

Sweden

Norway

Finland

Manaan

Gangwon

Incheon Seoul

Denmark

Cheonan

Berlin Poland Warsaw

Germany

Czechia Austria Vienna Budapest Baia Mare Oradea Cluj Napoca Suceava Iasi

Busan

Switzerland Milan Slovenia Croatia Zagreb

Hungary ARAD Timisoara Braşov Horezu Bucharest Constanţa

Italy

Alba Iulia Deva Sibiu Lupeni



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Approved by Master's Examination Committee:

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**TASHEKA ARCENEUX SUTTON**

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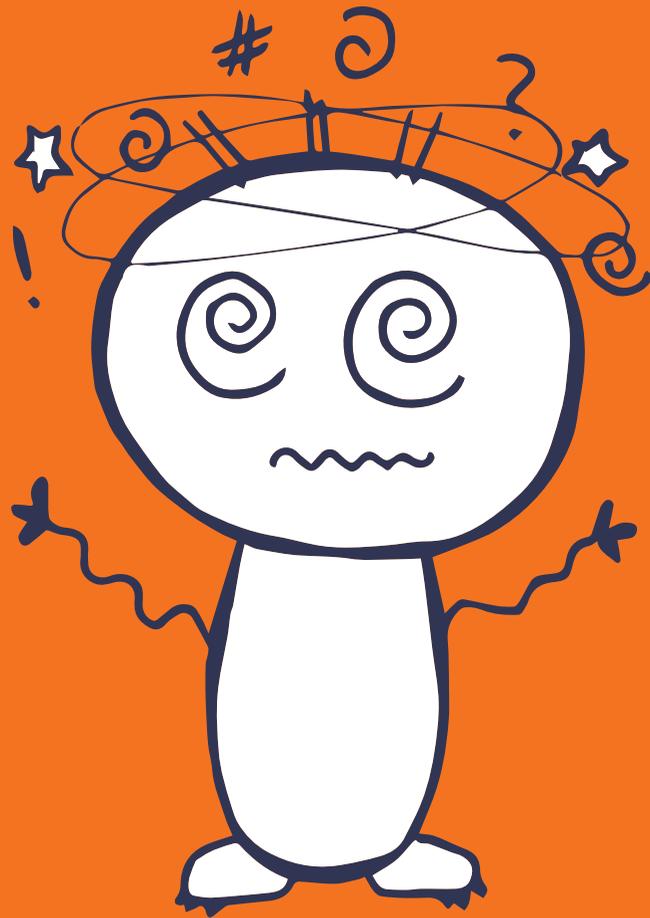
**YOON SOO LEE**

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**SILAS MUNRO**

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**IAN LYNAM**



MAPS

who am i?  
where do i  
come from?

who am i?  
who do  
i pretend  
to be?

MASKS

MONSTERS

who am i?  
who do i  
want to be?

“What is Beauty and under what conditions is it knowable?”

“What canons, which tastes and social mores, allow us to describe a body as ‘beautiful?’ How does the image of Beauty change over time?”

— *Umberto Eco, History of Beauty, p.93*

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. This is what the society we live in tells us, but this society is lying. The beauty culture promoted as standard leaves us feeling more vulnerable than ever, and the perfection it requires allows for no error. Our sense of belonging depends on how beautiful we are, how well we perform, and how closely we conform to the ideals placed before us. For those like me who have grown up feeling alienated from their own cultures, these standards only add more weight to our heavy baggage.

*Maps, Masks, and Monsters* explores what it means to be multicultural, beautiful, and perfect in the form of a memoir mixed with analytical writing. It addresses issues of personal insecurities and pain arising from unrealistic cultural expectations and pressures to conform. It is a quiet critique of the beauty culture — not just its portrayal of ideal physical appearances, but also its narrow focus on unrealistic standards of goodness, perfection, and how things are supposed to be. With my own personal cross-cultural background and experiences as the foundation, *Maps, Masks, and Monsters* aims to understand how cultures and traditions shape identity and question the influence of the beauty and perfection culture we live in. Who makes the rules, and why do we feel we must follow them? How do cultural and beauty expectations affect us? Who benefits from our submission? How can we feel whole when the world seems to tell us we will never be enough?

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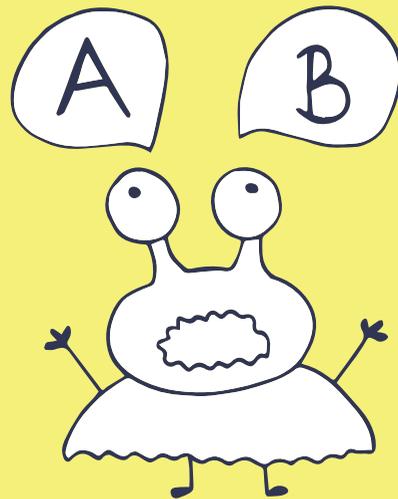
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# MAPS

*Cultural Values*



## Hi, I'm Korean, but not really.

All my courses at the beginning of the semester in undergrad started with something like this: “Let’s get to know each other a little bit! Tell us your name, class, major, and something interesting about yourself.” At the beginning of every semester, I said something like this: “Hi, my name is Danbee, I am a freshman/sophomore/junior/senior, graphic design major, and... I speak Romanian.” One may wonder why that is interesting. Well, that is because I do not look like I could speak Romanian. I do not look Romanian in the least. I look Asian. If anyone asks, I am Korean... but not really.

There is a habit in the United States of people often asking another where they are from. There is nothing wrong with the question, except for when they mean “where are you really from?” This is not a question of where do you live? This question is asking about one’s roots. With the United States being a potluck of cultures, it is not uncommon to think that everyone must have roots in another country. However, the question seems to be more common with people who look “foreign;” in a white-normative culture, that means anyone who is not Caucasian. I am often asked if I am Korean? Japanese? Chinese? I always smile and confidently respond — Korean. Usually, this is enough to satisfy the asker, and I am happy to leave it at that. I look Korean, I am Korean. Right?

If I start to dig deeper, the answer is not that simple. I am Korean because my parents are Korean. But I am not really Korean because I have American citizenship. So that makes me American? Maybe. But not really. I don’t really identify as an American.

When I tell someone I am Korean, I get follow-up questions like this: How long have you been in the States? Were you born in Korea? Do you speak Korean? I sit and ponder where to begin. I came to the States in 2007. No, I was not born in Korea. Yes, I speak Korean. If I am lucky, the questions stop there. If I'm not, they continue. Where were you born? Have you lived in Korea?

I take a deep breath.

Hi, I am Danbee, and I am Korean, but not really. My parents are Korean but they are missionaries in Romania. I was actually born in England, and at six months my parents took me with them to Romania alongside my brother, who is two years older than me. This was back in 1993, a few years after communism had ended, and Romanians were learning how to live in a post-communist society. Growing up, I noticed that many Romanians around me were not familiar with foreigners. Many knew of American missionaries who had come and gone, and many shopped at the market on the outskirts of town where Chinese people sold low-price products. I rarely met other ethnicities in the fifteen years I lived in Romania. I had just two encounters with two different African-American men, one of whom I met on a trolley and one in a park as I walked with friends. The encounters were short, but each time, I felt the gaze of the people around us: "Look! Not one, but two foreigners!" Perhaps the gazes were made up in my young mind, as I might have felt both pressure and relief to meet someone else who looked different than the Romanians in Romania. Most foreigners I saw in Romania were on screen, and most of them were from Latin America. Telenovelas were extremely popular.

South Korea, at the time, was a place unknown to the majority of the Romanians my family and I interacted with. For most, the first guess as to our ethnicity was Chinese. We were the only Korean family in our county and in surrounding counties, and the people

who looked like us were mostly Chinese, so why would we not be? Given our appearance, it must have made the most sense.

As children, my brother and I were sent to a Romanian kindergarten and were taught Korean at home by our mother. It was important that we learned Korean and understood our identity as Korean missionary kids. My parents knew that, no matter how much we would believe that we were Romanian, we would never be Romanian. It would not matter how well we spoke Romanian, how Romanian we behaved: our appearance would simply not allow it. We looked Asian, after all.

From the beginning, my father saw a difficult future for us in Romania. However, because there were no such things as international schools in Romania then, he sent us to what he thought was the next best thing — a public art school. Art, he believed, was the universal language that could provide us a future beyond Romania. *Liceul de Artă "Sabin Drăgoi"* (*The "Sabin Drăgoi" Art School*) was special in that it trained children in fine arts and music beginning in first grade. From day one, students and their parents would choose a focus, either in music or art, after which they would be assigned to a specific class. Both my brother and I began in the music program with a piano focus. This meant that alongside general education we would have music classes, choir, and private piano lessons. We would have one painting class up until the eighth grade, but most of the focus would be on music. While my brother switched instruments in fifth grade to play the cello, I continued my journey in piano. Although I loved art and was always curious about it, neither my parents nor I thought I would be good at it. I had also grown attached to my music class friends and was afraid to try something new. I preferred to stay with what I knew and with what was comfortable. I played in numerous recitals and auditions and received several awards, so I believed piano was the path to follow. I do not regret that I continued my study in

music, but I do sometimes wonder what would have happened if I had taken the leap of courage towards the arts program.

