Pop City
Oh, Youjeong

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Pop City: Korean Popular Culture and the Selling of Place.

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Moment 1:
“Cut the ropes!”
As the ropes are severed, the wooden fences that functioned as floodgates fall away, releasing an enormous volume of water that rushes down toward where the Sui troops are halfway across the river.
“What is that noise? It sounds like a great flood of water!”
“It is a water attack! A water attack!”
A dumbfounded and desperate army general screams. The screen freezes at the scream on a close-up of the general’s frightened face. Against grandiose background music, huge texts appear one by one in time to pounding drum beats; the first two read “Munkyung City” and “Danyang County.”

This is episode 45 of the prime-time television series Yeon Gae So Mun, which features the life of Yeon Gaesomun (603–666), a powerful general in the waning days of Goguryeo (37 BC–668 AD), one of the Three Kingdoms of ancient Korea. The episode depicts the climax of the Battle of Salsu, a major
battle that took place in 612 during the second Goguryeo–Sui war. When the Sui army reached Salsu (thought to be the present-day Chongchon River), the water level was shallow as Eulji Mundoek (a Goguryeo general) had previously cut off the flow with a dam. When the Sui army arrived in the middle of the river, Eulji opened the dam and the onslaught of water drowned thousands of Sui soldiers. As happens in most conventional Korean serials, that episode ends with a cliff-hanger. While the tension continues for a while, the audience is presented with a series of texts that name the sponsors of the drama series. The appearance of Munkyoung City and Danyang County at the top of the list informs viewers that they are the production’s biggest sponsors and actually provided the gigantic historical sets on which most of the series was filmed.

Moment 2:

A young woman wearing a blue dress is running along a rocking bridge made of ropes and planks that overlooks the sea. A young man in a dark blue shirt is following her. The girl is almost at the other end of the bridge when the boy yells: “Stop right there!” She turns back to face him. As he strides purposefully forward, his face is grim. “What do those things have to do with anything? I trust you. I like you. And I want you.” He crosses the bridge toward her and as soon as she is in his arms, the planks stop shaking. Everything is still. They kiss! As dawn is breaking, the overall color of the screen becomes blue and lyrical background music is heard.

This scene comes from episode 21 of Shining Inheritance (also known as Brilliant Legacy, [Challanhan Yusun], 2009), a megahit series that recorded peak ratings of 47 percent. A kiss scene on a swaying bridge, which conveys the kissing couple’s beating hearts and makes the audience feel exhilarated, is a clear demonstration of the talents of the writer and the director. It may perhaps disappoint some people to learn, however, that the kiss scene actually emerged out of a financial contract between the producers of the series and one of its sponsors, Donghae City. According to the contract, particular places in Donghae had to be featured in and blended with the story, and the suspension bridge, Chullungdari, was one of those places. That episode ends with the close-up kiss scene; while the screen freezes in still frame, the credits start to run, accompanied by background music, revealing the sponsors’ names, including Donghae City. As the sponsoring city intended, not long after the
episode aired press reports and blog posts started appearing that spoke of a romantic weekend trip to the rocking bridge and other attractions in Donghae. A seemingly dangerous suspension bridge located somewhere in Korea was about to become the romantic place.

The moments I have described show the degree of exposure given to the names of municipalities associated with television dramas in the form of sponsorship. This chapter deciphers the process by which cities have become one of the major sponsors of Korean drama production since the 2000s. As discussed in the introduction, one reason for the emergence of regional cities as supporters of television drama production lies in their desire for publicity, stimulated by uneven development and decentralization. Aspiring regional cities and financially desperate drama producers found they could offer each other a solution to their particular needs. The other reason derives from the spatiality of television dramas; drama production requires physical spaces that can be used as filming venues or backgrounds. When producers wanted to both diversify film locations and receive financial sponsorship, Korean cities came forward as space and funding providers. Cities thus became directly involved in the production of television dramas through their provision of space, place, and funding. I call this practice “drama sponsorship by cities.” It comprises two types of practice: first, cities construct megasize drama sets to be used as major filming venues and then further developed as tourist attractions; second, drama producers strategically display locations from the cities featured in television dramas in return for cash support. This chapter examines how urban spaces are inserted into television dramas in a manner similar to product placement; how media representation creates new meanings for these places; how drama-driven tourists reshape those meanings; and how municipalities capitalize on their representation in drama, on media spectacles, and on users’ engagement in their promotion.

