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FOCUS: CONTEMPORARY FEMININITY AND SPORT

CULTURE, GENDER ROLES, AND SPORT

The Case of Korean Players on the LPGA Tour

Eui Hang Shin
Edward Adam Nam

The success of multiple Korean women on the LPGA tour a decade ago was unheard of; today it is the norm. In the past 5 years, Koreans have joined the tour as rookies of the year, won major championships, and topped money lists. The timing of the success of Korean female golfers has been dependent on golf's emerging popularity and prestige in Korea and a divergence in traditional gender roles after the Korean War. At the core of their success are several traits that are consequences of their cultural upbringing: a work ethic that is the envy of the tour, a devotion to the game that is unparalleled, and indomitable mental toughness. These traits and certain aspects of the Korean psyche, culture, and family help explain why female Korean golfers on the LPGA are thriving. Recent showings by Korean American golfers foretell an even stronger generation of golfers.

Keywords: *South Korea; LPGA; examination culture; family structure; gender inequality; Se Ri Pak*

As sports professionalize and internationalize, athletes migrate from one country to another on a seasonal, residential, or comprehensive basis (Miller, Lawrence, McKay, & Rowe, 2001, p. 37). The globalization of sports confuses the national identity of professional athletes and also promotes multiculturalism (Bale & Maguire, 1994; Magee & Sugden, 2002; Maguire, 1999; Miller et al., 2001). At the same time, a concentration of players from a country or region of the world in certain international sports markets has produced a "new international division of cultural labor" (Miller et al., 2001, pp. 32-34). Furthermore, the transnational migration of professional players has caused the emergence of race, ethnicity, class, and gender issues in the global sports industries (Miller et al., 2001, pp. 126-129). Miller et al. (2001) pointed out that:

National mythmaking through sport is common as a means of generating new habits among the citizenry. Myths encourage active participation at the physical as well as the ideological level. Many accounts of sport situate it as a central tenet of national culture, in either a welcoming or a critical way. (p. 3)

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An incident that occurred in October 2003 illustrates how gender, race, ethnicity, and culture may be involved in the pro sports market. Jan Stephenson, a player on the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) tour, in an interview with *Golf Magazine* published in the November 2003 issue, stated,

This is probably going to get me in trouble, but the Asians are killing our tour. Their lack of emotion, their refusal to speak English when they can speak English. They rarely speak. We have two-day pro-ams where people are paying a lot of money to play with us, and they (Asians) say hello and goodbye. Our tour is predominantly international, and the majority are Asians. They have taken it over. (Kessler, 2003)

However, commissioner of the LPGA, Ty Votaw, asserted that ethnic diversity has been one of the LPGA's greatest strengths. He argued that "attendance, TV viewership, Web site traffic and purses are up. That does not suggest a tour is being damaged by any one group" (Blauvelt, 2003, p. C-13). In any case, Stephenson's suggestion that the LPGA needs more sex appeal and fewer Asians may have revealed just the tip of the iceberg of gender, race, ethnicity, class, and culture issues in today's professional sports markets. In particular, negative stereotyping of Asian players as unmarketable, dull to watch, and not providing much excitement to the game of golf may be based on what Chen has dubbed "Euro/America-Western-centrism" (Chen, 1998, p. 5). Previous transnational cultural studies (Birch, 1998; Birch, 2000, p. 143; Chen, 1998, pp. 1-9; Jabri, 1996, p. 61; Morley & Chen, 1996, p. 7) have indicated the problems of the perspective that "the Western individual is conferred a complexity and a plurality of identity formations, while the non-western 'other' is a uniform, conforming self whose subjectivity is confined within the cultural, ethno-linguistic community" (Jabri, 1996, p. 61).

Previous critical cultural studies discuss the problems of the simplification that Asian values prescribe "an almost unquestioning acceptance of tradition and communal values as constitutive of individuality" and that these communitarian ethics tend to empower a nation but disempower the individual (Birch, 2000, pp. 143-144; Jabri, 1996, p. 65). Critical cultural studies (Birch, 1998; Chen, 1998; Grossberg, 1996; Morley & Chen, 1996) have focused primarily on the articulation of conceptual and theoretical issues of the cultural factors in the democratization of political systems of the nation states in Asia. These studies have laid a solid, theoretical foundation for empirical studies on a specific, sociological research agenda. In addition, studies in the sociology of sports have provided a valuable tradition of investigating the various issues of sports that are correlated with the gender, race, ethnicity, and media (Bishop, 2003; Hargreaves, 1994; Magee & Sugden 2002; Maguire, 1999; Messner, Duncan, & Jensen, 1993; Miller, 2002; Stevenson, 2002). Utilizing the perspectives of cultural studies and the sociology of sports, we investigate the dynamic interplay of cultural

values, gender, race, ethnicity, and sports by focusing on the Korean players on the LPGA tour.

SUCCESS OF KOREAN GOLFERS ON THE LPGA TOUR

Most would have thought the collapse of the South Korean economy in 1997 to be an incapacitating blow to not only the standard of living of the Korean people but also to their spirit and pride. However, the people would find a national hero to rally around in one of the most unlikely of places: women's professional golf. In 1998, the year many more Korean businesses were bought up by foreign investors en masse, Se Ri Pak would win her first LPGA tournament, a major championship. At the time, the golf world could not have guessed that Pak would be but the first of many more Korean players to join and excel on the tour. Individually, their achievements are sensational; collectively, they are monumental, dispelling any notion that they are but a one-time trend.

With this unforeseen shift in the epicenter of women's golf, there is a desire to understand and explain how such a surprising movement could occur. Very little work has been done to understand the impetus behind it. Athletes though these women are, they are first and foremost Korean women. Delving into their culture will elucidate the driving forces behind their success.

The LPGA commissioner has been quoted as saying, "Five years ago, the word 'Korea' wasn't in anyone's business plans for the LPGA" (Kapisrke, 2003, p. 65). In 5 years' time, though, Korean players have enjoyed an unprecedented success on the LPGA tour compared to any other foreign group of players. A brief summary of LPGA tournament statistics and records will be used to show unequivocally that Korean players on the LPGA have become and will continue to be a sizeable and flourishing presence on the tour.