I was generally a happy child, content with my identity as Korean with a Romanian heart. In some ways, I preferred being called Romanian. I was fluent in Korean, I was still a Korean citizen, and we would visit Korea every three years or so, but Romania was my home.

In eighth grade, my life changed. I took the grand eighth-grade test and thought I was continuing my education in piano performance at the same school with the same friends I'd had since elementary school. I was wrong. In the summer of 2007, my family and I moved to Chicago. Imagine a teenager mourning the loss of her friends and everything she knows, coming to this foreign country that she

has visited before but never thought would become her home. Not to mention, she only realized this was really happening just about two months before actually moving.

For an easier transition, if we could call it so, both my brother and I attended a private Romanian high school in the suburbs of Chicago. While I believe it was for the good of both of us, trying to fit in a classroom with students who had known each other since they were babies presented itself as another challenge. The Romanian-American upbringing of the students seemed to be another culture in and of itself. I felt lost. I felt alone. I missed being home.

Years passed. I graduated from high school and made my way into college. If so far most of my friends had been Romanian-American,

## ROMANIAN SCHOOL SYSTEM

The school system in Romania is different than in the United States. In the States, students are required to take the SAT/ACT in their high school years to determine which college they want to go to. They do not have to decide their majors right away, and they can also change their majors later on. This is not the case in Romania. The career path of students in Romania is determined at the end of eighth grade. Students take a big test at the end of eighth grade that determines their aptitude to attend high school. They are tested in Math, History, and Romanian grammar and writing. Those who pass can go to a high school of their choosing. These are the students who will likely have more opportunities for a successful career, as the high schools open to them have a highly specific curriculum set up for the career of their choice. Those who do not pass are sent to general high schools which, as the name suggests, provide more general training. While these high schools provide essential education, they are not as specific to a certain profession. As a result, students who go to general high schools tend to have less of a chance to thrive in a career than those going to a career-specific high school, as they end up competing

with students who have had four years of specific training. This, however, also tends to be a disadvantage to the students who do pass the test and go to specific high schools because changing career paths midway becomes extremely difficult. They are essentially required to start over, and there is a lot of catching up to do.

I believe that this is a significant design flaw in the Romanian education system. While it offers the student highly developed skills in one particular area, it does not allow for exploration and experimentation that are crucial in finding and understanding what one really wants to be and do in life, in my opinion. A student is basically stuck within a career path that may or may not be the right choice. Given my own history, what I chose to pursue as a teenager is not what I am pursuing now. The results of the Romanian eighth-grade test also create a false sense of superiority in students who have passed the test over those who have not. A test in eighth grade is definitely not enough to determine if a student will have a successful career or not.

I was now making Korean friends. I was going to a Korean church, and all of a sudden I found myself engulfed in a Korean community. It felt odd. I had never had so many Koreans around me.

More years passed. Without even really realizing it, my Romanian self slowly began dissipating while my Korean self was taking charge. It made sense — after all, I was no longer in Romania, and the Romanians I met in the States were not really Romanian. While trying to figure out which nationality I identified with most, I became an American citizen. On paper, I am now American, but my American identity is frail. I have never really been Romanian: I couldn't be. Romanians would never see me as one of their own. My appearance never allowed it and now that the years have passed, it's almost an identity forgotten.

I look Korean. I speak Korean. My parents are Korean. Yet, I have never lived in Korea. Koreans notice that I am different. Slight accents in my speaking give it away. I dress differently and behave differently. There is so much of the Korean culture I am not aware of or do not understand, and Koreans take note of it. I do not feel nostalgic for the childhood snacks and games my Korean friends are so fond of, and when these conversations happen, I just drift away. My ability to speak Korean is limited to everyday conversation. I do not understand the elevated words used in the news or in a professional setting. It's difficult. However, when none of the cultures I live in seem to be mine, which do I choose? Can I even choose? Who am I?

**Merriam Webster defines culture as:**

- the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group
- the characteristic features of everyday existence (such as diversions or a way of life) shared by people in a place or time
- the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes an institution or organization
- the integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior that depends upon the capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations

## The World In-Between

1. Chris Reeve, *A Few Warm Stones No. 2: Ondol, Better Days Institute*, 2010, p. 40

Imagine three islands equidistant from each other. Now, imagine a small boat on the ocean right in the middle of those islands. That's me! I live on that boat. I have access to all three islands. I know those islands very well. I know the trees that grow on each island, the different animals, the different types of food. They are all so different, unique in their own way. I love those islands, but the boat is my home. How crazy is that? I have not one but three perfectly equipped islands to call my home, but I am in the boat.

I have grown up in three different countries learning to live in three different cultures. Romania is my childhood, the United States of America is my present, and South Korea has always been part of me through my family. I grew up learning these cultures, understanding different customs and expectations, and accepting them as my own. However, no matter how hard I tried to adopt one of these cultures as truly my own, I never could. My life has become so infused with all three that I found it impossible to fit into one. I am part of all three countries, but I will never fully belong to one. That is my boat, the tiny and weird little place I call the "world in-between," a place "simultaneously completely foreign and completely local."<sup>1</sup>

I find **cultures** intriguing. Having a set of rules, traditions, behaviors, and expectations that are accepted within an entire country is pretty mind-blowing. Where is the beginning of culture? Who sets up values, and why do people accept them? Does the longevity of a value being passed down from generation to generation automatically assure that said value is good?

As I ponder the meaning of culture, my mind races through the different cultures I experienced and questioned as I grew up. I continue to take note of differences and clashes between my three worlds and continue diving deeply into how these three cultures have shaped me as a person.

**DISCLAIMER:** I recognize that many individuals within each country hold their own values and may have differing or opposing opinions. The following situations and issues are based on my own personal observations and experiences with the three cultures I grew up in and how I feel affected by them.

According to **Dr. Geert Hofstede**, Romania and Korea are collectivistic societies. This means that they put emphasis on strong relationships and long-term commitment. They act as a group, and so the behavior of one is often considered the behavior of all. This was very much apparent in my upbringing in Romania, under Korean parents.

Family is very important in both Romania and Korea, and “family” refers not to nuclear family alone, but to the extended family of several generations. The family relationship extends to all grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins. There are certain responsibilities expected of the children and, even when married, children stick closely to their family of origin. In the States, children seem to become independent once entering college. Many will live in dormitories and will find their own place after graduation. This is not always the case, of course, and many do choose to return and remain home for some time, but I have met many American parents who were eager to send their children off to school.

Dutch psychologist and pioneer in study of cultures, conducted intercultural research based on values influenced by culture.<sup>2</sup>

2. “The 6D Model Of National Culture”, Geert Hofstede, 2020.  
<https://geert Hofstede.com/culture-geert-hofstede-geert-jan-hofstede/6d-model-of-national-culture/>

My husband is Korean-American, born and raised in the States. His parents are first-generation Koreans and, although they have lived in the States for over thirty years, they are sticklers for Korean rules and traditions. Before I married my husband, we went through marriage counseling with an American pastor. One of the issues we discussed was our commitment to our families. How often would we visit our parents? Grandparents? What about cousins? In the States, it seems uncommon for extended families to meet frequently, most reunions happening at big events or on holidays. Our marriage counselor even admitted that he and his spouse see their families only twice a year, for Christmas and Thanksgiving. This is definitely not normative in Korean culture. Frequent visits and calls to extended families are expected, and there is no surprise if in-laws decide to drop by unannounced if they live close by.

In both Romania and the States — although the trend is shifting in recent years — it has long been the custom that the wife adopts the surname of the husband. This does not mean that the wife has more responsibilities to the husband’s family than she does to her own. She is not expected to do more for her husband’s family than she is to her own. In Korean culture, the wife does not take on the name of the husband. She keeps her maiden name, but she literally marries into the family of the husband. Her husband’s family takes priority in all aspects, and she is expected to comply. Korea and Romania are still very much patriarchal societies. This is slowly changing as women are becoming more independent, some even refusing to get married and choosing to focus on their careers. However, there is still an overwhelming expectation from those who believe that the responsibilities of a woman are to stay home, look after the kids, do housework, and have a warm meal prepared for the husband who is expected to work and be the breadwinner of the family.

Because my husband identifies more with the American culture, my own marriage reflects a more individualistic behavior. We see

ourselves as partners, and we have equal say in the matters of our marriage. We both do housework and, while his parents still seem to think that I prepare the meals, my husband is the real cook in our house. We both have freedom to do things individually, and we agreed to no excessive commitment to in-laws and extended families. However, there is undoubtedly pressure and unspoken expectation from both my parents and especially my in-laws to take on the role of the traditional Korean wife.