**Constructing Drama Sets**

The construction of settings for dramas is an original type of sponsorship by municipalities. Called an “open set” (open seteu) because it is built outdoors, this type of set is a complex in which architecture in the styles of particular (mostly premodern) historical periods is constructed. The emergence of out-
door sets was mainly driven by a change in the subject matter and production practices of historical dramas in the 2000s. Unlike previous authentic historical dramas (jeongtong sageuk) that mainly depicted the kingdom’s indoor politics and ruling male aristocracy, the fusion historical dramas that became popular in the 2000s were based more on writers’ imaginations than historical facts. Recent fusion historical dramas have diversified their themes as well, exploring the lives of underrepresented classes such as women, scholars and scientists, and peasants and slaves. Breaking away from the monotonous concentration on the Chosun dynasty (1392–1910) in previous dramas, fusion historical dramas have broadened the historical frame of reference, taking in several other dynasties that preceded Chosun. The new subject matter and the diversity of historical periods required new settings that could be used as backgrounds and filming venues. In addition, the lengthy production and broadcasting schedules of historical dramas necessitated construction of a separate set dedicated exclusively to filming a particular drama. Taken as a whole, these changes in production practice brought about the emergence and proliferation of drama sets. Forty-two outdoor sets whose size is over 3.3 hectares were built across South Korea during the 2000s; over ninety when smaller-sized sets are included. The sets represent palaces, towns, institutional districts, markets, and streets. Because they are mainly used for shooting outdoor scenes, detailed and accurate representation of building facades and the vivid streetscapes of a particular historical period matters. Although each area is portrayed as a separate and distinct space within the drama, different areas and buildings are usually built together within the same location.

The construction of settings for historical dramas presents producers with two challenges: space and money. First, outdoor sets require sizable empty spaces where modern elements are nonexistent or can be totally eliminated. Mountainous areas or large open fields are usually the preferred sites. This requirement drives drama producers away from Seoul, where all the broadcasting firms and production houses are located but which is already densely developed, out to underdeveloped or less urban cities. In finding sites for sets, therefore, what matters is the availability and topography of land, not specific localities. With the exception of a few historical heritage sites that can be utilized as backgrounds, the actual historical settings of the events depicted in dramas and the physical locations of the sets where these events are reenacted are totally separate. Television dramas never seek
out the original localities and the artificially created historical settings are represented as the virtual urban. Second, set construction generally costs more than $5 million. This expense is far beyond the capabilities of financially struggling series producers. As mentioned in chapter 1, disbursement of funding from a broadcaster to an independent producer takes place after the airing of a whole series, that is, at least one year after the initial outlay for the production of a long-term historical drama. In the itemized accounts, art production has a separate budget appropriated from the production costs. This budget, however, mostly covers costumes and props. The responsibility for preparing the budget for a critical portion of art production, that is the construction of sets, usually falls on producers, thereby driving them to find sponsors.

Due to the spatiality of drama production, particularly its need for nonurban physical space, regional cities have emerged as perfect sponsors. Although the planning, editing, and broadcasting processes for television dramas are centered in Seoul due to the place-specific agglomeration of the broadcasting and entertainment industries, the physical production process of television drama involves a broader geography; indeed, the actual filming of television dramas requires vast spatial resources for sets and the use of recognizable places and landscapes as backgrounds. Thus, the shooting locations of television dramas are scattered among various locales. Cities that can provide land for a set are also expected to pay the construction costs and deliver tax incentives. In return, the city names are displayed at the end of every episode as sponsors. Although the sets used for dramas rarely depict the places where they are actually built, the textual reference to financial sponsorship informs viewers of the physical locations of the sets.

