challenged a global market without production preparation and marketing strategies. 451

Other domestic critics actively defended the musical against prejudiced criticism. Ahn Sun Jae, a professor from Sogang University in Seoul, Korea, sent a letter to the editor of The Guardian pertaining to Michael Billington’s review.452 Ahn argued that Billington failed to understand that a musical is capable of expressing strong political, anti-colonial messages while bravely challenging suppression by the dominant culture.453 In his letter, he emphasizes Billington's lack of comprehension of the musical's theme:

The show’s main theme, not even mentioned by the review, might on examination prove to be less a matter of tradition versus modernization than a recalling of what happened to a small fragile country (represented by the murdered Queen) on account of Japan’s ruthless expansionist ambitions (which are not perceived in this part of the world, at least to have died in 1945).454

Ahn stresses that the musical functions as “an attempt to challenge the excessively favorable image Japan enjoys in western countries.” He adds that Korea and Japan co-hosting the 2002 World Cup was another “humiliating compromise” under Japanese demands supported by western powers.455 Yun, in his article, also notes that the conservative English media agencies “picked a fight with” the musical’s creative and production teams by emphasizing the description of the Japanese people as villains rather than valuing the musical itself.456 He assumes that the biased comments of London critics are related to the power that Japan and Japanese companies

453 An. 17.
454 An. 17.
455 An. 17.
enjoy from their annual support of cultural and art events in England, while events promoting 
Korean culture do not exist in Britain.\footnote{Yun, 05.}

To discredit London reviews and to present another version of audience reception, ACom later held a press conference in Korea to present its perspective of the London tour to the Korean press. Song notes that most journalists and reporters attending the press conference were not ready to accept the analysis of the reviews that the production team had prepared to prove active interest in the musical by the London audiences.\footnote{Song, Personal interview.} In fact, the London journalists and critics are notorious for their harsh criticism. For example, when reviewing the opening of Rodgers and Hammerstein’s \textit{The King and I} (1951) in \textit{The Daily Express}, John Barber called the work a "treacle-bin Mikado" and declared that only one of the cast, Muriel Smith, could really sing.\footnote{John Barber, "Home-grown star is the new queen of Drury Lane", \textit{Daily Express}, 9 Oct, 1953:3.}

In Edward Behr’s \textit{The Complete Book of Les Misérables}, he relays Michael Radcliffe’s comments by including one review entitled “Victor Hugo on the garbage dump.” Another \textit{Les Misérables’} reviewer Francis King writes in \textit{The Sunday Telegraph}, “it stands the same relation to the original as a singing telegram to an epic.”\footnote{Edward Behr, \textit{The Compete Book of Les Misérables} (New York: Arcade Publishing Inc., 1989):139-140.}

True to the harsh climate of theatrical criticism in London, some of the negative comments about the Korean costumes and culture portrayed in the musical reflect disparagement of Korean culture and later resulted in a debate between Yun and Korean journalists. The British journalists concluded the London tour to be a failure due to the negative reviews it received. Yun, in his article “Musical, \textit{The Last Empress}: We Earned More Benefits in the London Tour” writes of the contribution of the musical to the development of Korean musical theatre. He suggests some journalists “misunderstood” the reception in London, for they narrowly
researched and generalized negative critical reviews.\textsuperscript{461} Calling these reports, “Hollywood action,” Yun highlights positive reviews in London regarding highly skilled vocal sounds from the actors, splendid spectacles, and the show’s eligibility for competing with other western mega-musicals.\textsuperscript{462} He emphasizes the musical’s frontier spirit where the production has “bravely competed with other conventional musicals,” while acknowledging its financial loss and negative criticism.\textsuperscript{463} Why did Yun defend ACom’s 2002 London tour and deem it successful by criticizing the London reviewers’ harsh criticism? Why did the Korean journalists affirm that the 2002 tour was an unproductive tour? How important are production reviews? Is it the only barometer to justify the musical’s failure or success? Is it significant to determine these binary concepts? Are there any examples to qualify the musical other than the production reviews?

Why did ACom and media agencies in Korea react sensitively to the treatment the musical received in London? Although there were many positive reviews, the Korean media agencies focused on the negative evaluations. Many reviews targeted and ridiculed the Korean culture rather than the musical itself, evaluating Korean culture in the shadow of Japanese Imperialism. The controversial conversations about the contrasting reviews of London critics, domestic media agencies, the production team, and scholars reveal that, in the process of developing a unique approach to a globally receivable Broadway style production, ACom's script, lyrical, musical, and production renovations should depend less on westernized response.

Conclusion

ACom had revised the 1998 production based on the reception of the 1997 tour, which had received mainly positive reviews with only a few problems in New York and Los Angeles. Some London critics noted the biased descriptions of traditional Korean culture present in the

\textsuperscript{461} Yun, Personal interview.
\textsuperscript{462} Yun, 05.
\textsuperscript{463} Yun, 05.
2002 London tour, while others focused on previous problems. The language change to English was made as a preemptive attempt to appeal to westerners. The subsequent reviews were the sole channel for gauging the effectiveness of this change and more fully understanding the western musical palate. The language change was ACom’s main attempt to expand The Last Empress’ global appeal.

Yun’s ideal expectation about English speaking audiences’ better accessibility to the musical was not very effective in attracting a global audience to the musical. Yun believed that the English version in London would break the language barrier between Korean performers and the international audiences. ACom’s suggestions to make the global performance, however, were miscalculated. Just converting the language or hiring western artists and staff were not the keys to solve the company’s previous problems throughout its two-year experience in the U.S.

Nevertheless, Yun held the press conference to address how much money ACom spent to prepare for the 2002 London tour and how sarcastic the London critics were. ACom prepared for the 2002 London tour over two years but the marketing team did not have enough research on neither the general climate of London criticism nor the audiences’ characteristics or preferences. Moreover, the entire rehearsing period was just three months; actors quickly memorized English lyrics (most of them did not speak English very well) and practiced new musical numbers and dances due to the insertion of St. George’s music. The creative team in ACom had been deferring to western critics by revising productions based on their comments on the production. Since the London tour in 2002, however, ACom has acknowledged the musical’s limitations in comparison to successful mega-musicals of West End and Broadway. The creative team admitted the musical’s storyline was weak and the musical scores were hackneyed. The

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important thing that ACom learned through the 2002 London tour was not to defend itself from western critics and Korean journalists’ criticism, but to have a discerning eye to recognize authorized and accredited artists to work with ACom and share ideas.

Given the company’s weakness, ACom should have opened up its mind to acknowledge any problems in the musical, which were pointed out from the press or academia, and speculated thought-provoking ideas regarding the musical’s global senses. In actuality, however, the creative team of ACom decided to return to the 1998 Korean language version for the subsequent 2003 tour in Los Angeles and the 2004 tour in Toronto, Canada because the English version of *The Last Empress* performed in London in 2002 had received such a controversial reception from both the London and Korean press.
CHAPTER 5

REGRESSION: LOS ANGELES TOUR IN 2003 AND TORONTO TOUR IN 2004

Because the 2002 London version of The Last Empress received mostly negative reception from both the London and Korean press, ACom used the 1998 version for its 2003 L.A. tour and for its 2004 London tour. Yun Ho Jin, the director of the musical produced the international tours to target the global audience but he addressed to the Korean press that ACom would tour the musical around foreign countries that have large Korean communities. What does a “global” audience mean to Yun? Due to the marketing strategy for the tours, Yun purposely narrowed down his global audience from worldwide audiences to audiences whose linguistic and cultural background were Korean. Did Yun step backward to relive ACom’s glorious time experienced in the 1998 U.S. tour? Or did Yun declare the 2002 London tour was a misstep?

In this chapter, I explain ACom’s last two North American tours from 2003 to 2004 and explore a new set of challenges of practical marketing strategies based on the company’s experiences during previous international tours. I analyze ACom's revision of the 1998 script for the 2003 L.A. and the 2004 Toronto tour by observing the creative team's concerns. Examining new aspects in the L.A. and Toronto reviews, I explore the strength and weakness of Yun’s decision to return to the 1998 version. Lastly, I highlight the underlying analytical problems that contributed to the musical's difficulties abroad.