When invited to my in-laws' home for dinner, I am expected to help in the kitchen and clean up after. It is never spoken, just implied. I am expected to cook for my husband and call his parents regularly. While they won't give me too much grief about it, they will always mention how it has been so long since they have heard from me. As the eldest son in the family, my husband is expected to take care of all the siblings and cousins younger than him, and, as his wife, I am expected to support this role. It is often exhausting, but this is a culture I am expected to respect as a Korean woman.

In a collectivist culture such as Korea, my behavior reflects my upbringing — my parents. This is also true of the Romanian culture. If a child does well, often the parents will be praised. If a child does poorly, the shame falls upon the parents. I have always felt pressure to behave. As a child I did not want to bring shame upon my parents who were already dealing with so much. I learned that fingers pointed at me would mean fingers pointed at them, and I did not want that. I was afraid of that. As a result, I fought hard to maintain the appearance of a well-behaved daughter, a straight-A student, and an “I have everything under control” teenager.

As an adult, I am still aware of the pressures of having a good reputation. Family background, education, career, and social status are important aspects in Korean culture, and they reflect

**“Does excellence not come from within the process of the individual? The efforts of the individual? The actual work of the individual?”<sup>3</sup>**

the success of the entire family. While my parents never required us to have high-ranking positions or earn a lot of money, they did encourage us to pursue higher education, get a terminal degree, and have a respectable job. They continue to urge me to make the right choices, and I often take into consideration how my decision could affect them.

In the States, assessments are done based on an individual's abilities and skills. I have not once been asked what grades I got in college when applying for a job, and my alma mater did not matter as much as what I included in my portfolio. My abilities are what got me my first job. Unfortunately, in Korea an individual's efforts alone are not enough to start a career path and are often disregarded. In a career path, it is more important to come from a good family background, know the right people, and look the part than it is to really be good at the job. Appearance over skills. A person who has graduated from a highly regarded school, but who is not experienced, will still have higher chances to succeed than one who has the necessary skills but has attended a school that is not as well known. A student coming from a wealthy family will be given more opportunities to evolve than one coming from a financially unstable family.

The same dynamic seen in a collectivist family can be seen in the larger culture of a collectivist country. Romanians and Koreans see themselves as part of a group first. The collectivist behavior of Korea stems from the Confucian belief that there is more value in the collective good than in personal needs.<sup>4</sup> This can be seen in

<sup>3</sup> Ra, A Few Warm Stones No. 2: Ondol, p. 45  
<sup>4</sup> Young-Ju Cho, Brent Malinckrodt, and Soek-Kyeong Yune, *Collectivism and Individualism As Bicultural Values: South Korean Undergraduates' Adjustment to College*, PDF 2010, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265077955\\_Collectivism\\_and\\_Individualism\\_as\\_Bicultural\\_Values\\_South\\_Korean\\_Undergraduates%27\\_Adjustment\\_to\\_College](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265077955_Collectivism_and_Individualism_as_Bicultural_Values_South_Korean_Undergraduates%27_Adjustment_to_College)

the Korean culture of hierarchy and submission to authority. Romania differs from Korea in the fact that its collectivist behavior stems largely from its history under Communism.

In my little *world in-between*, this collectivist behavior shows up largely in two ways. One is in my fear of failure, and the other is in relationship to long-term commitment. While my family never required excellence, I grew up in an environment where all eyes were on us. As the only Korean family in the county, everyone knew us. From an early age, I learned that people loved to talk. They loved pointing fingers as long as it wasn't them getting hurt. It was fun to judge others. I knew that if I made a mistake, it would eventually reflect on my parents. So I decided that, if people were to talk about me, they would have nothing but good things to say. This meant that I could not make mistakes. It meant that I had to be exceptional. Failure to be so meant failure to protect my family. It seems foolish to take on such a responsibility at a young age, but it is because of my young age that I saw this as inevitable. Over the years this fear of failure took on other layers. It became more than protecting my family — it became my pride and a reflection of my abilities. If I failed, it meant I wasn't good enough.

Do failures really reflect who I am? Does my failure mean I let my family down? What is failure?

The issue of long-term commitment is reflected in my desire to belong and hold on to relationships. When I first came to the States, friendships were what hurt me the most. Due to the individualistic behavior of Americans, I had a hard time creating bonds. This was because my definition of friends was very different. There is a word in Korean that cannot easily be translated into English: **우정** [ujeong]. This is a word that describes the way I learned to

**“Does pre-existing information govern our ability to assess and make appraisals of our own?”<sup>5</sup>**

5. *Ro, A Few Warm Stones No. 2: Ondol*, p. 45  
6. *Ro, A Few Warm Stones No. 2: Ondol*, p. 45

make and keep friendships in my childhood. It is a lasting bond, a commitment between friends that goes beyond just hanging out and having some things in common. It is a bond that is more like a family. I always seemed to find this easier with Romanians and Koreans. It is important to note, however, that the difficulty was not because Americans were shallow or uncommitted. Rather, it was simply because friendships in America manifest differently. As I grew more accustomed to the American culture, I came to value the respect for personal space and time, aspects often missing in the Korean and Romanian culture.

If you've ever watched a Korean drama, you will be familiar with the use of *unni*, *oppa*, *sunbae*, *hyung*, and other honorific titles that do not get translated into English. That is because they do not exist in English. These are names that are to be used when calling upon an older sibling, a student who has seniority in school, or a coworker who has been at a job longer than you. This is the hierarchical culture of South Korea. Age and higher rank are extremely important. Behavior is established based on these values. The elders take priority no matter what, and those who are older or have higher status must be respected.

**Can a “system of letting the work exist independently and being assessed independently without any preconceived notions, identities, or ideals”<sup>6</sup> exist?**

This respect is unquestioned. Even between twins, the one who was born first becomes the older one and is to be called accordingly. Because of the importance of establishing hierarchy, age is one of the first things Koreans ask about when meeting new people. This

determines how they will behave and what kind of language they will use. Unless it is a close relationship or the older person has given permission to do otherwise, younger or lower-status Koreans will always use honorifics when speaking to those above them in hierarchy. Upon first meeting or in business relationships, however, both parties will use honorifics. The culture of hierarchy exists in Romania as well, but not to the same extent as Korea. Romanians use honorifics with strangers, acquaintances, teachers, doctors, bosses, and the elderly. Between similar age groups or close family friends, speaking is generally casual, children often calling their parents' friends by name.

One of the hardest things to do while attending university was having professors who preferred being called by their first names. How could I, a student, greet my professor by their first name? I later learned that this was because, in the States, there can be mutual respect regardless of age and rank. In "Plastic Wood," Chris Ro notes, "There is a comfort in being respected as a peer (calling professors by name, having the chance to become equals — encouraged). This does not happen in Korea. You are forever belittled by the older people, the seniors, those with higher status."<sup>7</sup> In both Korea and Romania, a professor will always be your professor, but in the States a professor can become your friend. My undergrad professor has become a dear friend and mentor, something that would not be possible in Korean and Romanian culture. The same goes for relationships in the workplace. Koreans and Romanians must always adhere to the orders of the boss. The workers cannot dare to voice their thoughts. In the States, people in positions of authority often want to hear the voices and opinions of their employees. It may not be so in every company, but in my own experience, my bosses were always eager to hear what we, the employees, thought within our department.

**Filial piety — “the notion that respect must be given not only to your parents but to elders always. ALWAYS.”<sup>8</sup>**

I believe that respect for the elderly and certain boundaries created by hierarchy are helpful in creating a society that is courteous and mindful of our roles. However, when

this power is abused and there is no longer an opportunity for equal growth, hierarchy becomes a problem. Growing up, I never questioned my elders. I never questioned the information given to me by my elders. Especially in the Korean community, I played into my role as the youngest and often performed tasks that I did not want to do just because my seniors asked me. My opinions mattered least, so I learned to stay silent and follow.

I am now aware that this cultural trait did not work for my benefit as a student or designer. I constantly awaited direction because I was taught to wait for directions. My goal was to please my professors and even my peers. As a designer, I waited for directions from the client. In everything I did, I looked for some sort of guideline. I constantly needed someone to tell me what to do. When I was asked to think for myself in grad school, I was lost. When people finally asked to hear my voice, I did not know what to say. Did I even have a voice? I started to question who I was if there was no one there to tell me who to be. This led to a period of questioning myself — who was I and who I did I want to be? I had to start at the beginning — where did I first start to lose myself? What was my story? What were the experiences I wanted to bury, and what fears held me back from expressing myself? What were the things I wanted to say when I held my tongue, even when I disagreed with what was said? Little by little, I started to uncover the layers added onto me by others, and I made my way to the core where my values, beliefs, hopes, and dreams lay waiting.

<sup>7</sup> Ro, A Few Warm Stones No. 2: Ordeal, p. 46  
<sup>8</sup> Ro, A Few Warm Stones No. 2: Ordeal, p. 46

I am still uncovering the layers, but as my little world *in-between* continues to develop through these reflections, I am learning to use my voice. We all have one. We should not let others tell us what it is. We know what it is, and no one can say otherwise. Sometimes, we just need an extra push to find it.