Despite the mutually synergetic nature of the transactions, however, the party that is more desperate is the drama producers. In seeking space and funding, their approach to local cities and counties is very strategic. A project coordinator remarked: “We usually define three to four potential candidate cities (counties) and conduct brief research about them. We then arrange meetings with local leaders via local contacts—by the way, it has to be a mayor or a county governor; we don’t consider high-ranking officials at all, we present possible ‘local development plans’ in association with the drama set construction. Sometimes we capitalize on the ‘star names’ of directors or actors, but the presentation should be more about ‘local development’ than about the drama itself. If our presentation grabs local leaders’ interest, it does
smooth the way for a city’s drama sponsorship.” This interview suggests the placelessness of drama sets; they could be located anywhere that offers space and money. More important, the interview clearly indicates the mixture of the regional cities’ underdeveloped status and desire to promote themselves on the one hand, and the aspirations and pressures of elected local leaders on the other. As discussed in the introduction, elected leaders equate local development with creating publicity that can put the municipality’s name on everybody’s lips and attract visitors. Drama producers woo regional cities with the power of the media to do both.

Drama set–driven local development became trendy after the showcasing of Munkyung, a small former mining town in North Gyeongsang Province. In 2000, Munkyung City gave $300,000 for the construction of a set for the drama Taejo Wang Geon (2000), the story of a progenitor of the Goryeo dynasty (918–1392). Thanks to the drama’s extraordinary popularity (its highest viewer rate was 60.2 percent), the number of inward tourists increased from 420,000 in 1999 to 2.06 million in 2000, and more than 2.4 million in 2001. The city government renovated the aged set in 2008 and made it into a Chosun dynasty milieu by extending its size and adding grandiosity to its architecture. The remodeling gave the city prominence as a popular drama-filming site: more than thirty television dramas and twelve films were shot in Munkyung as of 2012. No longer a neglected mining town, one of its major revenue sources is now a media-related one. Its success has demonstrated the promise of drama sponsorship and drama set–oriented tourism. Ownership of a drama set remains with the city rather than the producer. When well-managed and advertised, a set can be a potential tourist attraction and give a boost to the local economy.

Another successful model is Wando County, a small and remote fishing village that invested $8 million in 2004 to build a set for the drama Emperor of the Sea (Haeshin 2004). Emperor of the Sea tells the story of a historical figure, Jang Bogo, who virtually dominated the sea trade from Tang China to Japan during the ninth century. As the drama’s viewer ratings exceeded 30 percent on average, the so-called Haeshin set hit the jackpot. Wando enjoyed an increase in tourist numbers of 20 million and earned around $10 million from admission fees to the set in 2005 alone. According to data Wando County released in 2008, the total number of tourists reached 50 million and the direct and indirect economic impacts of the drama sets exceeded $160 million. The county governor, first elected in 2002, was easily reelected
in 2006 and 2010 thanks to the tourism boom brought about by drama sponsorship. A local official said in an interview, “In Wando, it is said that no election is needed since the governor is virtually fixed.” The political assets the county governor achieved through drama sponsorship have been extended to the intercounty level where Wando County received several “local autonomy awards” (hanguk jibangjachi gyeongyeong daesang), which symbolize the extent to which the county has risen to be a prominent player among many other local municipalities.

How exactly have drama sets become a tourism booster? Their power lies in their association with spectacle. Historical dramas not only utilize drama sets as filming venues but also give context to them in spectacular ways with historical costumes, props, ceremonies and rituals, and battle scenes. The Legends of Four Gods (Taewangsasingi 2007), Jumong (Jumong 2006), and King Sejong the Great (Daewang Sejong 2008) illustrate the spectacular nature of the built environment of ancient dynasties; in their imaginative reconstruction of the period, they not only show its architectural style but also the ways the ruling kingdom consolidated its power through physical entities. The splendors of the imperial palaces are visual representations of nation-building processes and political dynamics. The physical drama sets evince the spectacular events depicted in its stories, evoking memories from dramas in the visitors, thereby acting as spice to attract tourists. To remind people of scenes from the drama, giant-sized panels showing stills from the show are placed at multiple points, together with props and costumes. Thus, visitors can extend the experience of watching the drama at a physical site. A drama set is an experimental theme park based on the spectacles conveyed by historical drama.

Sets also satisfy people’s curiosity about television production. Although they are not open to the public during the actual shooting period, their operators make various efforts to recreate the process of filming for visitors. Photos taken on location during the actual shooting of the film are displayed, with notices informing people what types of scenes were shot at which points and from what perspectives. Candid pictures of actors waiting their turn to go on set are shown, too. For drama and celebrity fans, as the consumption section will indicate, a set is not only a space in which filming is done but also a place where their special memories are developed. Like religious monuments, the drama sets attract pilgrims. Putting premodern architectural styles, fashions, and clothing on show in vivid ways, they also serve as his-
tory lessons. Although they are artificially created, the way they function similarly to perfectly restored historical heritage sites appeals to certain tourists, including students.