The 2003 L.A. Tour: An Appeal To The Korean Community

In the 2003 L.A. tour, ACom announced that the musical’s main target would be the Korean community in L.A. Since the Koreatown neighborhood of L.A. has the largest populace of Koreans in the U.S., Yun expected to sell many tickets to Korean audiences. He states that after his experiences in the previous tours in New York, Los Angeles, and London, he
determined that the area with over 50,000 Korean residences would be ACom’s major market for the musical.\textsuperscript{465} Yun’s determination of 50,000 people is not a very high range and it means that he would perform the musical in any city where a Korean community exists. He argued that tickets sales for the 1998 L.A. tour totaled $1.1 million, and over 30,000 Korean audience members came to see the production.\textsuperscript{466} Additionally, the 2003 L.A. tour was meaningful for the Korean community to celebrate the 100-year anniversary of the Korean immigration to the U.S.\textsuperscript{467} Yun advertised the musical by emphasizing the show’s production history on New York's Broadway and London's West End,, hoping to elevate the reception of the musical within the Korean immigrant community.\textsuperscript{468} According to the program notes for the 2003 tour, ACom emphasizes “the musical as a cultural product from South Korea” and “its strategic influence in the developmental process of Korean musical theatre.”\textsuperscript{469} Intending to bolster commercial success, the general managers, Lee Hee Whan and Steve Levy, proposed the Kodak theatre (formerly named the Dolby Theatre) to ACom because the theatre is located in the center of downtown Los Angeles, and it had hosted the Academy Awards since 2002.\textsuperscript{470}

Despite a quality venue and proximity to the Korean American community, the audience's interest in the production was interrupted for three reasons: 1) the fear of SARS, 2) ACom’s indolence in its marketing strategy, and 3) the ignorance of the previous audiences who already saw the production in 1998.

\textsuperscript{466} Kim, 13.
\textsuperscript{468} Hwang, 26.
\textsuperscript{469} The Official Production Program of \textit{The Last Empress} for Los Angeles Tour in 2003. (Seoul:ACom, 2003.)
\textsuperscript{470} Song, Personal interview.
Firstly, the epidemic of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) appeared in China in November 2002.\footnote{Summary of probable SARS cases with onset of illness from 1 November 2002 to 31 July 2003: Available: http://www.who.int/csr/sars/country/table2004_04_21/en/index.html.} *The Last Empress* was performed in L.A. from April 18 to May 14, 2003. Although SARS gradually ended in late summer of 2003, this epidemic had become a point of racial and ethnic discrimination against Asian people, especially in North American nations.\footnote{David P. Eisenman, Cheryl Wold, Claude Setodji, Scot Hickey, Ben Lee, Bradley D. Stein, and Anna Long. *Biosecurity and Bioterrorism: Biodefense Strategy, Practice, and Science.* July 2004, 2(3): 146-156. doi:10.1089/bsp.2004.2.146.} SARS influenced the Toronto tour in particular. Originally scheduled from May 29 to June 14, 2003, the performance was postponed to the following year at the request of Canada's Mirvish Theatre.\footnote{Seung Hyun Kim, “The Journalist Kim Seong Hyun’s Magnifying Glass for the Stage: ‘The Last Empress’” *The Munhwa Il-bo* 11 Nov, 2003:20.} In the 2003 L.A. tour, an average of only one third of the seats were filled with attendees during the production’s eighteen performances. Yun recalls that “the 2003 tour was an absolute catastrophe,” describing the speculation that L.A. audiences were reluctant to gather in a place where Asian people congregated, especially from South Korea, which is in close proximity to China.\footnote{Yun, Personal interview.}

Next, the response of the L.A. press for the 2003 tour was less active than for the previous tours. ACom’s marketing team contacted the advertising network that the company had previously used for the 1998 L.A. tour. Nonetheless, all of the reviews, except for one article from the *Los Angeles Times*, were from secondary local journals or magazines. I will explain it in the section of production reviews in this chapter. According to Song Kyung Ok, former general manager and producer for ACom from 1995 to 2002, the core members of the marketing team left the company for personal reasons, and the newly formed marketing team did not
actively promote the production to the major media outlets in L.A. due to their lack of experience with international tours.\textsuperscript{475}

Lastly, \textit{The Last Empress} appears to have maintained popularity and admiration from local domestic audiences as a pioneer performance; however, it simultaneously began being revered as more of a 'classic' than a novel presentation. Yun asserted that many L.A. audiences had already viewed the 1998 production, so they did not want to see it again.\textsuperscript{476} Additionally in Korea, the general climate of musical theatre had been repeatedly changed and developed. In the beginning of the millennium there were many different styles of musical productions performed in South Korea, including Korean-written musicals for small theaters for small theatres, salon musicals, and pop musicals.\textsuperscript{477} On the other hand, the Sul Do Yoon Musical Company had imported \textit{Phantom of the Opera} and made a legendary hit, earning over 200 million U.S. dollars for its seven month run in 2001.\textsuperscript{478} Many musical mania groups arose in response to public demand for the most up-to-date internationally acclaimed musical productions.\textsuperscript{479}

\textbf{Revision: Return to the 1998 Version}

Yun decided to reuse the 1998 version for the 2003 and 2004 tours because he deemed it to be a more authentic style of Korean musical, which he believed would attract western audiences. Song analyzes that the English version used for the 2002 tour was hastily prepared, and the mixture of musical numbers composed by both Korean and British composers blurred the characteristics of the original musical.\textsuperscript{480} The major changes of the script revision in L.A. and Toronto consisted of two main aspects of simplifying historical scenes to clarify the relationship

\textsuperscript{475} Song, Personal interview.  
\textsuperscript{476} Yun, Personal interview.  
\textsuperscript{479} Chan Sik Hong, “The Glory Days of Musical Theatre” \textit{The Dong-A Ilbo} 28 Jul, 2004:06  
\textsuperscript{480} Song, Personal interview.
between the main characters and incorporating English lyrics to increase the sense of reality. The new numbers, “Japanese Merchants and Geishas” in Act 1, Scene 5 and the revised “Back to Power” in Act 1, Scene 6 were added. Yi Munyol rewrote the lyrics and Kim Kwang Lim composed new music for these numbers. The numbers emphasize Chosun as a vulnerable country that had been influenced by foreign forces through the conflict between Queen Min and the Regent. These scenes are claimed to be some of the most problematic parts in the London tour due to their overlapping contents and the less developed character roles, which created confusion in plot comprehension. The result is a lack of a dynamic climactic development.

In the 2003 version, “Japanese Merchants and Geishas” combined contents taken from “New Military Unit, Old Military Unit” in the 1998 version and “Four Japanese Merchants I” in the 1997 version. This number served as a “show stopper” which provided a sarcastic comic scene, and contributed to the loss of the seriousness and intensive narrative. The Japanese soldiers in the new military units were replaced by geishas who wore splendid kimonos and performed comic sex dances with Japanese merchants, teasing the “uncivilized” Chosun people and ridiculing the Queen’s military policy. As a result, this scene provided clear reasons why the Korean soldiers rioted against the Japanese people and the Queen. This number revealed the underlying conflict between Queen Min and the Regent, which did not lie in personal reasons, but instead stemmed from their angst at living under foreign occupation.

The scene directly following “Japanese Merchants and Geishas” was “Back to Power” which is an extended scene of “Back at the Seat of Power” from 1998. The creative teams decided to omit the scene “Military Mutiny of 1882” because many western critics claimed there

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481 Yun, Personal interview.
had been an overrepresentation of “unnecessary” scenes that contained historical background. “Back to Power” in Act I, Scene 7, focused on how the old military soldiers and the Regent resolved their previous policy of isolation through protest against the Queen’s policy of modernization.

SOLDIERS. […] There is a roar demanding glorious victory. It is rising in every corner of this land, flying the flag of patriotism. We are marching as one. Persecution and humiliation under Queen Min and the Japanese. Humiliation and capitulation under the brutality of foreign powers. Heads up! Arise and fight! Our army has risen courageously. […] Let us all fight to protect our nation and our land! Now that we have come to this in a sincere effort to save the nation, let's bring the Regent back and abandon modernization. Let the Throne recover its full authority and no one will dare to invade our land again. Hoist the flag of Isolationism! Let's secure the future of Chosun! With a new history germinating, Chosun will shine gloriously. All loyalty to the Regent!