When looking at the accomplishments of Korean female golfers over the past 5 years, it is pertinent to keep in mind that golf's history as a pastime, let alone as a professional sport in Korea, is young. As a game that originated far from the Orient in Scotland in the 16th century (Campbell, 2001), it is not a surprise to see that the first golf course was not built in South Korea until 1931 (Lane, 2003). A further examination of the distribution of golf courses by year opened in South Korea gives a good indication of the sport's history on the Korean peninsula. From 1960 to 1964, only a single course was opened. Then between 1965 and 1979, an average of 1.35 golf courses per year were built. However, the true golf boom began with 16 course openings between the years of 1985 and 1989. The most course openings ever, 42, would occur from 1990 to 1994, and the 5 years following would almost equal that with a total of 41 (*Golf: Country Club Guide of Korea*, 2000). This distribution points to the fact that it was not until the 1980s that golf really took hold in South Korea. Today, the number of golf courses in South Korea is 176. Unlike Korea, Japan's history with golf is much longer,

and the country has experienced three golf booms versus Korea's one. Between 1960 and 1964, the number of courses in Japan rose to 424, and by 1972, the number began to exceed 1,000. Finally, in 1985, the largest boom in golf occurred under government programs to stimulate the private sector (Freeman, 2003, p. 6). Japan has the second largest golf market valued at \$3 billion (Campbell, 2001, p. 79), yet there are far more successful Korean golfers than Japanese on the LPGA tour. Furthermore, in annual team matches, the Korean LPGA team has defeated the Japanese LPGA team over the last 3 consecutive years. Additionally, until the 1970s, the place of women on the golf course in Korea was not as players but rather as expensive, attractive caddies for hire. This is a reflection of the status of Korean women that has not until the last 2 decades begun to rise to the standards in Western, developed countries. Given this framework, the accomplishments of Korean female golfers at the turn of the second millennium are extraordinary.

LPGA TOUR STATISTICS AND RECORDS

The presence of Korean women on the LPGA can be felt in the sheer number of players. A breakdown of the LPGA 2003 touring roster shows that Korean-born players make up by far the largest group of foreign participants with 18 players this season. Australia is second with 12, and England is a distant third with 9. The number of Korean players increases every year as more and more Korean rookies join the tour. This year alone, 8 of the 24 rookies are Koreans. What is more is that these players are not simply enduring the tour; they are thriving at the top.

Korea's best-known female golfer, Se Ri Pak, is the most veteran member of the Korean golfers on the LPGA tour at 5 years. In her rookie year, she won her first tournament at the McDonald's LPGA Championship, one of the four coveted majors. Following that, she would win the U.S. Women's Open, making her one of two players to win two major championships in her rookie year and one of six women to win both the U.S. Women's Open and the LPGA Championship in the same year. Six days later, Pak would win the Jamie Farr Kroger Classic to become the third player in LPGA history to win a tournament immediately after a victory at the U.S. Women's Open. She would win again the next week and again 2 weeks after that, putting together a string of wins that would secure the rookie-of-the-year title 9 weeks before the end of the season by a 904-point margin.

Including her rookie season, Pak has won a total of 20 LPGA tournaments, 4 of which have been major championships, making her the youngest player to win four majors. In addition, Pak has already won three of the four majors required for a grand slam. Most remarkably, after 5 years, Pak has already earned 22 of the 27 requisites for induction into the LPGA Hall of Fame.

Se Ri Pak's success is not an isolated event. The three seasons after Pak's rookie year saw two more Korean players, Mi-Hyun Kim in 1999 and

Hee-Won Han in 2001, earn rookie-of-the-year titles and one player, Grace Park in 2000 who was injured most of the season, earn runner-up. The current rookie-of-the-year standings show two Koreans in the top 10 with Christina Kim at the number two spot. The Korean women have proven several times over to be the best of the rookies joining the tour.

Following their rookie seasons, Korean golfers continue to prove themselves as golfing powerhouses. Mi-Hyun Kim has earned five LPGA victories since her 1999 rookie year. More significantly, Kim placed second behind Se Ri Pak at the 2001 Weetabix Women's British Open to mark the first time Koreans have finished first and second in a major LPGA championship. Additionally, Mi-Hyun Kim has become one of five women to cross the \$1 million mark in a single season and, until recently, held the all-time record for the lowest final scoring round in LPGA history—a 62 (–9). Throughout her 3 years, Kim has moved from eighth on the LPGA earnings list in 2000 to seventh in 2001 to finally fourth in 2002. Before turning professional, Grace Park dominated U.S. amateur golf. She holds the 1994 and 1996 American Junior Golf Association (AJGA) Player of the Year titles, the 1992 to 1997 AJGA All-American titles, the 1998 Rolex Eleanor Dudley College Player of the Year title, and finally Golfweek's 1998 Player of the Year title. She is the first player since 1938 to sweep all major amateur championships and led Arizona State University to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) National Championship title. Following her injured 2000 rookie year in which she won one tournament and placed 2nd in the rookie standings, Grace Park returned to the tour the next year to turn in a win and five top-10 finishes. She has continued to be a dominant player with 12 top-10 finishes and another victory in 2002. Park in 2002 also notably led the tour in the number of birdies. Park won the Michelob Light Open in 2003. Hee-Won Han has also enjoyed a breakout season following her rookie-of-the-year title in 2001 by finishing in the top seven of seven events, three as the runner-up.

None of these Korean golfers have been on the tour longer than 5 years. Yet in the past 5 years, the top-five Korean golfers collectively have won 28 LPGA tournaments and have finished in the top ten 146 times at tournaments played. In 2000, there were four Korean players in the top 50 on the season money list. By 2002, there were eight in the top 50 with three of the top-six spots held by Koreans. In the 2003 season, there were six in the top 30 (eight in the top 50) with Se Ri Pak second the past 2 years. More impressively, there have been at least two Koreans in the top 10 on the earnings list every year since 1999.