City Placement

A growing area of drama sponsorship is destination placement, that is, the strategic exposure of real places and landscapes from sponsoring cities in movies or television shows in exchange for funding. Destination placement has increasingly been seen in recent years as an attractive marketing vehicle that raises awareness of the destination, enhances its image, and results in a significant increase in tourist numbers. As Korean television dramas are eager to use city places and landscapes for story development, destination placement is heavily practiced by Korean and East Asian cities. I call these practices city placement because not only do their places and landscapes appear in dramas but the name of the sponsored city is specifically stated in the credits at the end of each episode.

The history of city placement in Korean television dramas follows two lines of development inside and outside the Korean drama industry. First, Korean television dramas began to use places and landscapes not merely as backgrounds but as driving forces of narrative development. Prime-time television dramas in the 2000s became distinguished from daily and weekly dramas (that mainly dealt with relationships and conflicts within families, and thus were mostly filmed in indoor sets representing people’s homes) by actively displaying domestic and overseas cities. In 2004, the drama Lovers in Paris popularized the phenomenon of the spatial development of stories. In this drama, the two main characters meet in Paris during the early episodes and later develop a friendship and love back in Seoul. The drama’s skillful exploitation of the romantic and exotic places and landscapes of Paris, which were blended with the events and characters, generated a national sensation. The “Paris stories,” however, are confined to the first few episodes; the remaining ones are based in Seoul. The spatial movement of characters and story lines from Paris to Seoul was inevitable due to funding constraints and the filming schedule. Despite the limited display of Paris, however, the series confirmed that “showing” matters as much as “telling,” and like commodities, places (cities) could be a subject of conspicuous consumption placed
in dramas. After the great success of *Lovers in Paris*, spatially oriented story development, particularly stories with elements of back-and-forth between Seoul and other places, became a trend in prime-time Korean television drama, as featured in, among many others *Only You* in Vicenza, Italy; *Lovers in Prague* (*Peurahau Yi Yeonin* 2005) in Prague; *HIT* (*Hiteu* 2007) in Hong Kong; *Que Sera, Sera* (*Keserasera* 2007) in Singapore; *On Air* in Taipei; *IRIS* in Budapest and in Akita, Japan. Given the practice of live filming (see chapter 1), however, overseas cities have limited spontaneous accessibility; Korean drama producers have therefore turned to domestic cities that are close to home but boast distinctive scenery that Seoul can never offer.

Second, Korean cities have experienced *creation of place* driven by television dramas. In the aftermath of the unexpected popularity of the drama *Winter Sonata*, which ignited the Korean Wave in Japan, the city of Chuncheon, a major filming site for the drama, became a tourist destination for both domestic and overseas viewers. The successful dissemination of *Winter Sonata* throughout East Asia brought 267,691 foreign tourists to the city in 2004; 295,673 in 2005; and 228,869 in 2006 (Korea Tourism Organization 2006). Compared to 28,500 in 2002 and 70,809 in 2003, these numbers indicate an approximately ninefold increase. The drama generated a great ripple effect in Chuncheon, with a revitalized local economy and heightened recognition status. The case of *Winter Sonata*, however, was not one of city placement; the drama’s director intentionally chose the lyrical landscapes of winter in Chuncheon as the drama’s controlling image. The accidental popularity of the drama and the city, however, taught both drama producers and Korean cities about the benefits of preplanned and refined marketing strategies of city placement.