REGENT. This riot was ignited by widespread corruption within the Queen's clan. I've sent men everywhere to look for the Queen, yet I only hear rumors of her demise. The position of the Queen is essential. It cannot be left unfilled for long. Now that the new cabinet is in place, let there be a royal funeral for the Queen.

In the 2003 version, the new lyrics of the military soldiers were added with much more detailed logical reasons for the historical military mutiny of 1882. The soldiers are not simply

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complaining about their personal living conditions such as low income and ethnic discrimination. In the 2003 version, the soldiers are more devoted to the nation, worrying about the independent status of Korea and suggesting political strategy to survive among its powerful neighbors, especially Japan. As the Regent returns to rule the nation, his intention to announce the death of the Queen becomes more logical and objective in the 2003 version. In the 1998 version, he simply requests the royal funeral for Queen Min just after hearing the rumor of her death. In the 2003 version, however, the Regent and the Queen’s relationship is less personal, but his integrity becomes more prominent not for his sake but for that of his nation. The new lyrics, “This riot was ignited by widespread corruption within the Queen's clan. I've sent men everywhere to look for the Queen, yet I only hear rumors of her demise” are added and the focus of the “Military Mutiny of 1882” is not the Queen, but the Japanese government. In addition, the Regent’s desire for power is not to push the Queen aside, but to protect the nation from foreign powers.
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<td>28. Rise, People of Chosun</td>
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As shown in the table above, the 2003/2004 productions were very closely modeled after the 1998 production with only minor changes. “Queen Elizabeth of Chosun” in Act I, Scene 8 in the 1998 version was deleted in the 2003 version due to its far-fetched comparison to England's Queen Elizabeth I. In the scene, Madame Sontag, Mrs. Underwood, and Mrs. Bishop praise Queen Min's "witty and wise," and "elegant and strong" character, describing the Queen the “Queen Elizabeth of Chosun,” hoping their county will “flourish” and “shine” through her.483 The ladies idolize Queen Min but fail to provide any solid reasons for their praises. The six numbers sung in English in the 1998 tour are kept in the 2003 and 2004 tours.

Translation

For the 2003 tour, ACom hired Archie Young, the Professor Emeritus in the department of English at Canada’s University of Ontario to make the Canadian version of the supertitles.484 Young rearranged the wordy 1998 English supertitles previously translated by Lee Hee Whan and Jeon Jun Tak. Just as Georgiana St. George included some misinterpretations in her London production, so Archie Young delivered concise but ambiguous interpretations in his 2003 version. Since ACom gave him only the 1998 version, including its errors, Young continued the discrepancies with different words and sometimes even with the same faulty expression. For example, the problematic translations of modernists and isolationists in “King Gojong’s Imperial Conference” in Act 1, Scene 5 in the 1998 version, which I analyze in the chapter 3, were kept as they were. English lyrics in a certain number like “Snow Flakes are Falling ” are exactly the same as “ It’s Strange, Snow Flakes Are Falling” from the 1998 version. The following excerpt is from the beginning of “You Shall Drink Miura’s Wine Queen Min” in Act 2, Scene 9 from the 1998 version.

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484 ACom hired Young for both L.A and Toronto tours in 2003, but his English supertitles were used only for the L.A tour in 2003. A year later, the Canadian version was used for the 2004 Toronto tour as well.
MIURA. Since there are few teachers in Chosun, trained for modern education,
I suggest Your Majesty to invite advisors from abroad.
Japan plans to train a modern guard unit, to protect the Royal Court.
Also Japan is willing to offer a loan of three million won,
to assist the reform of Your Majesty’s government.
QUEEN. Advisors from abroad?
Will they not be Japanese?
Soldiers trained and equipped by Japan.
Will they be loyal to us?

And here is Young’s 2003 version in the same part:
MIURA. Only a few in Chosun received modern education,
so I suggest inviting advisors from abroad.
Japan plans to train a modern army unit to ensure the security of the Royal Court.
It will be called the Training Corps.
Japan is willing to offer a loan of three million won
to assist the reform of Your Majesty’s government.
QUEEN. Advisors from abroad?
Will they not be Japanese?
Soldiers trained by you?
Will they be loyal to us?
While Jeon and Lee’s version emphasizes the nuance of the dialogue, Young’s version removes the superfluosness in the English lyrics and attempts to rephrase unclear sentences from the 1998 version. Young misses Miura’s delicate way of addressing the Queen when talking about Japan’s desire to invade Chosun, which is clearly shown in the Korean version by Yang In Ja. In Yang’s Korean lyrics in the 1998 U.S. version, Miura brings up the issue of necessity of modern education in Chosun, while showing his full respect to the Queen. So, in Jeon and Lee’s 1997 New York version, even though Miura repeatedly calls her “Your Majesty,” his hypocrisy is revealed in his shrewd tone of voice. However, in Young’s 2003 version, he depicts Miura’s first line as more aggressive and straightforward. Because of this passage and others, L.A. critics pointed out the problem of supertitles. In their reviews, Julio Martinez describes the translation as “cumbersome,” and Jeff Farve argues that the English supertitles are “choppy” and “un-poetic.”

The 2003 and 2004 script was similar to the 1998 version in terms of its plot structure and themes. Although the creative team clarified the historical accuracy in some musical numbers and deleted extraneous scenes, the teams did not revise the entire 1998 version. Rather, the creative team seemed to “proofread” the 1998 version. In the 2003 and 2004 translation, Yun hired a professional Canadian scholar write the English supertitles for the production. The 2003 and 2004 English lyrics, however, became more clumsy because the translator referred to the 1998 English supertitles as the basis and even shortened some critical parts in character development and theme. All in all, the L.A. tour suffered partly due to the hastily arranged revision.

Production Review

There were fewer reviews for the 2003 L.A. production than for the production in 1998. Even though ACom's target audience was the Korean community in L.A., the city's Korean press barely reported on the production. Minor local daily press agencies reported most reviews on this 2003 production, while the major press agencies in L.A. evaluated the musical in 1998. This lack of media attention may have contributed to the low ticket sales and limited financial backing.\footnote{Song, Personal interview.}

Unlike the previous criticisms, the reviewers of the 2003 production in L.A. focused on Lee Tae Won, who played Queen Min. Local presses reported about her work prior to the opening night of the production, focusing on her background as a Korean American.\footnote{Jim Farver, “Lee Starts in Splashy Broadway-Style Korean Musical ‘The Last Empress’” Daily Breeze, 18 Apr, 2003:K22; Vicki Smith Paluch, “The American and The Empress- Tae Won Lee Has Followed a Musical about Korea a Century Ago Back to the Land of Her Ancestors.” Long Beach Press-Telegram 18 Apr. 2003: U14; Favre, Jeff “Lee Took Lead Role in ‘Last Empress’ So She Could Rediscover Korean Roots” 17 Apr. 2003:G39.} In conjunction with ACom’s targeted marketing to the Korean community in L.A., Lee mainly talked about her Korean American background and her cultural identity. She explains in an interview, “For everyone else involved this was their chance to show America what they had. But for me I felt it was my first step to rejoining the Korean society.”\footnote{Favre, G 39.} She also notes that “Now, I believe in myself. The show has given me pride in being Korean-American.”\footnote{Vicki Smith Paluch, “The American and The Empress- Tae Won Lee Has Followed a Musical about Korea a Century Ago Back to the Land of Her Ancestors.” Long Beach Press-Telegram 18 Apr. 2003: U14.} In Jim Farber’s interview with Lee, she explains her background in detail, including her isolated life at the Juilliard School, her role as Lady Thiang in The King and I in London, and her dramatic encounter with the director Yun Ho Jin.\footnote{Farber, K22.} She even mentions that her work took her away from her husband for months at a time and ultimately led to their divorce, saying “the rise was not without its cost.”\footnote{Favre, G39.} The L.A. interviewers praised Lee’s talent based on her previous receptions from western critics and her musical background. Since Lee was nominated for Best Actress for
her Queen Min by the L.A. Ovation Awards in 1999, many L.A. press agencies have since taken notice of her talent.\textsuperscript{492}