SUCCESS BEYOND THE GOLF COURSE

These players' successes are not limited to the golf course. Their marketability, fame, and contributions to women's golf have skyrocketed. Se Ri Pak, now signed with TaylorMade, has enjoyed a multimillion dollar con-

tract with Korean conglomerate Cheil Jedang and writes as a player editor for *Golf Digest*. Additionally, Pak's native country has awarded her the Order of Sports Merit, the second highest medal that can be given by the Korean government for sports performance (*Korea Times*, 1998, p. 8).

Hall of Famer Nancy Lopez understands the significance of Se Ri Pak and the Korean golfers to the tour's future when she said, "Pak is just what the tour needs right now. . . . She can carry us onward" ("Don't Call Her Tigress," 1998, p. 50). Sponsors of the Chrysler Nations Cup in 2001 added Korea as a third nation to the usual United States-Canada match play in hopes of attracting more attention to the event (Mickey, 2001, pp. 39-41). Perhaps most impressive is Grace Park's signing with Artists Management Group (AMG). AMG manages superstars such as Pete Sampras, Jason Kidd, and Venus and Serena Williams. The management group has said to the press that, until Park, "they had yet to find a professional golfer that fit into their marketing model—providing a client general sports management complemented by entertainment-industry resources" (Herrington, 2001, p. 2). Park's sophisticated fashion sense, demeanor, and good play make her "unique and supremely marketable" outside of golf according to AMG. Park in 2003 also signed a head-to-toe endorsement with Nike. There is even talk that she will be featured in a Nike commercial (Lee, 2003). Park's augmented celebrity on and off the course will bring her name into the American household where LPGA golfers are largely unrecognized. The spillover effects can be nothing but good for the sport of women's golf.

SOCIAL STRUCTURAL EXPLANATIONS OF KOREAN GOLFERS' SUCCESS

GOLF BOOM IN KOREA

When golf is reflected in a society's pop culture, fashion, prestige, and economy, it can be said the golf industry is booming. A recent Korean TV drama series portrays two main female characters who compete with each other in their quest to become professional golfers. To understand the enormity of this, one has to know that TV drama series in Korea are by far the most popular form of media entertainment. Golf has steadily gained popularity in Korea since the 1980s. Initially a sport for the highly wealthy, the economic downturn of 1998 forced membership and greens fees to decrease, slightly broadening the base of golfers in Korea. According to the general manager of the Korean unit of TaylorMade, the world's largest golf equipment maker, the Korean golfing population has reached 2.5 million and is predicted to exceed 5 million in 5 years (*Korea Times*, 2002, p. 9). Today there are approximately 176 golf courses in South Korea, and the professional men and women's tours have grown to 433 and 176 players, respectively. The ever-growing golf population and popularity are but two contributors to the growing number of Korean women playing the sport and turning professional.

KOREAN PSYCHE

The game of golf is an individual sport that requires calm and mental strength balanced with the willingness to take risks. From Shamanism to Buddhism to Confucianism and even to Christianity, Koreans have traditionally sought meditation and the search for inner calm. Furthermore, the Korean people are passionate gamblers. Between friends, there is always a bet brewing. It is not necessarily haphazard betting but, rather, well-calculated risk-taking. However, once a bet is made, much more than money is at stake. One's pride and judgment are on the table. In any sport, there is a measure of risk-taking involved. In golf, it is more difficult to play aggressively because, as an individual sport, there are no teammates to make up for a badly calculated risk. Most often in golf, those players that are willing to take a well thought-out risk come out on top. For Koreans, this makes for an attractive sport—gambling on their strokes to put them in the lead. In regard to pressure and aggressive play, Se Ri Pak has said, "I don't know the reason, but I enjoy it" (Sheeley, 2003). In tournament play where the stress is stifling, other players have characterized Korean players as "playing with more confidence. They're fearless" (*Golf World*, 1997, p. 94).

A striking example of the Korean willingness to gamble is the civil service/judiciary bar examination. In Korea, the examination is open to anyone regardless of educational background. The examination is astonishingly difficult with a passing rate of less than 1%. Most that attempt the examination are gambling with their lives, for they must quit their jobs to study for the examination. After 5 or 6 years of failing to pass the examination, some people are left with scant options in their future, because the examination material is highly specific for the judicial service. What drives these people to stake their lives on one examination is the end result of a credential-based society. Current South Korean President Roh Moo Hyun is every civil service bar examinee's hero. As only a graduate of a commercial high school, and after 9 years of attempting to pass the bar examination, Roh finally passed thus allowing him to become a successful lawyer and giving him access to a political career that would lead to the presidency.

WORK ETHIC AS AN OUTGROWTH OF AN EXAMINATION CULTURE

Certain physical attributes and exceptional natural talents are high prerequisites to excel in professional sports. Women's professional golf, though, does not necessarily give a physically larger or stronger player an advantage. Nor are Korean female golfers physically lacking in comparison to their Caucasian counterparts. There is only an inch difference between the average heights of the top 25 Caucasian players on the 2003 earnings list and the Korean players on the tour. The median height for both groups is 5' 6", as well. In fact, the Korean players are known to exhibit exceptional lower body strength. Their stronger legs provide them with a solid

foundation to generate powerful swings through good hip rotation. Even still, there are a few Korean players that are only a few inches taller than 5'. Mi-Hyun Kim is the second smallest Korean on the LPGA tour at 5' 1", and save for Se Ri Pak, she is the most successful Korean on the tour. Kim has been asked many times if size is an issue, but the Korean player has responded that "everybody has to hit the same shots, and play the same holes. I just try to play smart" (Marky, 2002, p. D11). Kim, who has already won five tournaments and led the tour in accuracy off the tee in 2002, has demonstrated that pinpoint driving accuracy and smart plays more than make up for a shorter driving distance.

In the game of golf, practice may be more important than a natural ability for the game. This is because there is not much to club handling, stance, or swing mechanics that a player cannot with enough disciplined practice learn and perfect. Some players may possess a natural talent for reading putting greens, but even that is something that can be learned through practice and repeated exposure. This aspect of the game works to the advantage of Korean players. Most of the Korean players, unlike Tiger Woods who held a club as a young child, did not pick up a golf club until their teenage years. The uncanny success of the Koreans can be seen as a dividend of their inexhaustible practicing.