I am a perfectionist. I always thought I had to be exceptional in order to survive. Mistakes and failures meant I was not good enough, and as a result I feared that, unless I was good, I would not be valued or appreciated. I put a lot of pressure on myself, only to feel miserable when failure did strike. There is more to life than being the best, but I was too afraid to believe it.

**“Should is how other people want us to live our lives... Must is who we are, what we believe, and what we do when we are alone with our truest, most authentic self.”<sup>9</sup>**

My fear of failure has led me to avoid any kind of uncertainty. Dr. Hofstede’s study reveals that in both Romanian and Korean culture there is a set of rules and regulations people are expected to follow. There is no tolerance for things unknown and, as a result, anything that has not been regularly done or seen before is automatically turned down. Koreans prefer to deal with situations they are familiar with and they like to be prepared. Being told what to do gives reassurance. There is no ambiguity in something that has been done before.

This culture is reflected in my own uncertainty avoidance. If I stick to what I know and can do well, I cannot fail. It seems reassuring, but, in reality, it is problematic. When there is fear of uncertainty, innovation is discouraged. Being different is being strange — it’s not fitting in. As a student and as a designer, uncertainty avoidance has been the inhibitor to my own growth and creativity. I constantly colored inside the lines and avoided jumping out of the box to see what lies beyond its confines. I remained restricted and controlled by the rules I was given and avoided trying out different things. My own mother was worried I was too rigid to be an artist. In her mind, artists were free thinkers, expressing themselves in new and innovative ways. I was not like that.

As a pianist, I stuck to sheet music and never tried to improvise because I did not want to fail. My brother was always the talented one when it came to music. He had no trouble improvising and playing by ear and, since I always compared myself to him, I did not want to confirm that I was bad at improvisation. Once I actually tried, it turned out I really was bad at improvising, but without trying I would have never known. While I still lament my inability to improvise every once in a while, I have come to appreciate the many other skills I found I had. But I only found them by facing my fears and accepting that I may fail. I had to experiment and try

different things before I could find what I was good at.

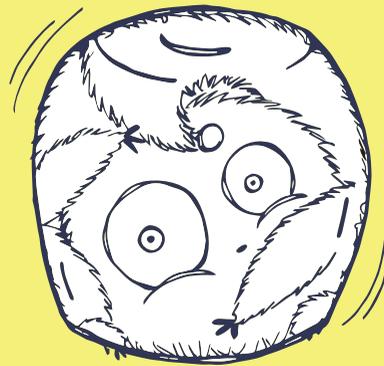
In the States, I learned that innovation is encouraged and wanted. The unique factor that no one has seen before is desired—maybe a little too much.

**“It is so beautiful to feel anxious because we don’t know what is going to happen. This tension is excellent.”<sup>10</sup>**

<sup>9</sup> Elle Luna, *The Crossroads of Should and Must: Find and Follow Your Passion*. New York: Workman Publishing, 2015.  
<sup>10</sup> Emilio Beltrame, *Impulso*. DVD. France, 2017.

**“We grow when we wonder.  
We grow when we question.  
The one thing I’ve  
consistently noticed here  
is somewhat of a lack of  
individual drive or initiative.  
The forming of one’s  
own thoughts, desires or  
wishes runs contrary to the  
programming [in Korea].”**

**— Chris Ro,  
*Plastic Wood, p. 48***



Although there are many innovators out there in the world, I believe the unique factor is not something we need to strive to artificially cultivate. Rather, I believe that it is something we already have. There is not one other person who is exactly like me. My experiences are mine alone, and the stories I can tell make me unique in my own way. I may not have what it takes to invent the next big thing, but I am me, and that is enough.

I follow the Romanian and Korean culture of restraint. This restraint is evidenced by the fact that Romanians and Koreans will work hard and rarely reward themselves. Working hard is just a way of life. I believe this is closely connected to the feeling that they have not done enough to deserve a break. I often feel this way. I never feel like I have achieved a satisfactory outcome and tend to overwork as a result. I have trouble accepting praise and will often feel disappointed in the results that seem not good enough.

I believe the first time I heard the phrase, “Reward yourself!” was in the States. I can’t recall exactly when and where I heard it, but I believe it was a professor who recommended I reward myself whenever finishing an assignment. The reward could be buying the cute shoes I saw a week ago, taking an afternoon off from all responsibilities, or indulging in that cake I said no to. While all of these sound great, being kind to myself is the most recent reward I have adopted — letting go of judgment and accepting my work as a valid effort deserving compensation.

The *world in-between* is a mashup of all these different traits and cultures. From a young age, I have been told how to be and what to do and was influenced by culture directly and indirectly. This led to constant code-switching. Merriam-Webster defines code-switching as “the switching from the linguistic system of one language or dialect to that of another.” I would argue that there is more to code-switching than just language and that it is not just limited to culture — I code-switch in my behavior and appearance based on the personalities and cultures of the people I meet as well. I will expand on appearance later, but I was faced with expectations of how I was supposed to look in each culture, and code-switching took another form: visually conforming to the appearance expectations of each culture.

When National Public Radio (NPR) launched Code Switch, a “new blog (now a podcast) covering race, ethnicity and culture,”<sup>11</sup> they received hundreds of stories about people code-switching and the reasons behind it. They compiled the most popular reasons, and they are as follows:

- **Our lizard brains take over.**
- **We want to fit in.**
- **We want to get something.**
- **We want to say something in secret.**
- **It helps us convey a thought.**

While these were all based on language code-switching, I felt as though many applied to my experiences, as well.

<sup>11</sup> Joseph Troncale, “Your Lizard Brain,” *Psychology Today*, 2014. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/where-addiction-meets-your-brain/201404/your-lizard-brain>.

<sup>12</sup> Matt Thompson, “Five Reasons Why People Code-Switch,” *Npr.Org*, 2013. <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2013/04/13/17712694/five-reasons-why-people-code-switch>.

<sup>13</sup> Urban Dictionary, “Lizard Brain,” *Urban Dictionary*, 2012. <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=lizard%20brain>.

### Our lizard brains take over.

Listed as the number one reason by NPR, this code-switching happens when people switch to a different language, dialect, or accent without realizing it in moments of fear. The “lizard brain” is a slang term for the limbic cortex, which senses danger and triggers instincts, fight-or-flight decisions, and involuntary actions.<sup>12</sup> It is called the “lizard brain” because this is the only brain function lizards have.<sup>13</sup> Although my code-switching does not happen much in moments of panic or fear, it does often happen subconsciously. Most commonly, it happens when I count. I will begin in English: one, two, three... *ten, unsprezece, doisprezece, treisprezece*... After ten, I will automatically switch to numbers in Romanian. This takes me by surprise because I haven’t been using Romanian regularly for over ten years. When it comes to meeting my parents, in-laws, or Korean friends, my brain automatically switches to Korean. I don’t have to think about what language I am using. One second I will be replying to my parents in Korean, then the next second I will be addressing my husband in English.

### We want to fit in.

It goes without saying that wanting to fit in has been my biggest reason for code-switching. As a person who felt she never fit anywhere, code-switching almost became a defense mechanism. By acting and dressing more like the group I wanted to belong to, I hoped to finally fit in. I want to note that code-switching is not always bad. It can create a space for common ground, and it can make one seem more approachable. However, in my case, it was more than making myself approachable. It was a struggle to find a group that would take me in. My code-switching was so extreme that I often portrayed myself as an entirely different person.

**We want to get something.**

I believe that, for me, the feeling of wanting to get something goes hand in hand with wanting to fit in. Part of my code-switching as a child had to do with gaining favor with teachers. The more Romanian I acted, the more intrigued my teachers would be — I would have their attention. It was the same with my Romanian friends. By code-switching to match my friends' personalities, I was able to approach them and in turn gain their friendship. Although I have gotten much better about not code-switching to the point where I lose myself completely, I still find myself code-switching to please. I have a fear of people disliking me, although I am learning to accept that I will never be able to make everyone I meet like me. And that is not my fault or anyone's fault. Some personalities just match better than others.

**We want to say something in secret.**

I was never a fan of saying something in secret myself, partly because I prefer to stick with one language as I establish a relationship with a person. For example, I find it extremely awkward talking to my parents in English, so I never do it. Another reason why I am not a fan of saying something in secret is because I have been on the receiving end of it myself multiple times. Since I look Asian, people in Romania frequently assumed I didn't speak Romanian. Comments directed towards my ethnicity and appearance were always hurtful. While saying something in secret doesn't always mean that one is talking about another person, in my experience it often is, and for that reason I choose to stay away from it.

**It helps us convey a thought.**

Both my husband and I will code-switch to complete a thought quite often, especially since certain Korean words do not have an English equivalent. In my case, I will often fail to recall a particular word in English, so I will just use a Korean word. I do the same with my parents, only I will use Romanian words to fill in the gaps. When speaking to my in-laws the gaps will be filled by English words. It is actually quite helpful, although it often leads me to joke that rather than being trilingual I am zero-lingual, as I seem to struggle to find the right words in a single language.