Lee received favorable attention from the critics, whereas the musical's spectacles and storyline received mixed reviews, similar to the musical’s previous tours. Ed Kaufman in \textit{Hollywood Reporter} called the musical “an eye-popping extravaganza: a crafty and colorful blend of opera, operetta and Broadway musical showbiz.”\textsuperscript{493} Vicki Smith Paluch a freelance journalist notes that ACom created “an artistic spectacle: singing, dancing, costumes, and lavish sets with a mixture of Korean musical and Western production values.”\textsuperscript{494} Yet, one critic states that Yun’s direction on the overwhelming stage with sumptuous production values lacks the insightful storyline and the Queen’s historical character.\textsuperscript{495} Another critic also mentions a similar point pertaining to the storyline, arguing that the story is “sharply anti-Japanese and tries to cover too much ground in the first act.” He continues by pointing out that the last year of the Queen’s life was shown in the second act, which lacks character development.\textsuperscript{496}

One interesting aspect presented by the L.A. critics was their respect for Korean culture. In contrast, the London critics mocked Korean traditional costumes (e.g., the Prince’s royal hat was compared to upside down McDonald French Fries). L.A. critic Gloria Goodale visited the wig shop, reporting that the splendid wig for Queen Min was made under careful historical research.\textsuperscript{497} Her description of the wig was accurately written with a respect of Korean culture:

\begin{quote}
Authenticity is a challenge in some practical ways as well. (...) Down in the wig department, the various headdresses are being set out for cleaning and preparation. Queen
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{492} Paluch, , U14.  
\textsuperscript{494} Paluch, U14.  
\textsuperscript{495} Martinez, B3.  
\textsuperscript{496} Favre, K22.  
Min’s wedding headgear looks as if it could walk on its own, what with the stiff dragon spears that anchor the ramrod straight black hair and the wildly colorful, animated baubles that bring the construction to life.  

Unlike the London critics in 2002, who literally ridiculed the Korean cultural costumes and props with disrespectful words, Goodale’s article emphasizes that the designs for the production “are the faithful reproductions from the turn of 20th century” with a headline of the article, “The East Side Story- ‘The Last Empress ’ The First Asian Musical to Hit the World Stage, Opens in Los Angeles This Week- The Latest in a Surge of Asian Art Around the U.S.”

Yun predicted escalated enthusiasm from the Korean community as the timing of the performance was in close proximity to the 2002 World Cup. He believed that since the Korean National soccer team was ranked as fourth seed, Koreans everywhere were experiencing an overwhelming feeling of nationalism. Unlike the 2002 London reviews, the 2003 L.A reviews newly examined Lee’s Korean American background and the genuineness of the Queen’s wig and brought ethnic identity and Korean cultural authenticity into view. Overall, the reception from the press was mediocre. The reviews on the production were mixed but most of them were flat and banal.

The 2004 Toronto Tour: Inclusion In The Season Subscription

Since the 2003 L.A tour’s anticlimactic financial loss, ACom prepared for their prescheduled tour in Toronto, Canada and aimed to achieve its first financial profit from the tour. Finally in the 2004 Toronto tour, ACom considered this venture commercially successful. The 2004 Toronto tour was scheduled to perform in 2003. When ACom contacted the Mirvish

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498 Goodale, 13.
499 Goodale, 13.
501 Kim, 13.
Company to request for the tour of *The Last Empress*, ACom offered both St. George’s English version and the 2003 L.A. tour version along with Archie Young’s English supertitles. Then the Mirvish Company decided to present the Korean version of the 2003 L.A. script. Interestingly, a factor that contributed to the musical's acceptance in Canada was the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak in November 2002. At the time, Canadians were bemused with a fear of death, which created an uneasy antipathy towards Asian people, especially Chinese immigrants.

Yet, the postponement of the performing day brought more chances to make profits. The head of the Mirvish productions, David Mirvish, announced the musical’s significance by highlighting its marvelous spectacles and the script's historical accuracy during his press conference to announce the new season. He also predicted that the musical would bring “a moment of Korean history to Canadian stages, while appealing to a more diverse audience.”

Michael Posner in Globeandmail.com notes, “A year after the ravages of SARS, the local economy is only now beginning to recover. The productions staged at Mirvish-owned or operated theatres constitute genuine tourism magnets.” Since ACom had been forced to postpone the Canadian tour back in 2003, the company now was rewarded with 14 extra performance dates, bringing total number of runs to 32. The musical was performed in the Hummingbird Center in Toronto, Canada from August 5 to September 1, 2004. The Mirvish production accepted *The Last Empress* in its 2004-2005 seasonal lineup and many season ticket

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holders filled the seats. The season’s other major productions included *We Will Rock You, Rat Pack*, and *Wicked*. The inclusion of *The Last Empress* in this group of wildly successful productions greatly helped ticket sales and marked *The Last Empress*’ arrival on the global stage. Due to a rising interest in *The Last Empress* and in musical theater in general, along with the Mirvish theatre’s strong advertising, 60% of tickets were already sold by July. The ticket sales were 75% for the entire running period, and the 2004 Canadian version reported $400,000 in the black. Moreover, the 2004 Toronto tour was sponsored by the ministry of foreign affairs in South Korea and the consulate general of the republic of Korea in Toronto. The consulate general supported the musical’s tour to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Korea and Canada.

The reaction of the Korean Canadian community showed that its interest in the musical was active. The community welcomed the post-SARS performance, wishing to promote “the new pride of Korean spirit” to all audiences, including non-Korean Canadians, second generation Korean Canadians, and the 1.5 generation (a unique subset of people who were born in Korea yet grew up in North America). *The Korea Canada Central Daily* reported on the welcoming reception for the cast, also sponsored by the Korean consulate in Toronto, held on August 2, 2004. Eighty of the musical’s staff and cast and fifty Canadian participants including David Mirvish, the representative of the Mirvish Theatre, a conductor from the Toronto Philharmonic

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506 Jones, Kenneth. “We Will.”
507 Jung, 01.
Orchestra, a Consul General, and many Korean Canadian artists and practitioners such as musical critics, pastors, composers and dancers joined in the reception. Ha Tae Yoon addresses that “this production [The Last Empress] tells the superiority of Korean culture to Canada and provides more chances for other Korean productions to debut in our [Canadian] stages.” The Korea Canada Central Daily also reports that the 1.5 generation and second generation of Korean Canadian people revealed their appreciation and pride in the development of Korean cultural performance, pointing out the modernized stage design and the uplifting of Korean pride. Julie McGrew, a music teacher in a Toronto high school, notes that “the actors’ talents in singing and acting are excellent and I can understand the entire contents of the musical by reading the supertitles.” Kim Young Shin, a Korean Canadian journalist, expresses the production is a “great success” due to the full occupation of the 2,500 seats. Most audiences are season subscribers and they particularly showed their interests in the splendid royal costumes, traditional dances, and tumultuous historical events of the late 19th century in Korea, which are mostly explained in Act 1. Admitting that the previous tours were much too appealing to the Korean community’s patriotism, Yun claims that for future tours, the marketing should be customized based on a local strategy.

Even though the 2004 Canadian tour marked The Last Empress’ final international circuit, it was the first time that ACom received a profit. This overdue financial success was largely due to the company's collaborative marketing strategies and Toronto's active reception of the performance.

513 “Homelands’s Musical,” 1.
514 “Homelands’ Musical,” 1.
518 Noh, 01.
Production Review

Canadian press reviews covered most every aspect of the musical. These included the general presentation of scenes, use of the “borrowed” western formula, interest in the historical validity of the characters, the music, and the narrative.