Statements to the media give some indication of the amount the Koreans on the tour practice. Several top Korean players have expressed that they stand out in their practice routines. Grace Park has emphasized to the media the role of the Koreans' tireless work ethic when she said, "I know that Korean players work hard. They are the first ones on the range, the last ones to leave. I think that's why we are seeing more and more [Korean] players at the top" (Sirak, Rosaforte, & Antonini, 2003, p. 31). Echoing Park's opinion, Mi-Hyun Kim has said, "We [Koreans] practice a lot. Every Korean player wants to try to practice hard and work out hard" (Van Sickle, 2001, p. 21). Se Ri Pak's practices, summer or winter, while training under her father in Korea, were known to include 2-hour weight lifting sessions before school and 7-hour driving sessions that lasted past midnight (Emerson & Lee, 1998, pp. 44-48). It is not just that her father drove her to this type of severe practicing. Pak has stated, "That's just the way that I am. I can't sleep knowing that I don't have something the way I want it" (Myers, 2002, p. 101). Se Ri Pak's persistent practice has resulted in a swing that is the envy of the tour. Sports media has characterized Pak's golf swing as "hypnotically robotic, thoroughly repeatable and extremely beautiful" (Bamberger, 1998a, p. 52).

Midnight practices might baffle most non-Koreans; for the Korean, such is not out of the ordinary. Korean society places a high value on higher education, and because of that and Confucian roots, Korean students take entrance examinations for all levels of education. After middle school, students begin a high school admissions process that resembles that of the American university system. After high school, there is yet another entrance examination for higher education. It is this examination that reigns supreme in every high school student's mind. In a society where a

great emphasis is placed on not simply an education but a prestigious education, a person's course in life depends on doing well on the college entrance examination. This creates a uniquely strenuous examination culture in Korea.

The desire to attend the most prestigious university and the high selectivity of the most prestigious Korean universities fuel the examination culture. Only 60% of the freshman class at a prestigious university includes immediate high school graduates. The other 40% are repeat entrance examination takers who graduated from high school 2 or even 3 years ago. In preparation, high schools are largely geared toward preparing students for the examination. Still, for additional preparation, students attend *cram schools* at night after regular classes. A typical student will wake up several hours before school and begin studying. After a school day that is far longer than the average American school day, the students return home from school about 5 in the evening, eat dinner, and arrive at cram school by 6. Five hours later, students are let out and return home shortly before midnight. More than likely, the student will not sleep if they have not mastered something from the day's lessons. Somewhere between class time and cram school, students meet with private tutors hired by their parents. These students may even be attending American SAT test preparation institutes in addition to all of this, for many Korean high school students apply to American universities, as well. Such a rigorous regime of study and preparation for an examination can rarely be found elsewhere in the world. This relentless cycle of mental preparation for a single examination on which students are given only one chance per year translates well into the single-mindedness and never-ending practice sessions seen in the Korean golfers.

KOREANS PURSUE FOCUS THAT IS FURTHER CULTIVATED IN THE EXAMINATION CULTURE

With so much practice, the lives of Korean golfers are dissected and presented to consist of nothing but golf. In terms of sporting entertainment, it makes for a less exciting show; in terms of winning tournaments, it makes all the difference. Korean golfers are entirely focused and devoted to the game of golf and their training. Most of them do not date, and because they are in a foreign country, they have very few friends. Moreover, their lengthy training sessions do not allow for much else but golf to enter their lives. Se Ri Pak has said, "I have little interest in other things. I don't want to go to the movies. I don't want to go out. It's too much trouble" (Bamberger, 1998b, p. 77). Even during a photo shoot with *Vanity Fair* magazine, golf was on the Korean's mind. The photographer described the session as follows, "It was like pulling teeth. She kept saying, 'I must go back to the range and hit balls'" (Kindred, 1999, p. 54). This mindset follows the golfers onto the course during tournament play. Korean players are criticized for showing little emotion during tournaments. Sport spectators want impassioned athletes to cheer on. Pak has been described by the media as "the closest thing yet to a

human version of Iron Byron, the ball-testing machine . . . a golfing machine—no brain, no emotion, automated excellence” (Bamberger, 1998a, p. 55). Yet this cool single-mindedness displayed by Korean golfers may be the secret to their success.

Graham and Stabler (1999) used the Cattell 16 Personality Factor questionnaire developed by Raymond Cattell to determine traits champion golfers possess that nonchampions do not. With a sample size of 50 LPGA tour players and repeated testing on the PGA and Senior PGA tours, Graham and Stabler discovered eight unique traits that champion golfers exhibit. The defined traits are focus, abstract thinking, emotional stability, tough-mindedness, confidence, self-sufficiency, and optimal arousal. However, focus is the single most important trait for a champion golfer, for all the other traits are hinged upon its stable presence.

Focus is defined to be the ability to “detach from everything going on in one’s surroundings . . . from internal distractions, high expectations, and over-involvement with results” (Graham & Stabler, 1999, p. 21). Champion golfers not only exhibit this trait but have the ability to “relax this focus between shots, then [narrow] it again as they approach the ball, thinking about only the shot or putt at hand” (p. 22). Focus is vital in the game of golf because of several aspects of the game. As Graham and Stabler (1999) pointed out, golf is generally inert, has a lot of downtime in between play, and takes a lot of time to play. Unlike reactive sports where athletes respond to another athlete’s movement of the ball, golf maintains a motionless ball waiting to be struck by the golfer, which requires more focus. The time between shots and total length of golf play is mentally challenging. From shot to shot, there is a lag in play that gives the golfer’s mind a window to lose focus or to focus on the wrong things. Over the course of the day, as well, it becomes exceedingly difficult to maintain a certain level of focus (Graham & Stabler, 1999).