For a long time I believed that code-switching was like lying. In my more extreme moments, perhaps it was. But the more I find and understand myself, the more I realize that code-switching is a natural part of me and, furthermore, I am not the only one doing it. Code-switching does not mean that you are becoming someone you are not — it means you are simply showing a different side of yourself. It can be a tool for adapting to new environments and establishing relationships that are based on respect and consideration of other people.



Having grown up in three different cultures, I had many values and expectations thrown at me. I am now learning that I do not have to accept all of these values as my own. I can simply choose to observe certain values and let go of ones that seem to be implanted in me. I can choose which values I want to adopt as my own. In a way, I am my own culture. When I take a step back, I can see what shaped me as a child and what shapes me as an adult. I may not be able to call any of the three islands my home, but I can definitely enjoy each one. I can study, and observe, and learn to exist in my little boat with the varied things I gather from each island.

## Cultural Identity

### ROMANIA

Before being called to become a missionary in Romania, my father had no idea what this country was and where it was located. I would argue that while most people will probably have heard of Romania and will know that it is a country somewhere in Europe, many will not know where exactly it is situated. Romania has not had a strong presence in history, but it has made a few significant contributions. I have yet to meet anyone who has not heard of one of the following: the communist regime in Romania under Nicolae Ceaușescu, the origin of Dracula in Transylvania, or Nadia Comaneci, the first gymnast to score a perfect score of 10.0 at the Olympic games.

While I do not have much of a recollection of my early childhood, my parents have told me stories of their struggles to find milk for me in the aftermath of communism. People were learning to survive with a new identity that freed them from the chains of communism. Growing up in the '90s, Romania was an underdeveloped country. Most of the cars driving on the streets were cars manufactured in Romania — the Dacia that had a deeply cushioned back seat one would bounce off of constantly as the car hit the many potholes on the street. The *tramvai*, or the trolley, was the main means of transportation, with tickets that everyone could afford. They were slow and loud, with doors that made an awful screeching sound whenever they opened and closed. Some of these got updated halfway through my life in Romania, which at that time was exciting, and riding a new trolley was something to look forward to.



Photo from The Guardian, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2013/08/28>



Photo by Chen Kyu Park

In our town, we had one McDonald's restaurant. Unlike in the States and possibly all other more developed countries, McDonald's was a rarity and a treat. Hosting a birthday party at McDonald's was an incredible gift, making the birthday child popular, and buying the teacher a Big Mac was a form of showing appreciation. Other major food chains like Pizza Hut and KFC did not exist outside of the capital, Bucharest. Eating at these fast-food chains was a once-in-a-few-years treat, as we usually visited Bucharest only when we had to renew our visa.

There were no malls. Thinking back, I am not sure where I used to get my clothes. I vaguely remember small clothing shops on the streets of the town, and one single mall-like building that had extremely expensive merchandise. We would only shop there for special occasions. We had one movie theater with one screen, and it would play one movie per week. This is where I would get access to Hollywood movies, as most of the channels on TV were either Romanian shows, news, or telenovelas. Most foreign shows were dubbed in Romanian. I specifically remember watching *Dragon Ball* on Saturday mornings, entirely dubbed by a single male voice. Telenovelas were broadcast in Spanish with Romanian subtitles. The Spanish and Romanian languages, both coming from Latin roots, are very similar. It is common for Romanians to become fluent in Spanish just by watching these shows. At that time, telenovelas and Latin American celebrities were very much the influencers of my generation in Romania, more so than American celebrities. Fashion choices were made based on these influencers, although I do not recall giving too much attention to our image as children — at least not as much as children and teenagers seem to do now.

Beauty, however, has always been promoted in children's culture, including how children are addressed, and in the books and movies they consume. Children grow up being called princes and princesses, pretty and handsome. It seems that in the eyes of an

adult, the focus is often on appearance. This trend continues to grow and, with the expansion of media in general, it seems that more and more children become fixated on how they look. They notice name-brand bags and clothes and feel they need to obtain them, sometimes simply because someone in their group has them. But more on this later.

Growing up in a rather closed country, most of the foreign interactions I had were through my parents, who would regularly invite short-term missionary teams and other pastors or missionaries to Romania. However, Romanians were often unkind to us as foreigners. While Europeans and Americans were not always identified on the streets unless they spoke, we, as Asians, had no way to hide that we were not Romanians. My family was often called out on the street and verbally harassed for our appearance and language. I was thirteen years old when I was first allowed to walk to and from school entirely on my own. Before then, I had always been accompanied by either friends or my older brother. This is now changing, Romanians are becoming more open to the foreign world. Even Korea, the country that no one knew about when I was growing up, has made its way into Romania in the form of K-drama and K-pop. More and more tourists are also visiting Romania for its natural wonders, shows about Romania being released on streaming services such as Netflix.

Recognized as a Christian country, most of the Romanian population is Eastern Orthodox. Though he came from a **Presbyterian** background, my father was anointed as a Baptist pastor in Romania. Living as a Baptist Christian in Romania meant that there were a lot of rules to follow.

The Presbyterian denomination is not common in Romania.

With the Reformation in the sixteenth century, ornamentation — once sought after by the church — became associated with deceit and temptation. It fell out of favor with the people and was removed from Protestant churches. Art critic John Ruskin and artist William Morris fought for the restoration of ornament in the arts late nineteenth century,<sup>14</sup> but many churches chose to remain free of ornamentation in order not to distract from God. The Romanian orthodox monasteries and cathedrals have kept ornamentation as a form of worship and cannot be left out of the visual culture of Romania. They are adorned with paintings, beautiful stained glass, and large murals. The churches I attended as a child, however, are devoid of such decorations. The Romanian Protestant churches have adopted the Reformation views and chose to remain free of ornamentation because they wished to be set apart from the Catholic and Orthodox. They remain true to the Reformation that instructed that materialistic values shall not be a distraction from God.

As a result, not only were the churches not decorated, but the members of the church were expected to adhere to certain regulations when it came to outward appearance. For example, women were expected to wear minimal to no makeup. Any sorts of piercings on the body or tattoos were unacceptable. Hair was to be kept in its natural color, which meant that hair dyes were out of the question. My father was often suspected of dyeing his hair, since many were not familiar with Asian hair, and my father's hair is particularly

**“This pathway from wonder and the imagination to rationality and function follows the path from the Catholic to Protestant, and is largely isolated to the Western Christian world.”<sup>15</sup>**

14. Arthur Clutton-Brock, *William Morris*. New York: Parkstone Press International, 2007.  
15. Marian Banjes, *I Wonder: New and expanded edition*. Second American ed. New York: Monacelli Press, 2018, p. 24.

dark. Upon realizing that this caused a distraction in the church, he began starting his sermons by clarifying that his hair was natural, no hair dye involved, whenever we visited a new church. No jewelry was accepted other than wedding bands, and wearing “appropriate,” modest clothes was a must. This meant no shorts or skirts shorter than knee-length, no tank tops, and no low-cut shirts. When attending church, women had to wear skirts or dresses and men were required to wear suits or nice shirts, always with a tie. These were normal expectations, and naturally, as a pastor's daughter, I followed all the rules. However, this was true only in Romania. When we visited Korea, I was no longer required to wear a skirt to church. My grandmother applied makeup and adorned herself in jewelry on Sundays for church. Children and teens were running around the church in shorts and tank tops, as we visited Korea in the summer. These contrasting behaviors came as a culture shock to my young mind. What had happened to all the rules?

It seems as though many of the traditions and beauty standards I encountered in Romania have stemmed from the Western aesthetic culture, and many of them remain isolated in the Western, European world. They do not seem to apply to Eastern cultures. My grandmother believed in a Creator who loved beauty, and therefore she presented herself in her best image for Him. She celebrated ornamentation as created by a God who found delight in beauty. This, for me, remains as the purest image of celebrating beauty — my grandmother was adorning herself with makeup and jewelry not because someone said she would look younger with foundation, because the necklace would distract from her aging skin, or because she would feel more valued. She was certainly not covering up her other, no-makeup self. Unlike the examples I will show later, my grandmother's makeup was not a mask. It was a bold statement.