The combination of these two types of development—place as a driver of narrative and the drama-induced creation of place—triggered the rampant practice of city placement, whereby municipalities deliver cash grants to drama producers in return for opportunities to display their attractions and scenery on television. During the period from 2003 to 2013, more than thirty Korean cities and counties practiced city placement. Of these, seven did it more than twice, a measure of how desperate local authorities are to promote themselves. Because cash sponsorship (usually less than $1 million) is less expensive than the construction of huge outdoor sets (which can easily cost more than $5 million), and because the showing of actual (rather than virtual) places within localities is a more advantageous way of promoting them,
the practice of city placement has flourished. Recently, other East Asian local governments have engaged in promoting their own areas through Korean television dramas, aggressively recruiting Korean drama producers and supporting drama filming in their region. In return for local scenery and landmark sites being shown in several episodes, Akita Prefecture in Japan sponsored the production of the Korean drama IRIS and Tottori Prefecture supported Athena: Goddess of War. Like Korean regional cities, Akita and Tottori Prefectures have suffered underdevelopment and economic hardship.\textsuperscript{15} Thanks to drama-channeled place marketing, they each enjoyed an immediate surge in their number of visitors, both from Japan and other parts of East Asia, their names became well known, and their local economies were boosted. Having witnessed the effects of showcasing these pioneers, other Japanese cities followed suit: Okinawa was featured in Scent of Women (Yeoinui Hyanggi 2011), Shark (Sangeo 2013), and It’s Okay, That’s Love; Osaka in The Fugitive: Plan B (Domangja Peullaen Bi 2010); Hokkaido in Love Rain; Amori in The Innocent Man; and Onimichi (Hiroshima Prefecture) in Sign. Tochigi Prefecture sponsored the drama City Conquest (Dosi Jeongbeol), which was partially filmed in 2013, but the production was canceled because it was unable to win a network channel in Korea.

City placement indicates the shift in direction from place seeking to (spatial) sponsor seeking, that is, from searching for places that harmonize with drama stories to searching for sponsor cities that can cover part of the production cost in exchange for using their sights as backgrounds in the drama. The terms of the contracts between producers and cities define the ways a city or area is depicted in dramas. For instance, when the city of Boryeong sponsored the drama War of Money (Jjeonui Jeonjaeng 2007), the specific contract terms included showing textual notices of Boryeong’s production sponsorship in all sixteen episodes of the drama; the creation of a minimum of three episodes specifically relating to Boryeong; the shooting of scenes involving the main characters in Boryeong; a statement of Boryeong’s sponsorship on the official website, drama posters, and recordings of the original sound track; introduction of Boryeong’s filming locations in the promotional materials for the series; and highlighting Boryeong’s local specialties and heritage in the drama.\textsuperscript{16} In some cases, characters directly mention the urban sponsors in scenes from the drama. For example, Rooftop Princess includes a scene in which characters working at a home-shopping company discuss launching a tourism product and, in the process, characters actually speak
about Jian County, one of the sponsors. In the story, characters make a field investigation to develop detailed product schemes and their movements follow the conventional tour routes of the area, including Mai Mountain specifically. Moreover, the relationship between the main characters develops substantially during the pilot site survey, rendering the places featured not merely backgrounds but meaningful and memorable settings.

The contract-based insertion of urban (or rural) spaces in television dramas is very reminiscent of product placement. As in PPL, city sponsorship is not necessarily predetermined but can be organized even in the middle of a series airing. The critical question is how to match up the places that have abruptly decided to buy themselves some promotion with the story lines that are already underway. Advertising places through television dramas is facilitated by flexible and spatially organized narrative development. Dialogues, incidents, and even story lines are adjustable—and indeed need to be adjusted to show particular places to viewers. Here it is worth returning to the example of Shining Inheritance that was briefly mentioned in the beginning of this chapter. The primary background of the drama is Seoul; thus, most scenes unfold and were filmed in Seoul. Yet in episode 21, the four main characters suddenly go off on a business trip to Donghae. Donghae is a homonym; it can mean both the east coast and an urban area located on the east coast, Donghae City. In the story, the restaurant company for which three of the four main characters work puts in a bid to provide catering for an East Sea cruise. But these sudden and temporary spatial movements by characters and the corresponding shifts in background were designed to accommodate a late-joining sponsor, Donghae City, within the plot.

Under the sponsorship contract, some episodes had to be devoted to strategically displaying the city’s key attractions. Episodes 21 and 22 are the ones in question. The cruise ship featured in episode 21 is actually operated by the city; the catering bid is supposed to take place on the cruise and therefore multiple venues on board the cruise ship are naturally featured in the drama. Other parts of the action are intentionally tailored to highlight other key sites in the city. Eun-sung (played by Han Hyo-ju) and Hwan (played by Lee Seung-ki) already have a crush on one another when episode 21 begins, but they are not in a relationship yet. They have prepared the documents for the catering bid together and are going on the business trip to Donghae. By good fortune, they arrive at their destination early. With plenty of time to spare, they explore the beach; the radiantly happy scenes in which
the two take off their shoes, run along the sand, and have an animated conversation are inserted to show off Donghae’s beautiful shoreline.