Possession of this type of focus equates to success, as well, in relation to examinations. Comparing a game of golf to an examination, one finds it is inert and simply waits to be read and answered. It is lengthy, usually requiring a full day to complete with several breaks in between sections. One cannot be distracted by parents’ expectations and final scores; the test at hand must be the sole focus. Just as from shot to shot a champion golfer will relax his or her focus and refocus on the present shot forgetting about the previous and next shot, a student must do the same from question to question. The student cannot get bogged down on an uncertain answer on the previous question much like a golfer cannot be distracted about the double bogey on the previous hole. In crunch situations, professional sports rookies are known to choke and lose focus because of their lack of experience. Loss of focus affects the physical body itself—muscles tense up, fine motor control is reduced, and thoughts race through the mind. However, Korean students experience these high-pressure situations for the majority of their academic lives when examinations mean the difference between the number one and number two rank in an elementary, middle school, or high school class and

most of all when freezing on the college entrance examination means not going to college and waiting another year to try again.

Additionally, the composure and calm demeanor of top Korean golfers have been noted by observers. Former professional golfer and now TV commentator Judy Rankin encapsulated this characteristic of Korean players after watching Se Ri Pak win the U. S. Women's Open: "Controlling your emotions, not being open about your emotions—Asian culture views that kind of control as a strength" (Bamberger, 1998a, p. 55). As something that is inherently sought out by a people, it is no wonder Korean players exhibit incredible detachment during tournaments. Furthermore, it has been a long-time training technique in Korean sports to spend nights in cemeteries to build a tough mind and conquer fears. Se Ri Pak has stated that her father had her practice in the cemetery and even sleep there to build nerves of steel (Bamberger, 1998a, pp. 52-55). Perhaps it may be a bit unorthodox, but it is nonetheless effective.

KOREAN FAMILY STRUCTURE

Part of the reason the Korean players are better able to completely devote themselves to the game of golf is the close involvement of their parents. Over the years, the parents of superstar athletes like Tiger Woods and Venus and Serena Williams have been credited as major forces in their children's success and often take active roles in their careers. However, parents play a more significant role in the Korean golfer's life. In a foreign country bereft of all things familiar, having a mother or father or both on the tour means a world of difference to the Korean player. Their fathers are their caddies, coaches, and confidantes. Their mothers are bulwarks of support and familiarity, sacrificing their marriages and family lives to pick up and move to the states to care for their daughters' needs. It is this never-ending devotion of parents to their children's needs that plays a heightened role in these players' victories.

The inner workings of the Korean family are much different from those of an American family. The salient difference is the length of time that immediate family members live together in a single household. The tremendous parental devotion exhibited by Korean parents is a natural derivative of this extended cohabitation. Unlike Western culture that encourages children to move away from home and support themselves as soon as possible, Korean family units remain together in many cases up until children marry. This lengthy period of living in a single household allows for children to develop exceedingly close relationships with their parents. This type of closeness allows for a sincere and strong support base for children as they mature into adults. It is the concept of building and maintaining an emotional and financial foundation for their children that allows the children to better be able to discover dreams and pursue them wholeheartedly even if that means leaving behind a homeland. The family structure also allows for heightened and prolonged supervision and involvement of parents in their

children's lives. Parents are given the utmost respect and are almost unquestionably obeyed. It is not that Korean families do not emphasize independence and self-awareness. Rather, once dreams and goals are made, parents are present to direct their children in the right direction and provide the tools necessary to succeed at any cost.

The story of any top Korean golfer on the LPGA would tell of not only parental direction but also of parental sacrifice. Mi-Hyun Kim's parents were devoted to their daughter's dream and were ready to do anything to make their daughter's journey easier. As a rookie, Kim's parents made familial and financial sacrifices to travel alongside Mi-Hyun Kim, driving from tournament to tournament in a van and sleeping in low-priced motels. Even after Kim won the rookie-of-the-year title and gained sponsorship, her parents are almost always by their daughter's side while she is on tour. Se Ri Pak enjoys the guidance of her father who keeps her focused on her dream. In regard to movies and boyfriends, Pak's father once said to her, "Ten years from now. Golf now, that later" (Kindred, 1999, p. 55). After 5 years on tour, Pak's parents still accompany her. The less highly profiled yet successful Korean players also have at least one parent by their sides at tournaments.

AGRARIAN ROOTS MAKE FOR GOAL-ORIENTED PEOPLE

The Korean people have traditionally been an agrarian and sedentary people. Agrarian societies differ from nomadic societies in a fundamental way. Agrarian societies are futuristic in their mindset, looking forward to the future harvest. Transient groups of people, on the other hand, are less cumulative in their thinking, focusing on what can be reaped in the present. Investment in the earth and in labor without immediate returns with the coming harvest in mind causes a different philosophy to form in farming people. Regardless of how many processes and how difficult they may be, they will be done with the end goal as motivation. Much of what has been discussed is a reflection of this way of life. An extensive examination culture set up with a single most important test at the end closely matches the well-anticipated harvest of an agrarian society. Even a parent's unreserved sacrifice is done with the fruition of their children's futures in mind. The Korean golfer approaches golf with the same attitude. Every ounce of energy is placed in preparation of their career goals.

THE ABSENCE OF KOREAN MALES IN GOLF

The current movement of Korean golfers to the LPGA is the culmination of several cultural elements as discussed above. Yet why Korean men are absent on the PGA tour and why it took until the late 1990s for a Korean golfer to break into the top on the LPGA are worthwhile questions. Until K. J. Choi, there were no Korean male golfers who had won on the PGA tour, and his victory is an isolated event. The lack of Korean men on the tour, however, is easily elucidated in light of several simple facts. Compulsory military enlistment for young Korean males in their prime siphons off much of

the Korean male golfing talent. Also, physical size and strength is more vital on the men's tour than on the women's. Whereas on the women's tour a handful of players may stand 6' or more and drive more than 300 yards, it is a given on the men's tour. So although a Korean woman may not be at a physical disadvantage, Korean men are. These two factors alone are large enough barriers. Add in the fact that Korean men can more easily than women pursue successful corporate careers in their own country, and it becomes clear why there has not been a movement of Korean men onto the PGA tour.