While Romania remains a pretty conservative country, it is slowly evolving and its values are shifting. It is still unclear to me what is representative of the Romanian identity today, but after the Revolution of December 1989, Romania desperately fought to escape its past under a communist regime. According to Angelo Mitchievici, who wrote the foreword to *Iron Curtain Graphics*, “Color gradually began to conquer the exasperating, dirty grayness of the communist world, shop windows began to display the products of once-fetishized Western consumerism, while the old Dacia cars, historically symbols of a high standard of collective wellbeing, are now mere memories along with the valve television sets and never-ending queues.”<sup>16</sup>

During the communist dictatorship between 1948 and 1989, propaganda existed everywhere. Slogans used on posters, flags, and placards all recited the communist propaganda, emphasizing centralization and uniformity. Imagination and creativity were

## ROMANIAN FOLK ART

Romanian folk art survived despite the many years of foreign domination and remains bright and colorful. It comes in many forms such as wood carvings, rugs, and pottery, and is “characterized by abstract or geometric designs and stylized representations of plants and animals.”<sup>17</sup> Traditional Romanian folk clothes are made from hemp, linen, or woolen fabric and boast elaborate embroidered patterns. Men always wear a belt around their waist coupled with a vest and a hat, while women have an apron and typically cover their heads with a scarf. The colors of the garments usually emphasize the colors of the national flag — red, yellow, and blue — and the patterns represent different regions of the country. The craft of textile weaving is widespread in Romania, and it is often handed down from generation to generation. These textile weaving skills can also be seen in the traditional and elaborate patterns of Romanian rugs. Rug patterns may also differ depending on the region they are from.

<sup>16</sup> Angelo Mitchievici, Caterina Preda, Carla Duschka, and Clorian Isac, *Iron Curtain Graphics: Eastern European Design Created Without Computers*, Berlin: Gestalten, 2012, p.6.  
<sup>17</sup> Vasile S. Ciucu, and Keith Arnold Hitchens, “Romania,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 2020. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Romania>.



Images from Iron Curtain Graphics: Eastern European Design Created Without Computers.

Wood carving is a big part of Romanian folk art. Many homes in the Maramures county, for example, still display elaborately carved gates and fences. The patterns used to show the status of the owners, the more elaborate pattern indicating a higher status. Many homes, including my parents’ home, have displays of carved wooden plates and spoons. These are usually painted and covered with varnish for longevity. Other important wood carvings are the wooden flutes and recorders, with the most iconic being the *nai*, the pan flute.

When it comes to folk art, the Merry Cemetery cannot be left out. A popular tourist attraction in Romania, the Merry Cemetery is known for its colorful and ornate tombstones that display paintings summarizing the life of the deceased. They each also include creative descriptions of the people buried in them. Each tombstone tells



Photo from Passau Art Craft, <https://tinyurl.com/y2sp9y7b>.

a story in either a humorous, serious, or poetic form. In contrast to what we think of cemeteries in the United States, the Merry Cemetery is unique in its approach to celebrating the lives of those who are no longer among us.

One folk art tradition that I am quite fond of is the painting of Easter eggs. While in the States dyes are used to color eggs, in Romania many traditional homes would paint their eggs. Traditionally eggs were hollowed out before being painted by women and children in preparation of the celebration and were used as decorative pieces. In my childhood, the eggs were not hollowed out, but rather they were cooked, painted, and then put out to eat on the table. The explosion of patterns and colors on the eggs made it really hard to break them to eat. Wood carvings that emulate these painted eggs are also commonly found in places where folk art is sold.



Photo from Romania, <https://tinyurl.com/y2sp9y7b>.



Photo by Cheon Kyu Park.

discouraged, although extreme control actually forced the people to become more creative and innovative in order to survive with this minimal freedom. The extensive collection of posters from this era of communism gathered in *Iron Curtain Graphics*, edited by Carla Duschka and Ciprian Isac of Atelierul de Grafica, Romania, show just how much designers were able to achieve under strict regulations — workers personalized their posters through lettering and uses of color while keeping the message they were supposed to transmit intact.

## SOUTH KOREA — DO YOU KNOW BTS?

If South Korea has done one thing right to make itself known, it might be the rise of K-pop and K-drama culture. I was first introduced to Korean pop in 2006 while visiting my cousins in Los Angeles. I experienced a karaoke room and was exposed to a genre other than the classical, Romanian folk, Latin American pop, and Celine Dion to which I was accustomed. I received a CD with a few songs selected by my cousin, some ballads and some pop. Back at home in Romania, I began searching for the artists labeled on my CD. This marked the beginning of my interest in Korean culture. In a matter of weeks, I had picked my favorite bands and had watched any and all shows in which they appeared. I learned all their names and ages and, together with my Romanian best friend, began to dream of becoming a K-pop artist. Of course, at that time, no one understood, let alone shared our passion. K-pop was a genre unknown to the general public, and we were the weird ones.

While my own interest in K-pop has faded, the K-pop culture has grown tremendously in recent years. Artists such as Psy and groups like BTS and Black Pink have made their way to the States and are calling attention to the dominant world of celebrities in Korea. I was surprised to find an entire billboard dedicated to BTS in Times Square. Not only are there millions of K-pop fans across the world, but Korean movies and dramas — short TV series — have been getting increasingly popular. It is my opinion that Korea uses music and TV as a means to advertise itself, and they are doing so successfully. Korean dramas are packed with Korean culture, fashion, and beautiful scenery from across the country. While the plot focuses on the main characters, there is always a shot of their surroundings, encouraging interest in the setting they are in. The food culture, the nightlife, the buildings, and natural scenery are always represented in Korean dramas, and they are done in an incredibly beautiful and often subtle manner that is a testament to the producer's ingenuity.<sup>18</sup>

18. Pinaz Kazi, "Korean Dramas Gaining Popularity Worldwide, Experts Explain Why," *International Business Times*, 2020. <https://www.ibtimes.sg/korean-dramas-gaining-popularity-worldwide-experts-explain-why-16-7927>.



Photo from Live Wallpaper HD, <https://tinyurl.com/y64rwu58>.

Photo from Live Wallpaper HD, <https://tinyurl.com/y9qcsqaw>.

Lars Kim calls Korea a “shrimp caught between two whales.”<sup>19</sup> This is in reference to the relationship of Korea to China and Japan. Korea has cultural and diplomatic ties to both in terms of development, but it has long been a push-pull with the neighbors.

While Korea boasts in its own traditions and culture, it is a nation heavily influenced by other countries. Korea’s ideology, mainly Daoism and Confucianism, came from China, as did the country’s standards for art, education, and music. Korea has also adopted Buddhism from China, on which it built its visual culture: technology, calligraphy, paper making, woodblock making, and metalsmithing.<sup>20</sup> The writing system was also first based on the Chinese characters, *Hanja*. Korea created the first metal movable type in early 1200, following the invention of the movable type made out of ceramic by the Chinese.

Before the reign of King Sejong, only the upperclassmen were able to read and write, as the Hanja writing system was too difficult and expensive for the common people to learn on their own. The current writing system, *Hangeul*, was created under the rule of King Sejong, who desired to make reading and writing accessible to all people. The new writing system consisted of twenty-four characters and was written in syllables. Using the three main sounds that were inspired by the Chinese philosophy, the characters mimicked the positions of the mouth and tongue when making the sounds. This resulted in three main symbols or shapes. The circle represented heaven, the square or horizontal line represented earth, and the triangle or vertical line was the connecting force in between heaven and earth, representing the human.

Hangeul was initially rejected since the upper class feeling threatened to lose their power if all people were able to read and write. However, beginning in the late 1800s, Korea started

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— *Survey of Korean Calligraphy, Typography, and Print Lecture*

to experience more and more Western and Japanese influences. Western Christian missionaries commonly visited Korea. It was they who popularized Hangeul when they printed the first Hangeul dictionaries and language guides.

With the influence of the Western culture rising, ideas of democracy and freedom from colonial rule also began to emerge. An underground resistance formed, and Hangeul became a symbol of freedom of speech. There was an explosion of the vernacular press, and a new type of voice emerged. This was the voice of the women of Korea, educated and Western-leaning, known as the *sinyeoseong*, or new woman. These women wore Western clothing and paved a new way for women to express themselves in a male-dominated society.<sup>21</sup>

vowels consonants	ㅏ	ㅑ	ㅓ	ㅕ	ㅗ	ㅛ	ㅜ	ㅠ	ㅡ	ㅣ
ㄱ	가	카	거	커	고	코	구	규	그	기
ㄴ	나	카	너	커	노	코	누	뉴	느	니
ㅇ	다	카	더	커	도	코	두	두	드	디
ㄹ	라	카	러	커	로	코	루	류	르	리
ㅁ	마	카	머	커	모	코	무	뮤	므	미
ㅂ	바	카	버	커	보	코	부	부	브	비
ㅅ	사	카	서	커	소	코	수	슈	스	시
ㅇ	아	카	어	커	오	코	우	유	으	이
ㅈ	자	카	저	커	조	코	주	쥬	즈	지
ㅊ	차	카	쳐	커	초	코	추	쥬	츠	치
ㅋ	카	카	커	커	코	코	쿠	큐	크	키
ㅌ	타	카	터	커	토	코	투	투	트	티
ㅍ	파	카	퍼	커	포	코	푸	푸	프	피
ㅎ	하	카	허	커	호	코	후	후	흐	히

19. Lars Kim, "Survey of Korean Calligraphy: Typography and Print," Lecture at SFPL Main Library, Koret Auditorium, April 2, 2019.  
20. Kim, "Survey of Korean Calligraphy: Typography and Print."  
21. Kim, "Survey of Korean Calligraphy: Typography and Print."