 Critics in Toronto seemed to be impressed by the overall appearance of the musical. For example, Robert Crew of the Toronto Star claimed the décor is lavish and the technology was sophisticated.\(^{519}\) John Coulbourn complimented the manifestation of “Yun’s inventive direction,” “the breath-taking set design,” “opulent costumes,” and “exquisite lighting design”\(^{520}\) just to name a few. Kim Yong Sin in The Korea Central Daily acclaimed the choreographer’s application of various dances, which include sangomoo, a Korean traditional dance portrayed in the martial dance scene during the “State Military Exam.”\(^{521}\) Yet, he argued that the bombastic descriptions of western characters, which are portrayed by tall wooden legs in “Seven Foreign Envoys,” are not funny at all, but rather, result in making western audiences feel uncomfortable.\(^{522}\)

Likewise, the local Toronto critics had much interest in ACom’s attempt to use the East-meets-West formula and the Broadway mega-musical framework. One critic compared the musical to the story of Evita but argued that The Last Empress had a much more interesting storyline and the character’s psychological insight is better (than Evita).\(^{523}\) Although another critic regarded the musical as an “uneasy mix of Asian-style hubris and Western folly,”\(^{524}\) most

\(^{521}\) Kim, A4.
\(^{522}\) Kim, A4.
critics welcomed its combination of western styles and Korean traditional subjects by acclaiming it as the “Korean Evita.”

Unlike the previous western critics, Toronto's reviewers tried to understand the Queen’s character as it aligned with Korea's modern history. Korean immigrant communities welcomed the musical’s presentation because they thought it would create an awareness of the Queen's revisionist history to non-Korean audiences. Yi Munyol also writes in celebration of the 2004 Toronto tour, mentioning the revisionist’s new perspective on Queen Min and comparing it to his process of writing Fox Hunt.

While the previous western critics claimed that the historical subjects made the storyline outdated, Canadian critics showed their interest in the true story revealing the Queen. For instance, one critic evidences understanding of the metaphoric message that Chosun was the battleground for foreign countries and Queen Min was the leader of the chaotic society at that time, calling the musical a “pure melodrama- except that it is apparently true.” Yet another view states that the musical is bland due to its informative story about “a slice of modern history of which most of us will know nothing.”

Many of the Canadian press agencies introduced The Last Empress’s Queen Min by comparing her to England’s Queen Elizabeth I and Argentina’s Eva Peron. This brought much emphasis to Lee Tae Won’s powerful vocal skill, which in turn brought international fame. A critic pens his impression of Lee Tae Won’s performance, claiming “she is also a good enough

525 Crew, F07.
526 Kim, A4.
529 Cushman, “East Meets.”
actor to give a suggestion of vulnerability along with strength, particularly at the death of her two daughters.  

Lastly, the critics in Toronto frequently criticized the storytelling method and musical score. Most of their comments regarding the drama and music are similar to those in the previous tours. Some critics argued that Hong Gye Hoon’s character is so small that the story “failed to underscore Queen Min’s humanity” because the story leans too much on a history lesson. Kamal Al-Solaylee argues, “Each scene is a self-contained entity unto itself giving the musical a fractured, episodic structure, when a more organic approach is in order.” Al-Solaylee also pointed out that the disjointed music was “two kinds: rousing and militaristic.” Alternatively, the music was noted as a “second-drawer of Rodgers and Hammerstein” due to its Euro-American style of presenting the indigenous Asian musical on Asian themes.

While the L.A. reviewers expanded their interests in issues of ethnicity (i.e. Lee Tae Won’s Korean American background) and Korean traditional culture (i.e. Queen Min’s costume), the Canadian reviewers comprehended the production in terms of its subjects and characters at a deeper level than the previous western critics did. As the revision for the 2003 and 2004 tour was not much different from the 1998 version, the critical receptions from the L.A. and Toronto critics were analogous with those of the previous tours (i.e. weak storyline and character development, too many historical events in Act 1, and the dull music). That is, although ACom focused on the reception of each tour to revise the script for the next one, it perhaps ignored the musical's main weaknesses. Instead, the company kept embellishing the spectacles and condensing the storyline.

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531 Crew, F07.
532 Coulbourn, John, ibid.
534 Al-Solaylee, Kamal, ibid.
535 Cushman, Robert, ibid.
Paradoxical Global Codes

Yun decided to return to the 1998 version for the 2003 L.A and 2004 Toronto tours since the 2002 English version received such mixed reviews in London. The creative team acknowledged that the 2002 English version distorted the Korean sentiment with regard to the demise of the Chosun dynasty and the death of Queen Min.\(^5\)\(^3\)\(^6\) Hence, Yun did not overly rework the English version in the face of the literally problematic script and the uninteresting music. Although Yun admitted that the musical should have been modified for more non-Korean audiences, he embraced the musical’s shortcomings to keep its authenticity.\(^5\)\(^3\)\(^7\) This version was led by Yun and other Korean crews with the initial intention of making a global production and serving as the Korean pioneer of the global musical.

Preserving authenticity of the script, ACom narrowed down its target audience from the wider global audience to the smaller Korean community for its 2003 L.A. and 2004 Toronto tours. The original goal of ACom was to produce the global musical to entertain international audiences and make money from the foreign markets. Yet, the marketing team paid more attention to the Korean audiences, assuring their production history in L.A. and Toronto promoted the musical’s reputation in the homeland.

ACom learned through their western tours that adding another foreign city to their production history would be rewarded with increased enthusiasm back home. Beginning in 1997, ACom returned to Korea at the end of each international tour to give a rousing homecoming performance. This served to celebrate the company’s return as well as boast its competitive international level. These audiences also anticipated seeing the musical’s latest version. ACom advertised the company’s homecoming performance of the musical by highlighting the revision

\(^5\)\(^3\) Song, Personal interview.  
\(^5\)\(^3\)\(^7\) Noh, hyun, 01
and its updated spectacles. For ACom, this aspect of the musical’s international tour is paradoxical in that the financial deficits from the tours in western cities were paid back by their encore productions in Korea. *The Last Empress* used its domestic profits to pay off foreign-incurred debt.

Korean audiences welcomed ACom’s promotion of this Korean cultural product abroad and highly valued the musical’s national significance. Ever since ACom toured *The Last Empress* overseas, there has been a contrast between the widespread domestic popularity and the lukewarm international reception of this unique musical. In the homeland, ACom broke from the conventional climate of musical theatre in South Korea by embarking on a 7-year tour of North America. Since the musical started its international tours, the domestic audiences and press agencies have paid more attention to the musical’s political, social, and economic value than to its literary and artistic value. Titled “the national musical,” *The Last Empress* functioned as an example of Korean cultural products.

Why did the Korean audience give “authorization” to the musical based on its international production history? For the Korean audience, foreign reception (i.e., positive reviews from major foreign press) was the barometer to evaluate the musical’s quality because of the audience's relative lack of knowledge on the musical theatre. Since Broadway-type mega musicals were introduced to Korean audiences in the 1980s, many of the audiences believe that western musicals, especially from the U.S. and U.K were leading forces in the genre. Even ACom's creative and production teams viewed many of these popular shows before they

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produced *The Last Empress*. Therefore, both ACom and Korean audiences depended on the reception from foreign critics since they lacked knowledge of musical theatre even in the 1990s.

ACom’s creative and production teams reacted sensitively to the foreign reviews believing that the only channel to communicate with global audiences was to observe the reviews from foreign critics. This belief was broken when the musical was performed in the West End in London U.K. in 2002. Yet the problems occurred since the creative team accepted the western reviewers’ opinions that were based on the misconception that the musical’s origin was from the west. Still, the final version of the musical was created in light of the feedback from foreign reviewers.

In 2005, the year following the 2004 Canadian tour, ACom celebrated the ten-year anniversary of the musical, publically announcing the final version for the 2005 production as “the masterpiece.” Yun boasted that the musical’s consistent runs within South Korea and abroad (i.e. 580 runs and 770,000 audience members as of the year 2004) contributed to gaining confidence that the Korean musical industry was able to compete with other western musicals in developed countries. He also acknowledged that *The Last Empress* had been upgraded through ACom's experiences with its North American tours. Yun insisted that *The Last Empress* disproved the chronic misconception that Korean musicals are inferior to those on Broadway and in the West End. Yun also analyzes that the main reason for the musical’s long runs both in South Korea and other countries is that the Korean content combines with “global codes” in this production, which moves international audiences.