Later on, a third character, Seung-mi, a stepsister of Eun-sung who also loves Hwan, suddenly appears. Although a company manager has sent her to deliver revised documents for the bid, she is mainly concerned that Eun-sung and Hwan are spending time together. A fourth character, Jun-se, who is fond of Eun-sung, also joins the group, ostensibly to work on the catering bid with them. The peculiar emotional tensions generated by the foursome are the means by which the drama incorporates city sponsorship into the basic plot. Jun-se has booked campervans for the four of them, so they happen to spend one night at a campsite. The unexpected stay in campervans and the equally abruptly arranged seafood barbeque at dinnertime (during which the four emotionally push and pull one another) were designed to feature Mangsang Auto Camping Resort in Donghae City. The next morning, Eun-sung gets up early, just as dawn is breaking. She leaves the campervan, and walks away from the campsite. Standing at the lookout post near a lighthouse (Mukho Lighthouse in Donghae), she gazes at the scenery below. She then puts on a heart necklace that Hwan had left in her house when he stumbled in completely drunk. At that moment, Hwan appears from below. Seeing him, Eun-sung runs toward the rolling bridge described in the chapter introduction. The suspension bridge on which they kiss is actually Cullung-dari near the Mukho Lighthouse in Donghae.

Here, I should provide some explanation of kiss scenes. A kiss scene in Korean drama is the most critical moment as far as both story development and audience expectations are concerned. Modern Korean dramas, particularly those produced in the 2000s, focus on the emotional vicissitudes of four leading characters (two male and two female) who form a love rectangle. One of the formulas is that the top lead couple go through ups and downs (throughout many episodes) caused by such things as class barriers, family opposition, continuous interruption by the two subleads, crossing one another, or mutual misunderstanding, until they finally recognize each other’s love at the end of the series. A kiss scene is the culmination of this type of roller coaster storytelling, the dramatic climax that settles the fluctuations in the love plot for the time being. It is important to note that a kiss scene in Korean drama demonstrates much more than physical affection; rather, it is a peak romantic moment set against a beautiful background, with lyrical music, the couple staring into each other’s eyes, and a passionate confession
of love. Since Korean dramas rarely contain obvious sex scenes, the role of a kiss scene is not to show desire in action, but to make the audience feel an echo of the characters’ emotions.

By setting such a critical moment close to Mukho Lighthouse and Chullungdari, *Shining Inheritance* did a more than wonderful job for its sponsor, Donghae City. How many people even knew about Chullungdari before this drama was screened? As for Donghae residents who recognized the places, had they ever attached any meaning to them before the kiss scene? The thrill and exhilaration of the kiss scene filmed around these two locations not only made a swift and dramatic impression on viewers but also invested the places with special meaning. They were forever after associated with the romantic kiss and pounding hearts. After the airing, these newly created associations began to be circulated through the media, the Internet (e.g., blog posts, online communities, and news postings on portal sites), and tourism products. Now people call Cullungdari “the place where Han Hyo-ju and Lee Seung-ki kissed,” and the area around Chullungdari and Mukho Lighthouse has emerged as an iconic destination for romantic trips. This case demonstrates how affective representation of space in television dramas generates, adds to, or modifies the meanings and images connected with the space, and communicates these newly created meanings to viewers. I argue that affective values generated by drama elements (plots, characters, and their emotional flows) “create” a place charged with particular emotions and meanings.