Image from Meggs' History of Graphic Design, 5th ed. by Philip B. Meggs and Alton W. Purvis

## FEMINIST NA HYE SEOK

Na Hye Seok was a Korean woman, painter, and author who lived during the Japanese colonial rule between 1910 and 1945 and established herself as a pioneer feminist figure. She was one of the first women writers to match up against male writers such as Yi Kwang-su, author of the first modern fiction novel in Korean literature. Na Hye Seok wrote critically against issues of gender, calling out the patriarchal society and Confucian marriage and family systems. She played a major role in defining what it meant to be a *sinyeosong* and strove to encourage women to educate themselves, embrace their power, reject the expected role of a submissive woman in a world dominated by men, and become pioneers of their age. Na Hye Seok herself lived her life as an example. Her definition of the ideal woman was the following:

*“Katussa [Katerina Maslova], who embraced revolution as her ideal; Magda, who upheld egoism as her dream; Nora, who pursued genuine love as her ideal; Mrs. Stowe, who held equality derived from religious belief as her ideal; Mrs. Raicho, who believed in women’s genius, and Mrs. Yosano, who had dreams for a harmonious home.... We cannot regard a woman as*

*an ideal simply because she has fulfilled the role of a conventionally moral wife, that is, when she has carried out her socially expected roles. We have to equip ourselves with qualities that go beyond such expectations by improving ourselves in whatever we do; and we should not simply accept the motto of ‘good wife and wise mother’ as our ideal, either. This slogan is promoted by those educators only to commodify women...”<sup>22</sup>*

Ultimately, Na Hye Seok fell from grace as her ideals proved to be too much in a patriarchal society. After her divorce from her husband as a result of her infidelity, Na Hye Seok lost everything including her children and her painting career. Despite her efforts, divorced women were not looked upon kindly. Nonetheless, Na Hye Seok remains an important figure in Korean history, and Kyung Moon Hwang — associate professor at the University of Southern California and author of *A History of Korea: An Episodic Narrative* — believes that perhaps Na Hye Seok was too far ahead of her time to truly be recognized and valued for her ideals.

Of course, the Westernization of Korea was not necessarily received kindly. Many activists continued to wear Korean traditional clothing, the hanbok, as a symbol of their national identity and pride. They stood against westernization and globalization as the garments of Korea upheld the Confucian ideology. The altering of these garments and other regulations, such as men cutting their hair, reflected negatively on the activists’ beliefs and signaled the fall of their nation’s system.<sup>23</sup>

*Hanbok* are no longer regularly worn, although recently there has been a rise of popularity among younger people. This is likely more of a craze, younger people looking to rent out colorful and decorative hanbok in order to take photos in front of royal palaces and monuments. Korean historical movies and dramas also play a

part in the rising interest in hanbok. Traditionally, however, hanbok are still worn on special occasions, such as the first day of the lunar calendar, weddings, and children’s first birthdays. Growing up in a Korean family, we would always wear our hanbok for New Year’s. My brother and I would bow to our parents, after which they would give us their blessings along with some pocket money. This tradition got discontinued as we aged, but I loved wearing a hanbok at my wedding reception to honor my Korean heritage.

The summer Olympics of 1988, held in Seoul, highlighted Korea to the world, and both the magazine industry and digital era bloomed. Design had been used as a tool for promoting governmental policies during the ‘60s and ‘70s, and the magazines or “bookazines” or “mooks” became extremely influential. “Although

<sup>22</sup> Yung-Hee Kim, “Creating New Paradigms of Womanhood in Modern Korean Literature: Na Hye-seok’s *Kyŏngp’ohai*,” *Korean Studies* 26, no. 1, 1-60, 2002. [www.kci.go.kr/jsp/article/2379324](http://www.kci.go.kr/jsp/article/2379324).  
<sup>23</sup> Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, *Culture Korea: Edited by Hyonjeong Kim Han*. First ed. San Francisco: Asian Art Museum, 2017.



Photo by Junde Kim, www.unsplash.com.



Photo by Ksenya Petukova, www.unsplash.com.

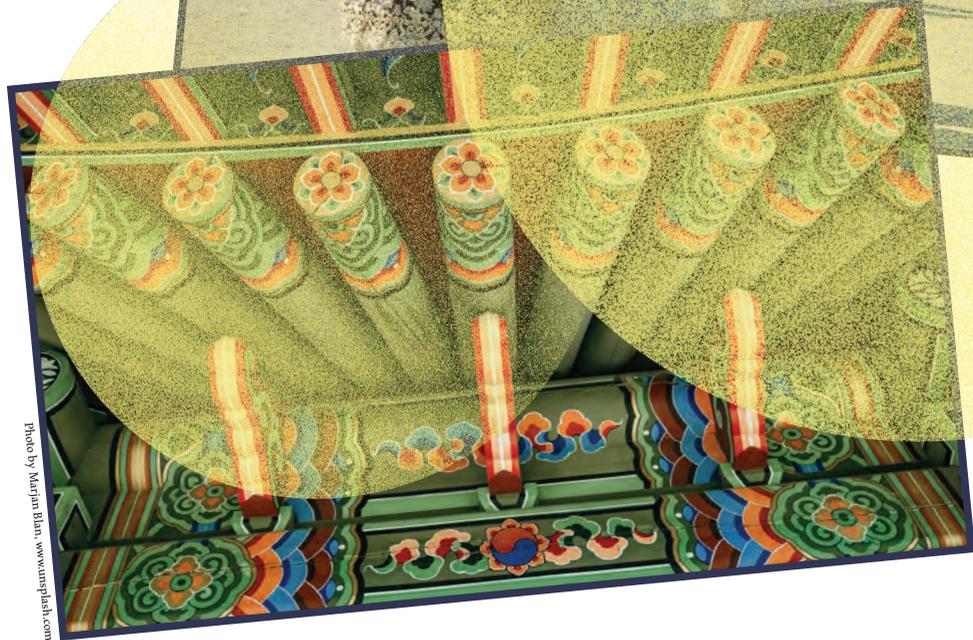


Photo by Marjan Bilan, www.unsplash.com.

## KOREAN CULTURE ART

Much like Romanian folk art, Korean culture is filled with colors and patterns that can represent different meanings and show class or status. Traditional patterns can be found on many everyday objects including hanbok, *norigae* (knotted pendants), *binyeo* (long hairpin), *beoseon* (socks), shoes, furniture, cushions, pillows, walls, doors, and even foods like rice cakes prepared for celebrations. Five traditional colors are usually used: blue, red, yellow, white, and black. Different patterns and colors are used depending on occasion or season, and they often represent age, status, and gender. The traditional patterns and colors are based on the Yin and Yang harmony as well as the five elements of nature. The embroidered clothes and embellished objects display one or more of the ten symbols of longevity: turtles, cranes, deer, pine trees, sun, mountains, water, rocks, clouds, and herbs of eternal youth.

The hanbok used to be symbolic in representing a person's class and status. Colors often indicated different identities of women, such as their marital status. For example, single women wore red skirts and yellow jackets, while married women wore dark blue skirts and jade green jackets. Purple ribbons tied on the breast of the jacket indicated that a woman was widowed, and dark blue cuffs indicated that she had at least one son. Military ranks were differentiated by the color of their uniforms. Having been rooted in shamanism, Koreans believed that the right colors could bring good luck and/or drive evil away. For this reason, it was customary for brides to wear red at their weddings. Red represented the Yang color that was believed to release positive energy and repel the negative energy of Yin.

Homes played a significant role in Korean culture, reflecting the lifestyles and cultural values of the people. The *hanok*, the Korean traditional house, varied in size and form according to each owner's status within society. Furniture reflected beauty and spiritual values, being characterized by wood grain, functional structure, and modest ornamentation. Koreans valued living in harmony with nature, so the architecture and construction of their homes reflected this relationship. Patterns of the Korean traditional culture are elaborate and colorful but are seemingly getting lost within the fast-growing modern culture of present-day South Korea.<sup>24</sup>

often thought to be personal, expendable literature and media, they certainly have proved themselves to be cultural objects often representing social reality and in many instances raising public consciousness in readers.”<sup>25</sup>

Korea is a country known for its fast industrialization and modernization, with its economic, cultural, and technological advancements recognized across the world. With the rise of K-pop and Korean brand products, Korean culture has made itself known in most countries. However, when it comes to Korean art and design, questions arise as to whether the Korean identity is being well represented. With the influence of the West and Japan continuing to rise through the 1900s, Korea began its struggle with identity and authenticity. While some welcomed the Western modernity as a positive progression of the nation, others saw it as a loss of tradition and true cultural aesthetic, rendering Korean design to mere imitations of foreign work.