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539 Sang Young Jung, “Yun Ho Jun, the Director Who Produces the Stage for Celebrating the 10th year of *The Last Empress*” *The Hangyoreh* 17 Nov. 2004:20.
540 Yun Ho Jin, Personal interview 11 Jul 2011
Even though Yun planned to perform *The Last Empress* in other international cities, such as San Francisco and Beijing, Shanghai in China in 2006, the tours had to be cancelled due to ACom’s financial problems.\(^{542}\) Accordingly, the 2004 Canadian tour brought ACom to the end of its international tours. Nevertheless, ever since the international tour of the musical was suspended in 2004, *The Last Empress* still tours domestic cities in the capital region and other regions in South Korea every year. In fact, *The Last Empress* will be performed from December 6 to 29 in 2013 at the Gyemyeong Art Center in Daegu, South Korea.\(^{543}\)

ACom continued using “global codes” by holding the outreach programs in the homeland after the musical’s international tours had ended. Yun searched for methods to continue the global perspective. ACom organized three outreach programs in Korea from 2007 to 2009. All programs were related to the history of Queen Min and, in particular, her character in *The Last Empress*. In the following chapter, I explain how ACom succeeds in keeping *The Last Empress* alive by speculating the “global codes” through the outreach programs in Korea.

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CHAPTER 6

THEATRICAL IMAGERY OF THE EMPRESS IN HISTORICAL SPACES:


From 2007 to 2009, ACom took an entirely different approach to sharing its musical *The Last Empress*. It produced three outreach programs called “Searching for the Breath of Empress Myeongseong” not only to promote the musical *The Last Empress* to foreign audiences, but also to embody the historical spirit of Queen Min's life on social, political, and economic levels. The first two outreach programs happened in Korea and were divided into two parts each. These events presented an opportunity for audiences interested in Queen Min to visit historical places relevant to her past and to view a live performance of the musical in these locations by professional actors. The third outreach program happened in Japan and presented a short version of the entire production in the birthplace of Queen Min's assassins.

The locations of the three outreach programs were the palace where Queen Min was assassinated, the birth house where Queen Min was born and raised before she entered the palace, and a Japanese island where the majority of assassins were born. ACom's outreach programs promoted aspects of the revisionist history about Queen Min through dramatic character reenactments in the musical performances held in historical places. Moreover, ACom enticed foreign audiences by branding the musical as a global genre of theatre and emphasizing its production history in North America and Europe.

The First Outreach Program

The first outreach program, called “Field Trip from Geoncheonggung (the Geoncheong Palace) to Hongneung (the royal tomb of Queen Min),” aimed to promote the value of the musical in terms of its historical content. This program was performed to celebrate the
reestablishment of the Geoncheong palace that belonged to King Gojong and Queen Min. The reestablishment of the palace was significant in Korea because of the building’s historical background. King Gojong and Queen Min built the Geoncheong palace in 1873 to proclaim their direct rule over the nation. It was also where Queen Min was assassinated. After being destroyed by the Japanese government in 1909, it was reestablished 98 years later. Hongneung is the burial tomb of Queen Min. ACom jointly arranged the program with national organizations such as the National Treasure Center and the Korean Tourism Association. The production team invited most of the program’s 90 participants, targeting a specific audience. Indeed, 40 participants were members of the musical's creative team or sponsors. The rest were international students who studied the Korean language and culture in Yonsei University and citizens who pre-registered with the program online to gain complimentary admission. However, the press spotlighted six Japanese activists from the justice-seeking group "People Who Think about Empress Myeongseong” (PTEM hereafter). Over the years, this group has revealed hidden facts about the death of Queen Min. Kawano, a member of the group, was especially highlighted by the press in Korea because his grandfather had been one of the assassins. Kawano, now an 86-year-old grandfather himself, visited Korea with his grandson, Narita Jin, to apologize for his grandfather’s wrongdoing.

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546 To tour in the Geoncheong palace, people should pre-register online because the palace is located near the president's house in South Korea; the government limits the number of public tourists to 30 people.
547 PTEM was founded by Guy Toshino, a former high school teacher in Kumamoto Hyun in Japan. He studied history about Queen Min for 10 years to reveal the truth of her death.
548 Ahn, “My Grandfather.”
549 Ahn, “My Grandfather.”
This first program was organized as a ritual process that focused on the story of Queen Min’s death. Its tour began at the Geoncheong palace and ended at Queen Min's burial place located in Hong Rung. The chief of the Korean National Treasure Center stated that this event was “the chance to console the souls of King Gojong and Queen Min.”\(^\text{550}\) Participants first gathered in Jang Ahn Dang, the palace's study or meeting place for Queen Min and King Gojong. After the speaker had introduced the program and its schedule, the actors began to sing various arias in the hallway of Jang Ahn Dang (See Photo 1). Termed the “Requiem of Queen Min,”\(^\text{551}\) these sentimental arias celebrate the reestablishment of the palace and the Queen's rebirth. They include “You’re My Destiny” and “Shine My Darkest Night” in Act 2 Scene 12. In the stage production, these arias are sung on the night marking the anniversary Queen Min was killed in the Geoncheong palace. Wearing original costumes with full makeup and performing in the actual place, the actors portray the fearful and complex emotions of Queen Min before her death.\(^\text{552}\)

The musical symbolizes a reenactment of actual history and creates dramatic characters that perform arias, adding aesthetic reverence to calm Queen Min’s spirit and render respect to the spirits of those who have passed on and deserve honor from surviving generations. As a bridge between a historical figure and a portrayed character, the performance becomes a past action occurring in the present. During an interview with the press afterwards, Kawano argues, “He [his grandfather] did it for Japan at that time…I cried when I heard the song. The action was wrong.”\(^\text{553}\) Lee Tae Won's (i.e., the actress portraying Queen Min) response states, “I felt sad

\(^{550}\) Ahn, “My Grandfather.”
\(^{552}\) Lee Tae Won played as Queen Min and Lee Phil Seung played as General Hong.
\(^{553}\) Ahn, “My Grandfather.”
when Kawano cried. The tragic history like the death of Queen Min should not happen again.\footnote{Ahn, “My Grandfather.”} The emotional impact of Lee and Kawano’s exchange is reenacted as a theatrical scene of reconciliation between Lee as Queen Min and Kawano as an assassin (See Photo 2). Later, participants toured two areas considered to be places where the Queen may have been murdered. Controversy remains as to the exact location of her death; therefore, participants visited both Gon Kyung Hap, the bedroom of the Queen, and Ok Ho Ru, the garden area.\footnote{It is still controversial where Queen Min was killed: For more information about the debate, see “The Place that the Empress Was Killed Was Not Her Bedroom, But Her Garden Area.”\textit{Buksori} 205. Jan, 2005. Online. Internet. 23 Nov, 2013. Available: \url{http://www.dhamul.co.kr/buksori/news_view.php?type=2003111116272313&ho=200412223013998&ind=851}.}

Theatrical aspects of the musical enhanced the ritual characteristics of the second part of the program. Lee Tae Won recited a letter, an excerpt from General Dye’s monologue in the epilogue of Scene 27 in \textit{Fox Hunt}; following the reading was a moment of silence in honor of the deceased Queen Min. The excerpt described Queen Min as the “Joan of Arc in Chosun” adding dramatic effect by praising her brave fight against Japan’s power.\footnote{Yi, 198.} During this particular scene in \textit{The Last Empress}, Lee seemed to be a shaman on stage, once possessed with the spirit of the Queen, who now returned the Empress’ spirit, reassuming her descendant position. At the close of the ceremony, Lee, as a descendent, reconsidered the image of Queen Min, reflecting on the journey of her historical story on stage. As in the scene of Lee and Kawano’s meeting in the palace, the theatrical presentation elicited deeply imbedded emotions from both Japanese and Korean audiences.

In summary, the first outreach program celebrated the reestablishment of this historical place by using participants’ reconsiderations of history. The revisionist history of Queen Min was retold as a form of musical theatre. The vice president of the Korean Tourism Association
iterated that the production is a storytelling of the country’s history that establishes the brand of Korea in the eyes of tourists and enhances tourism.\(^{557}\) Throughout the process, the musical increased in value in terms of its interconnection with historical artifacts and its new interpretation of Queen Min.

Figure 2
2-A: Lee Tae Won (center) sings “Shine My Darkest Night” in the hallway of Jang Ahn Ru during the gala performance. Seoul, Korea. 2-B: Lee Tae Won (left) and Kawano Tazumi (Center) in a joint interview after the gala performance.