An interesting gender dynamic occurs in Korean families that also highlights why Korean men are less likely to play golf professionally. A recent interview with a father of a Korean player on the LPGA tour reveals that he attempted to teach his son golf first, but he was undisciplined and given to his own desires. He went on to teach his daughter golf and found that she was disciplined and willing to work hard. The future is limitless in possibilities for Korean men, and it is reflected in their relationships with their parents. Although a father may attempt to train his son to become a champion golfer, the son is more likely to resist or be less appreciative if it does not lie within his scope of dreams. The attention showered upon sons by their parents is expected and perhaps taken for granted. It is different with daughters who have fewer options. When a father has a mind to teach his daughter golf or to nurture his daughter's talent, she is more likely to be receptive to the attention that is usually given to her brothers. Moreover, she is willing to work harder to make her father proud and retain the attention. These gender roles play a large part in the absence of men in golf and in the discipline and willingness of daughters to train hard.

CURRENT SUCCESS OF KOREAN GOLFERS CONTINGENT UPON KEY EVENTS

THE KOREAN WAR AND EMBOLDENED WOMEN

Before the pieces required to create a champion golfer can be aligned, a conducive environment is vital. Traditionally, the roles of women in Korean culture are as wives to bear sons and daughters to marry off. In a male-dominated, agricultural society, daughters are looked upon as burdens and extra mouths to feed to the family. They cannot do the work a healthy son can, and they require substantial monetary costs to be married off. Wives who could not bear sons to her husband were shunned by in-laws if not also by her husband. Korean women historically were refused education and mistreated by their own families simply because they were born girls. Given only the dregs of rice pots and forced to sleep in the coldest parts of the house, daughters were completely aware of their lack of worth. The threat of foreign invasion has been a constant throughout Korean history, as the country's geographic location is strategically valuable. Husbands and fathers off at war were replaced by their wives. What is curious, though, is that these highly repressed and demeaned women maintained within themselves the

resourcefulness and boldness to keep their families alive temporarily or permanently if they were widowed. If they had become defeated women, they would not have been able to survive as the abrupt heads of households. During and after the Korean War, Korean society saw the thrusting of millions of women into the position to provide the necessities for survival, forging a stronger, more aggressive, and more independent woman. She embodied both an almost primal drive to do anything and everything to ensure the well-being of her children and a steady and ever-present emotional base.

In modern Korean women, especially those placed in situations of hardship, these traits shine through. More so than any other group, Koreans left their homelands with the intention to create better futures for their children. First-generation Koreans in America have proven to be a uniquely successful group of immigrants by starting small businesses. A closer look reveals that, in most cases, it is the Korean wife that operates the business while the husband finds work elsewhere or provides hard labor for the business. The brazen and resourceful Korean woman is ideal for managing a business. More important, this shift in the role of women reaches further into Korean society. Daughters with such positive, strong willed, and resourceful mothers as providers and role models are able to aspire to much more than their mothers. This coupled with the eventual women's movement in Korea in the 1980s resulted in the tough, motivated, and confident Korean woman on the golf course.

KOREAN AWARENESS OF STATUS CREATES UNIQUE CONDUIT FOR WOMEN IN GOLF

Even though they are more assertive and aggressive than ever, Korean women have found that certain venues, such as the political and corporate worlds, are still not open to them in the 21st century. The entertainment business until late has been one of the few places a large number of women can attempt to climb the social ladder on their own. Golf in the last 20 years has become an unexpected but respectable career for women in Korean society—unexpected because of its short history in Korea and respectable because of its status. Golf's status in Korean society has remained upper-middle class since its debut. Land is scarce on a peninsula roughly the size of Indiana, and hence, green fees are exorbitant. The average member initiation fee for country clubs in Korea is nearly U.S. \$170,000. Daily green fees for members are on average \$50.00 and for nonmembers \$100 on weekdays. Weekend fees are roughly \$30 higher than weekday fees to both members and nonmembers. Golf in Korea is lavish. After 18 holes of being attended by a caddy that has a college degree and fulfills every need from filling divots to providing exact course information, the country club provides an elaborate warm-cold-hot bath. Even golf's association with corruption in Korea speaks to its exclusiveness. Unsound dealings on the golf course are luxuries of successful and wealthy businessmen and public officials. Although this is true, it does not completely eliminate the less

financially substantial from the golf course. Koreans are peculiarly conscientious of their social status. They will attempt to keep the appearance of a certain status even if it is a financial burden. For instance, lower-middle class businessmen may pay the expensive green fees regularly even if they cannot afford it to boast in their social circles that they play golf.

One would think that golf's prestige and expense married with the mentality that women should remain delicate would keep women out of the sport. However, golf's gender separation, lesser physical requirement, and high status create a unique situation. According to Se Ri Pak's old manager, Steven Kil, "Korean fathers have come to see golf as a good and respected career for their daughters" (Burnside, 2001, p. 2). This has done nothing but increase the number of little girls that dream to be the next female golfing superstar. Women can entertain dreams of becoming champion golfers without the fear of gender inequality. As professional tournaments are not unisex, golf provides a fairly lucrative arena where women need only compete against women. If a daughter desires to play golf as opposed to American football, there is less resistance from the family, because it augments the family name and does not make the daughter any less feminine. Furthermore, the implementation of special athletic and artistic admissions programs into high school has greatly encouraged female sports. As education is highly valued and a high school's prestige brings more clout to the family name, females are not turned away from golf. Golf serves as a way to gain further advantage in the previously discussed examination culture. Exceptionally talented golfers can bypass entrance examinations and attend highly prestigious schools to receive both a prestigious education and a future lucrative career in golf.

SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND GENDER INEQUALITY

South Korea has had an impressive record of economic and industrial development in the past 3 decades. The size of the gross domestic product (GDP) was 12th in the world in 2002, and the sizes of exports and imports were ranked 12th and 14th, respectively. Furthermore, South Korea is ranked first in the world in shipbuilding, Dynamic Random Access Memory (DRAM) sales, and broadband Internet access; third in container shipping and tire production; and fourth in foreign reserves (International Trade Association of Korea, 2003, pp. i-ii). However, many indicators of women's status are substantially lagging behind the economic progress. For example, the labor force participation rate of nonfarm women 15 years old and older in 2002 was 47.5%, and the labor force participation rates of women who completed high school and college were 53.2 and 58.1%, respectively. Only 15.2% of employed females are in professional, technical, managerial occupations. Although the average number of hours worked per week is about the same for males and females, female wages are only about 63.9% of male wages. In fact, South Korea is ranked 61st in the world in terms of the *gender empowerment measure*, which is based on the proportion of female professional and

managerial workers, the ratio of female to male income, and women's power in economic and political arenas (Korea National Statistical Office, 2003, Table 34).

The lag of women's status behind the rapid economic, industrial, and technological development is caused by the persistence of traditional values regarding gender roles. The social structural constraints on women's pursuit of highly desirable professional, managerial, and technical careers have forced young women and their parents to develop effective and alternative strategies to cope with the reality of a gender-biased professional labor market. More specifically, the high investment/low reward of college entrance examinations and the concomitant, almost lottery-like social mobility and status acquisition have led young women to invest time and resources into athletic and musical training in ways that are parallel to the way young men invest in educational opportunities that would enhance economic and professional careers. In view of the relatively low labor force participation rate of college-educated females, the short-term return from the college education, beside the competitiveness in the marriage market, is rather limited. Moreover, the fact that talented athletes and musicians may bypass the requirements of entrance examinations for colleges and may even receive athletic scholarships would make many parents believe that encouraging their young daughters to have a head start in sports or music is a viable alternative to the typical investment of family resources for tutors and cram schools for college entrance examination preparations. Although parents may provide equal educational opportunities for both their sons and daughters, a career in professional golf, as with careers in art and music, would be viewed as much more acceptable for their daughters than their sons. Thus, the parental bias against female children in terms of career choices ironically may work in favor of allocating family resources for their daughters' training in golf. In other words, pursuing a career in golf is acceptable for daughters but not for sons simply because males would have to support their families financially, and careers in golf may not provide stable and lucrative incomes. On the other hand, given the limited opportunities of employment available for women and the fact that a wife's earnings would be only the second source of family income, young women can afford to take a risk for a career in professional golf. Hence, Korean parents may be more willing to call an *all in* for their daughters' careers in golf, music, and arts than they are with their sons' careers.

SE RI PAK'S ROOKIE YEAR CONFERS CONFIDENCE TO OTHER KOREAN GOLFERS

Although this mindset has come about in the last 2 or so decades, it still was not until the last 5 years that Korean women began their incredible movement onto the LPGA. American professional sports athletes are ethnically diverse. African Americans and Latinos have dominated mainstream sports like basketball, football, and baseball, so it was not racial issues that

slowed the Korean golfers' coming to America. The now-successful Korean women on the LPGA disclose that they were afraid at first to play in America, unsure if they could make it. Se Ri Pak's spectacular rookie season on the LPGA shattered any more misgivings about Korean women winning in America. Pak has said, "I would play with [Korean golfers in Korea] in amateurs and juniors, and when I came over here [U.S.] and did well, they think, 'Why not? I can do that.' So they come over here" (Barr, 2003, p. D9). Pak's rookie-year success was monumental to other Korean golfers. Mi-Hyun Kim, who played with Se Ri Pak on the Korean amateur tour, echoed this sentiment. Kim said, "Before Se Ri came on the LPGA tour, we thought it was a very big thing and maybe something we can't do. But after Se Ri came over and won two majors in her first year, some of us thought maybe we can do that, too" (Marky, 2002, p. D5). Like Tiger Woods, Se Ri Pak brought the game to her homeland and elevated it to new levels of prestige and popularity. Signing multimillion-dollar contracts with Cheil Jedang and TaylorMade assuredly shaped a role model out of Se Ri Pak to girls and parents alike. Additionally, Pak in 2003 was named by *Sports Illustrated* as 1 of the 101 most influential minorities in sports; the only other golfer to make the list was Tiger Woods (Deitsch, 2003, pp. 38-46). Although the first Korean victory on the LPGA tour came in 1988 by Ok-Hee Ku, Pak's endorsements, accolades, and the high caliber of tournament victories during her rookie season are what allowed her to embody a golfing role model and movement. "Se Ri is definitely a huge idol for a lot of young players. When people find a role model, it gives them a goal and something to look forward to," confirmed Grace Park (Blauvelt, 2003, p. 2). Perhaps, too, the economic crisis in 1998 in Korea provided the perfect stage for Se Ri Pak to make her move. In such a time of depression, the whole nation became caught up in her success, quickly making golf something for which every class of citizen would turn on the TV. Now the largest percentage of LPGA TV rights fees and LPGA merchandise revenue come from South Korea (Blauvelt, 2003). A regular tournament on the LPGA tour is played on South Korea's resort island, Cheju Island, feeding Korean golf hunger. Pak as a role model has kindled dreams of professional golf in the hearts of Korean women. There were no Korean golfers on the LPGA tour in 1997. In the years from 1998 to 1999, there were three. The number grew to 9 in 2000, 10 in 2001, 11 in 2002, and finally to 18 in 2003. Five years of a multitude of Koreans advancing to the top of the LPGA tour has done nothing but add fuel to the fire, bringing more and more Korean female golfers to America.

GREATER AVAILABILITY OF EDUCATION AND GOLF IN AMERICA ATTRACTS MORE KOREANS

The current year has an unprecedented number of Koreans on the tour, and that number will continue to grow. Korean parents, ever ready to sacrifice, have begun to send their golfing daughters to America at earlier ages to train at America's top golfing academies. Korean parents would not

easily allow their children to forgo an education to pursue a golfing career. However, Korea's rigorous and stressful examination culture makes it difficult for Korean golfers to train and attend cram schools. There is already a trend for Korean parents to send their children to American private boarding high schools to aid their children in obtaining an esteemed American university education. They have found that attending high schools in the United States gives their children advantages over other internationals in the college admissions process, and Korean families have no qualms about mimicking the routes discovered by those before them as long as they lead to success. The same was true with classical music several decades ago. Famous musicians like Kyung Wha Chung and Sarah Chang made successful careers out of classical music. Now almost every Korean child is taught to play either violin, cello, or piano because they are given the most solos in classical compositions and hence are highly desirable instruments for Koreans to master. These days, Julliard's precollege and college music programs are made up of a substantial number of Koreans attempting to follow the same path to success as those before them.