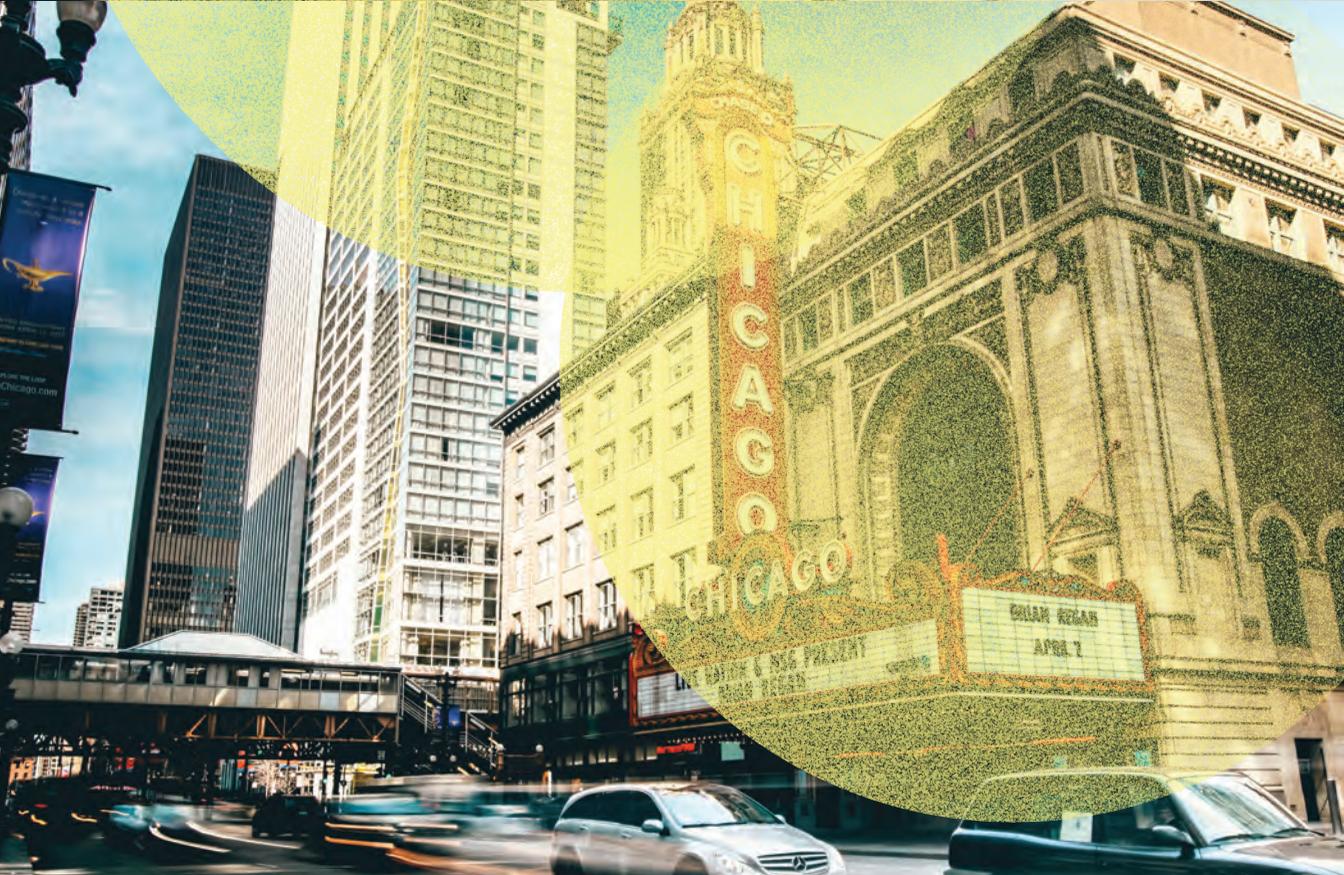
A study done at Hongik University aimed to understand and develop Korean design identity, hoping to inspire and contribute to further discussions about its values with the world. According to the study, Korean design identity is rarely discussed, creating a considerable gap between academic and professional practice. Because of the lack of research regarding Korean design identity, it is also rarely discussed in international design studies. In order to support and raise awareness about the Korean identity, the Korean design industry put in place a national design guideline referred to as “K-design” in 2012.<sup>26</sup> “K-design formulates a national design identity, ‘K-design DNA,’ by compiling examples from traditional architecture, furniture, ceramics, fashion design and humanistic spirit/philosophy, to modern design examples from electronics, automotive, furniture, package, and material and surface design.”<sup>27</sup>

27. Schelwach and Jeon, *Contemporary Traditions: South Korea's Emerging Design Identity- An Exploration Among Professional And Academic Design Experts Aged 30-50*.  
28. Yunah Lee, “Design Histories and Design Studies in East Asia: Part 3 Korea,”  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/41419559>.

25. Chris Ro, *A Few Warm Stones: Ondol, Better Days Institute*, 2010, p. 31.  
26. Sven Schelwach and Changnyong Jeon, *Contemporary Traditions: South Korea's Emerging Design Identity- An Exploration Among Professional And Academic Design Experts Aged 30-50*. PDF Archives of Design Research, 2017, <http://odior.org/xml/1240/1240.pdf>.

While Korea has seen a successful economic and industrial boost, whether the K-design DNA was successful in identifying Korean authenticity is subject to debate. (As I will discuss later in this work, expectations for one’s physical appearance in today’s South Korea further complicate the matter of authenticity, on both a cultural and personal level.) This remains a highly discussed topic in the present, with many Korean designers studying and researching the progression of the Korean nation in hopes of developing a more authentic Korean design.

**“Although history of design focusing on Western designers and design movements is taught in Korean education, research on Korean designers and specific historical and cultural contexts in which objects are made and used remains at the embryonic stage.”<sup>28</sup>**



## UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, WELL... CHICAGO

For people in Romania, the United States is seen as somewhat of a dream country. My friends and I would talk about roads that were perfectly paved with no potholes — something all-too-common in Romanian roads. It was almost like we discussed the land of flowing milk and honey. With some of my family living in Canada and different parts of the States, I had visited a few times when I was younger, but I didn't remember much of those trips. When we officially moved to the States, I quickly realized that the perfectly paved roads we used to dream about are really not a thing, at least not in Chicago.

The reason why my family chose to live in Chicago had a lot to do with our education, but my brother and I remained here even after graduating from high school. (My parents come and go.) Both my brother and I attended college in the Chicago area, and if someone asks me where I am from, I will say Chicago without hesitation.

Downtown Chicago is a beautiful city, known for its historical, modern, and postmodern architecture. Many buildings such as the Sears (now Willis) Tower, John Hancock, Marina City, and Tribune Tower are iconic. As a suburbanite, I do not visit the city very often, but when I do I take the time to enjoy the skyscrapers. I also love looking for hidden and in-your-face graffiti when I'm downtown, as well as spotting the multitude of "You Are Beautiful" stickers by designer and artist Matthew Hoffman. Seeing these stickers everywhere is a personal joy. I see them as a reminder that, no matter where I am, where I am going, or how I look at the time I see the sticker, I am still beautiful. This means that regardless of whether I am fully decked out — makeup and hair done — or if I am just running an errand in sweats with greasy hair, I am still beautiful. My beauty is not reflected in what I am wearing or in how flawless

my skin looks, even if the poster on the next block will be of a model in her prime, the typical portrayal of standard beauty in our times.

Of course, when it comes to Chicago, the Bean (formally known as Cloud Gate) cannot be left out. Crown Fountain is a hot spot for children to play during the summer, while families and friends can gather in front of the Jay Pritzker Pavilion for a live concert. I have attended several concerts at the Jay Pritzker Pavilion, the most memorable one being the performance of Carmina Burana, a cantata by Carl Orff, in pouring rain. I remember a handful of us sitting on wet seats, our coats soaking up water as the hours passed. No umbrellas. If we had hoodies, we were lucky. Chicago is culturally rich, boasting many music venues, art institutions, and various museums. The Art Institute of Chicago, known for its large collection of French Impressionist art, is a popular attraction for tourists and locals alike. A visit to the Art Institute is one of my personal favorite pastimes.

Chicago is also known for the development of American jazz as well as gospel music, its roots first started by Thomas Andrew Dorsey in the late 1920s.<sup>29</sup> Just to throw in a fun fact, the first McDonald's franchise building was opened in the suburbs of Chicago, more specifically in Des Plaines, Illinois, in 1955. The original building was demolished in 1984, but a replica stood in its place as a museum and fun landmark. The replica was also demolished in late 2017 due to flooding and a lack of visitors, but it was a fun place to pass by once in a while.

My family and I chose to come to Chicago mostly because of the Romanian private school my brother and I attended. My father also knew the pastor of the Romanian church and believed this was a good opportunity to expand his ministry. I now call Chicago my home. While I was hesitant to stay when my family and I first came to the States, I came to love this city. Its rich cultural history and

29 Pery R. Duis and Cathlyn Schallhorn, "Chicago [History, Population, Map], & Facts," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Chicago>

beautiful architecture are selling points; what turned Chicago into my hometown is not the city itself, but rather the people I have met, the relationships I created along the way, and the wonderful memories I share with family and friends.



Photo by Connie Bickford, www.unsplash.com