Source: All photos courtesy to ACom.

The Second Outreach Program

The second outreach program aimed to instill a sense of new historical awareness about Queen Min. Its primary purpose was for the younger generation to understand their historical identity by confronting the past through a contemporary musical. The program was performed in the birthplace of Queen Min in Yeoju, Gyeonggi-do on August 28, 2008. Sponsored by the Korean Tourism Association and the town of Yeoju, the program was an extended celebration of the renovation of the Queen's birthplace. Reconstruction began in earnest in 1995 with the motto

\(^{557}\) Ji Hye Lee, “Reestabishing luxurious cultural treasure, ‘the Geoncheong palace’”

“making the birthplace of Queen Min a sanctuary.”558 The town of Yeoju built other facilities including a museum and folk town and finally celebrated the completion of the project on August 13, 2008.559 At that time, ACom participated in the opening event with Lee Tae Won singing the musical’s arias in the house of Queen Min. The birthplace now functions as a place of education and celebration. Ahn Dong Hee, the director of the Korea Foundation for International Culture Exchange, noted that the town has been respectfully transformed to be more festive by breaking the conventional concept of the solemnity of the Queen's assassination and Korea’s unresolved grief toward the Japanese people.560

This second outreach program was organized as a field trip for college-aged participants. ACom advertised it to the major universities in Korea that offered Korean language programs for international students.561 Twenty-two people from China, Japan, France, Mongolia, Guatemala, Ukraine, and the U.S. participated in the program.562 The remainder of the audience was from Korea and they had applied online. Staff members, the production team, and journalists from the news media joined the group as well. This free program, open to the public, was limited by ACom to 70 participants because the performance area measured only 753 square feet.563

The focus of the program was to tour historical places to better understand the Korean culture. Participants first went to silleuksa, an old temple near the birthplace of Queen Min. In

561 In South Korea, approximately 40 universities have Korean language and culture programs. They include Yonsei University, Korea University, Kyunghee University, Sogang University, Seoul National University, and Ewha Women’s University.
the temple stand several stone pagodas that have been appointed as national treasures.

Afterwards, the group moved to the birthplace of the Queen, where partakers toured all its facilities including:

(i) The birthplace where Queen Min lived until she was seven.

(ii) The museum, which displays the apology letter from the PTEM.

(iii) The literature and cultural hall, which has a 161-seat auditorium along with a multi-purpose stage. The animated biographical movie about Queen Min was screened free of charge.

(iv) Gam Go Dang, the house where Queen Min lived before she married King Gojong. This was located in Hanyang (now Seoul), but the town of Yeoju requested that this building be moved and placed next to the birthplace of Queen Min before it was eventually torn down due to the construction of public schools in Seoul.

(v) The folk town that displays the style of houses that commoners used to live in.

The performance of selected scenes from the musical told the story as a gala show. After the tour around the birthplace, participants watched selected scenes from the musical in the estate's front garden. For this performance, ACom added more fictionalized scenes to emphasize Queen Min’s private life as a mother. The selected scenes were all from Act 2, Scene 12 and were performed in sequence, including “The Prince and The Queen,” “Where was it that we Met?” “You’re My Destiny,” “Thunder and Lightning,” and “Shine My Darkest Night.”

“The Prince and the Queen” and “Thunder and Lightning” in particular showed Queen Min’s

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564 “The Birthplace of Empress Myeongseong.”
gentle and caring side as a mother. While the first outreach program focused on her death, the second stressed her life as a mother who died leaving her son alone. As a result, the story of Queen Min's life made the portrayal of her death more heartbreaking and vivid.

The minimal use of props allowed spectators to concentrate on the essence of Queen Min’s life rather than the spectacles. A simple chamber orchestra, including two violins, a viola, a cello, and a piano, played background music for the musical numbers in the garden area. No artificial lighting or recorded music was used (See Photo 3). Lee noted she felt as if the soul of Queen Min passed through her during the performance. Indo Satomi (a Japanese outreach participant studying the Korean language), who had not heard of Queen Min until joining this program, expressed a feeling of sadness in the “Thunder and Lightning” scene, especially when viewing the Prince hug Queen Min, simultaneously sensing the approach of a tragic moment (See Photo 4). Another spectator, Murakami Kaori, who studied Korean language at Sungkyunkwan University, states, “I didn’t know about the content of the musical, but I was touched in the scene with the Prince and Queen Min… I will browse the Internet to know more about Queen Min and definitely see the production as well.”

In its second outreach program, ACom restated Queen Min's history via tourism combined with performances for international university students. The actors in their stage costumes, performing in historical places with minimal props, glamorized the character of Queen Min, offering participants an opportunity to reconsider history from a modern perspective.

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566 Kim, “The Last Empress.”
567 Kim, “The Last Empress.”
569 Kim, “The Last Empress.”
Figure 3.
3-A: Lee Tae Won (right) sings “Shine My Darkest Night” in the garden of Gam Go Dang, Yeoju, Korea. The musicians are seated at the corner of the garden accompanying the song in the garden. 3-B: Lee Tae Won (right) and Hong Tae Sup (left) sing “Thunder and Lightning” in Gam Go Dang, Yeoju, Korea.

The Third Outreach Program

ACom performed the third program on the Japanese island of Kumamoto to present the historical meaning of Queen Min’s death and to pacify the emotional conflict between Korea and Japan. Entitled “Toward Reconciliation and Understanding,” the program was jointly organized by ACom and the PTEM. After the PTEM had met the ACom production team in Korea at the outreach program in the Geoncheong palace in 2007, the two parties continued corresponding to organize the event. An executive committee for the program was formed in August 2009, and sponsors, including the local press, the media, and theatre and drama associations, were organized in the following month of September.570 The program was finally performed at the University of Kumamoto in Kakuen, Room 14, on October 8, 2009.571

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570 The sponsors were as follows: Korean Consulate General in Hukuoka in Japan; The Office of Japan National Tourism Organization for Kumamoto Hyun in Choongchungnamdo, Korea; The Korean Residence Union in Kumamoto Hyun; NichiNichi Press in Kumamoto; NHA in Kumamoto; KAB, TKU, KKT; The University of Kumamoto; The Association of Japanese Directors in Kumamoto in HeiSei Music School; the Association of Dramatists in Kumamoto; the Association of Theatre Artists in Kumamoto; the Mumasajiki Theatre Troup; PTEM;
History shows that the island of Kumamoto was involved in the assassination of Queen Min. Twenty-one of the 48 people involved in the assassination of the Empress were born in Kumamoto Hyun, and as mentioned previously, one of the slayer’s descendants, Kawano Tazumi, later apologized for the part his ancestor played in the brutal deed against the Queen.\textsuperscript{572} The PTEM states, “Most people in Kumamoto did not know this history [the fact of the assassination] because it was intentionally hidden, so this event should be a watershed for the chance to understand both histories correctly.”\textsuperscript{573} A committee member for the event also arranged the date to coincide with the 114th anniversary of Queen Min's assassination.

ACom and the PTEM arranged the program to share the history of Queen Min without biased perspectives, agreeing to use the form of musical theatre as a catalyst. ACom introduced the musical to the Japanese participants in Kumamoto by promoting its international reception from western audiences during its tours and its popularity at home. Song Kyung Ok, the executive producer of the program, notes that the free event was performed in Korean with Japanese supertitles.\textsuperscript{574} This fact exemplifies the partnership of the two cultures.

For the program, ACom presented live performances and screened recorded scenes. While an actor sang a certain musical number, the same scene was projected onto the screen with Japanese subtitles (See Photo 5). The screen was located in the upstage area and the five musicians playing two violins, a cello, a viola, and a piano were seated in the downstage area accompanying the actors’ songs. Originally, the executive committee planned to perform the entire stage production in Japan. They, however, had to rename the program “Special Highlight...”
Performance," because the Japanese government did not allow them to perform the entire musical due to political circumstances.\footnote{575} Five scenes were selected to present a spectacle and introduce the main characters of the musical. “Shaman Rite” in Act 1, Scene 2 was chosen to portray Korean tradition and beauty.\footnote{576} This scene was one of the most popular scenes among foreign audiences during its North American tours. Next, two newly added arias for this event, "My Wife" and “We Shall Rise Again” in Act 1, Scene 6, sung by actors playing King Gojong and Queen Min, were presented. “You’re My Destiny” and “Shine My Darkest Night” in Act 2, Scene 12 remained the main arias in all three outreach programs. After these five scenes had been performed, the remaining climactic scene, the “Fox Hunt,” and the grand finale number of “Rise, People of Chosun,” were projected onto the screen. Brief descriptions of the scenes and lyrics for each were also screened with Japanese subtitles.