Parents of golfers are seeing America as an incredible environment for their golfing daughters to both study and train at a younger age. Couple this with top-notch golfing programs at prestigious American universities like Stanford and Duke, and these families envision golf, academics, and prestige all in one. This is exactly the case of Grace Park whose parents bought her a house in Arizona while she attended Arizona State University. Park dominated the college and amateur tours while still pursuing academics. Young-A Yang has followed the footsteps of Park. Yang attended the Arnold Palmer Golf Academy her last 3 years of high school and then played golf for the University of Tennessee for 4 years. She even explained that her "parents were big on academics, and in Korea it was difficult to do both—play golf and study. So America was probably the ideal place for me. That's why I came here" (Barr, 2003, p. D9). Golfing academies, private high schools, and American universities everywhere can expect to see more and more Korean golfers each year.

DISCUSSION

It has taken a golf boom, a change in the perception of traditional gender roles, and Se Ri Pak's breakthrough rookie season for the Korean female golfing movement to drive ahead at the speed it is now. The traditional placement of value on mental sharpness paired with the love for a good gamble creates the dynamics of a composed and aggressive Korean golfer. Add to this the zeal for education in Korea sustained by an examination culture and the influence of a goal-oriented life philosophy, and the result is a Korean female professional golfer with a vigorous work ethic and an unmatched devotion to the sport. Finally, throw into the mix radically supportive parents who are ready to imitate the success of those around them, and the result is the multiplication of one highly successful golfer into the

rapidly growing host of successful Korean female golfers on the LPGA tour today.

It is acknowledged that, although the examination culture in Korea confers an impressive work ethic and a keen mind in the precollege population, there are some negative aspects. Emphasis is placed on memorization instead of creative and analytical thinking. Articulation of novel and independent ideas is not encouraged. The work ethic imbued in the Korean examination culture should not be applied to all parts of life. Nevertheless, the examination culture provides a continuous regimen of preparation, a goal-oriented behavior, and a disciplined will to master material above and beyond the required to become the best. We argue that golf is a sport that resembles an examination setting; golf is a sport that requires all of these characteristics to excel.

As LPGA commissioner Votaw characterized the Korean golf phenomenon,

If you go down to the David Leadbetter Academy or any other golf academy that specializes in training junior golfers, you'll see Asian golfers pounding golf balls all day. So they're coming, and they're going to keep coming. We see that as a certainty moving forward that's not going to stop. (Barr, 2003, p. D9)

Korean golfers are riding on a wave of confidence garnered by the wins of Se Ri Pak and her Korean peers. These women contribute to the confidence of Korean athletes playing in international professional sports—a confidence constantly augmented to record levels by the South Korean performance at the 2002 World Cup and by the emergence of Koreans in Major League Baseball. There is more in store for the LPGA than just the presence of successful Koreans. Se Ri Pak's physique, sculpted by her father's training, brings a hint of the men's game to the women's. The Korean work ethic will push and challenge the current standards of the sport. These women will catalyze yet more change.

Even beyond the players on the tour is a class of juniors and amateurs that unquestionably foretells the enduring success of Korean players on the LPGA in the future. In 2000, the U.S. Junior Girls champion, Aree Song, who has a twin Naree that also plays golf, finished 10th at the Nabisco Championship, stunning veteran LPGA tour players (Potter, 2000, p. C7). A few months later, the Korean-Thai Aree would become the youngest player to reach the semifinals of a U.S. Women's Amateur Golf championship. Three years after Aree's exquisite play at the coveted major Nabisco Championship, a 13-year-old Korean American, Michelle Wie, would show the world again that Korea would remain a source of champion golfers. Michelle Wie stole the stage from top LPGA players in 2003 when she posted the lowest score in a round at the major Nabisco Championship, moving her into third place and putting her into the final group in the final round (Harig, 2003). The fact that, in January 2004, Michelle Wie beat half the men in the

qualifying round at a PGA tournament hints at a new generation of Korean-American golfers that may surpass their international counterparts.

The Korean American golfer proposes a novel case. Although not raised in an examination culture, these Korean Americans are still raised by Korean parents who exhibit the Korean traditional values of hard work and devotion. Their parents still send them to cram schools and hire private tutors; the only difference is that it is in preparation for the SAT, not the Korean college entrance examination. More important, their parents may share the perspective that encouraging their daughters to start their training in golf at young age is a viable alternative to supporting them to obtain a high-quality secondary and college education. It should be acknowledged that we do not have any definitive evidence on the extent to which the first-generation Korean immigrants retain the traditional Korean values. Moreover, it is not possible to determine the effects of traditional values of immigrant parents on the personality development of Korean American children. What makes them a potentially unique group is that these families are making their homes in the very country where the world's golfing elite plays. Korean Americans have better access to the game and its best teachers than their Korean predecessors. They may still be exposed to the same cultural values that make the current Koreans on tour champion golfers but will be spared culture shock when they join the tour. Part of both worlds, Korean culture and American golf, Michelle Wie is but the first of Korean American golfers to arrive on the scene, and she is already making a name for herself. In another 5 years, the greatest rivalry in golf may pit Korean against Korean American.

It remains to be seen what the addition of variables such as marriage and children will do to the careers of Korean female golfers. Looking at Juli Inkster, a tour member for more than 2 decades, an LPGA Hall of Famer, and a mother of two, it may be that the Korean golfers can sustain and accelerate their successful play even as wives and mothers. Or it may be that as parents they will opt to forfeit their golf careers for the benefit of their children much like their own parents did for them. It is simply a matter of time for the answer to this question to be found for this generation of Korean golfers.

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