The audience, comprised of over 700 people, including residents of Kumamoto Hyun, people from Korean-Japanese communities, and members of the PTEM, reacted positively to the performance.\footnote{577} During the performance, there were not enough seats for the audience, so chairs were placed in all the corridors of the auditorium (See Photo 6).\footnote{578}

One Korean journalist reports that some Japanese audience members wept as they saw Queen Min killed by assassins.\footnote{579} Okat Shiho, from Kakuen University, states, “I was sad. This program will announce the history to most Japanese people who did not know that Japan killed

\footnote{575} Yun has attempted to perform the musical in Japan since its premiere in 1995, but the Japanese government refused it. The latest attempt occurred in 2002, but it was also refused.\footnote{576} ACom’s Official Press Release Document of “The Special Performance of ‘The Last Empress’ in Kumamoto Hyun in Japan,” ACom, 2009.\footnote{577} Dong Hyun Lee, “Queen Min Seems to Have a Soul Reconciliation with the Assassins” The Munhwa Ilbo. 9 Oct, 2009:3.\footnote{578} Yae Kyung Kim, “The first Performance in Japan on the day that she was killed 114 years ago.” HanKook Ilbo. 9 Oct, 2009:12.\footnote{579} Lee, 3.
Queen Min.\textsuperscript{580} Hiyashi Kiyoko, who formerly worked in a trade company in Korea and Japan, notes, “Although the story dealt with a painful history, the musical did not make me feel uncomfortable, so I hope we should have more of these interconnections.”\textsuperscript{581} Kawano Tazumi adds, “I hope there are no more boundaries between Japan and Korea.”\textsuperscript{582}

The outreach program, however, blurred the ideas of “reconciliation and understanding” by omitting biased scenes and removing other main Japanese characters from the production. Miura is an example of inflammatory character that was removed for this Japanese program. The character of Miura is controversial as the leader who planned the assassination of Queen Min. Yet, his conversation with Queen Min in “Miura’s Audience” in Act 2, Scene 3 was significant in that it showed Queen Min’s diplomatic skills with other powerful countries. The deleted scene also supports reasons why Japan forced Queen Min to have Japanese military support in Chosun but was not portrayed in the Japanese program due to political and cultural sensitivities.

The four arias chosen for this targeted outreach program appear to understate the conflict between Korea and Japan and overemphasize the melodramatic content between King Gojong missing his wife and General Hong’s one-sided love for Queen Min. On the other hand, ACom selectively omitted controversial scenes about Chosun to avoid inciting conflict between Japanese and Korean audiences. The first two arias describe the moment when Queen Min escapes from the people who are angry at her for opening a door to Japan, while the second two arias explain her fragile emotion caused by avoiding political and social interference from Japan. These two arias seem to conclude that Japan remains a public enemy because the people of Chosun hated Queen Min when she was close to Japan, but respected her as a national Empress

\textsuperscript{580} Kim, 12.
\textsuperscript{581} Lee, 3.
\textsuperscript{582} “Queen Min’s Song Lingered Around Japan 114 Years Later,” 20.
when she tried to refuse Japan's assistance. These selections might stress Korea’s hatred of Japan without explaining Chosun’s weak power among powerful nations, which were described in other omitted scenes.

The special performance of *The Last Empress* in Kumamoto suggests that musical theatre can cross the territorial boundaries between Korea and Japan and unite them by interpreting history from intercultural perspectives in this era of globalization. In fact, the musical's director, Yun Ho Jin, expected that the event might indeed be meaningful if it becomes a stepping-stone for performing the entire production in Japan in the future. 583

Figure 4.
4-A: Ji Hae Gun (right) sings, “You’re My Destiny” to Lee Tae Won (left) at the University of Kumamoto, Japan. 4-B: Spectators wait for the program at the University of Kumamoto in Kakuen, Room 14, Japan.

Source: All photos courtesy of ACom

Final Thoughts

ACom held outreach programs to deliver the character in the musical to the public as the actual living embodiment of Queen Min. Unlike the staged musical of *The Last Empress*, the outreach programs more directly communicated with foreign audiences by using gala performances as a catalyst to create the incarnation of Queen Min. The outreach programs

583 Lee, 3.
represented her image in historical places to examine her character more deeply and to promote the virtuous evaluation of the musical’s artistic value.

Interestingly, the concept of a “global” production has been transformed since ACom began to export the musical abroad. The company believed that going outside the homeland to present the musical was the very way to fulfill the company’s duty to produce a global musical. Since the international tours were suspended due to ACom’s financial difficulties, the company discovered the musical’s limit in appealing to foreign audiences. Throughout the 7-year North American tours, the foreign reviewers kept pointing out similar criticisms of the musical even when the creative team revised the musical’s script under the foreign reviewers' critical comments. Aware of the weak financial standing of the international tours, and unlike the company’s previous unilateral way of traveling to the audiences’ homelands, ACom switched its direction to Korea. The company invited foreign audiences who live in Korea to historical places to meet Queen Min in *The Last Empress*.

In the first two outreach programs, the embodiment of the revisionist's interpretation of Queen Min lively appeared in key historical places and presented her reconsidered image to domestic and foreign audiences. By combining Korean tourism and appreciation of the musical, ACom invited foreign audiences not only to learn Korean culture and history but also to view this respectable form of theatre. Therefore, the company’s characterization of globalization has changed from exporting the globally known mega-musical during the international tours to broadcasting Queen Min’s life in her homeland in the first two outreach programs.

In the third outreach program held in Kumamoto Island in Japan, ACom expanded the notion of globalization by conceptualizing the musical as the medium between Koreans and Japanese in order to provide them a full view of the history of Queen Min. The musical was
performed in Japan not for commercial reasons but for the purpose of meeting with the assassins’
descendants. In the original book of the musical, *Fox Hunt* by Yi Munyol, the play begins with
the scene of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima and the court’s decision to release the assassins
without guilt or punishment. Yi resumes to appeal against the assassins by retelling the story of
Queen Min and punishes them with a nuclear bomb not at his own hand, but at the hand of the
U.S. For Yi, the musical functioned as a news account to broadcast the assassination of the
Queen Min. Later, in the outreach program in Kumamoto Island, ACom uses the mutually
familiar theatrical form and the medium of *The Last Empress* to present the concise version of
the story to the assassins’ descendants for the purpose of reconciliation between the Korean and
Japanese descendants. ACom enriched the musical’s vital function to bring humanity over the
territorial boundaries and beyond cultural, historical, political, and social boundaries. During the
last outreach program, this Korean musical succeeded in drawing its Japanese audience into the
true drama, that is, reconciliation for the future.

Throughout ACom’s journey abroad and at home, the company has embraced the concept
of globalization and modified it under the circumstances that it experienced. Acknowledging the
musical’s limitation of weak literature quality and lack of marketing experience, bungling
collaboration with western crews, and their financial deficit, ACom discontinued the musical’s
global tours. Nevertheless, during the tours, the process of revision and adjusting to its
audience’s reception is testament of the company’s determination to survive the worlds’ tumult.
In its quest for global acceptance, ACom continuously revised and updated the production for ten
years and *The Last Empress became* the national musical of Korea.

In spite of these paradoxical results of the musical’s international tours, the process of the
tours is worth preserving because ACom opened the door for Asian cultural products (i.e.
musical productions) to join the mainstream theatre market. Embracing the concept of globalization, the musical suggests that Korean cultural treasures in the new millennium do not need to be from a genuinely Korean tradition, which is usually inherited by her ancestors, but could encompass a globally acceptable form of theatre and even embody the contemporary spirit of unity for the next generation. This musical functions as a prevailing Korean tradition and serves as a pioneer of the indigenous musical.
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