Affective representation and place making are not always successful in city placement, however. In many cases, the sponsors (municipalities) and producers (mostly writers) experience conflicts and struggles. The conflicts come from different perspectives on landscape. Vanessa Mathews (2010) discusses the distinction between “landscape as space,” which relates to nonspecific settings, and “landscape as place,” which relates to site-specific settings. In the former, emphasis is on the interaction between characters; in the latter, the film’s narrative determines the filming locations. Sponsor cities always expect “landscape as place”: they want their landmarks strategically displayed. Korean television dramas that value characters’ emotional flows tend to focus on interactions between them. In the case of *Dream High*, sponsored by the city of Goyang, the sponsor explicitly complained that the episodes based in the city focused more on the characters than on the places that were supposed to be highlighted. That is to say, *Dream High* did not do for Goyang the job that *Shining Inheritance* did for Donghae.
To minimize such conflicts, city placement became more strategic in the late 2000s; locations are now prearranged with a view to anticipated tourism product development. The producer of the hit drama *Bread, Love, and Dreams* worked closely with its sponsor, Northern Chungchung Province, and a tourism agency in Osaka to strategically develop drama-derived tourism products. During the planning stage of the drama, the producer, the sponsor, and the tourism agency invited a group of Japanese women to Northern Chungchung Province, showed them several locations, and asked them to identify the places they preferred. Based on this pilot survey, the producer and sponsor city carefully selected places and landscapes in advance, and strategically showed them off in the drama. Needless to say, the production firm and the Osaka-based tourism agency cooperated again to launch drama tourism products featuring *Bread, Love, and Dreams* after its airing.

**Drama Tourism and Affective Place**

Drama locations attract a wide range of people. Given the mass appeal of television dramas, the number of drama-inspired tourists is extraordinary, and the recent period since 2004 has witnessed drama tourism emerging as a new and critical mode of exploring Korea. One notable aspect of this phenomenon is the rise of regional areas previously overshadowed, except for some traditional tourist sites, by the glitzy attractions of Seoul. Korean television dramas have enabled both domestic and overseas tourists to discover hidden corners of Korea. This section examines how exactly people consume drama locations. Consumption needs to be analyzed first because, as I will later show, it is the critical element in the promotion of drama sites. What interested me ethnographically at the sites where dramas were filmed was the hierarchy among tourists. Different groups of people have different levels of motivation and engagement with the drama locations. I will use this tourist hierarchy as an analytical tool to examine consumption practices.

The first level, the so-called group tourists, consists of those whose visits are arranged by tourism agencies. An array of buses carrying from thirty to two hundred group tourists to drama locations was the most common sight I witnessed during my fieldwork. This category includes both domestic and overseas, and both male and female, tourists—the majority are members of Japanese informal social groups or village-unit Chinese travelers. Most of
them are aware that the places they are visiting are associated with television dramas, but their interests remain vague. For instance, in reply to my question as to why they were traveling to drama locations, one Chinese informant at the Jeju location for *All In* remarked: “Korean dramas have raised my general interest in South Korea. But my visit to this place is organized by an agency like many others.” Although television dramas advertise Korean cities to a broad range of viewers both inside and outside the country, in practice, local players such as travel agencies and bus operators play a vital role in actually bringing tourists to the places they know from the drama series.

Group tourists’ movements are highly regulated by travel agencies and travel guides, so their visits are characterized as “disciplined rituals” (Edensor 2000, 334). At the drama sets, they stick to the designated routes and present a collective spectatorial gaze. Tour guides provide incessant explanations about the sets—what scenes from the drama were filmed at which points, for example. Letting tourists know about the familiar scenes in dramas is, thus, one of the main tasks of on-site guides. The tour leaders also designate certain key picture points, and the tourists practice the disciplined ritual of taking photographs with specified backgrounds. The photograph taking lasts for a short time, during which each visitor (individually or in groups of two or three) repeats the same rituals. In such collective practices, there is little room for moments of immersion in the place. After the formal activity of picture taking, most tour participants lose interest. Yet there is some room for agency. On some sets for historical dramas, traditional Korean costumes and life-size cardboard photos of the main characters are provided. Wearing the costumes, some of the tourists have their photos taken with the character cutouts, assuming unconventional, dramatic poses. A few of them even engage in reenactment of the relevant scenes from the show, taking their cue from the still pictures displayed around. Albeit brief and limited, these moments with the costumes certainly transcend regimented rituals, generating some drama-associated feelings. Overall, however, group tourists’ more directed consumption of drama sites is evidence of their lower degree of fandom as far as the dramas are concerned.

Disappointment is also a significant part of drama tourism, particularly among group tourists. Many of those who visited the set for *The Legends of Four Gods* expressed complaints: “The set does not look as spectacular as in the drama. I was a bit disillusioned by the much smaller size and the crude
back view. We found that the elaborate facade is merely a wooden wall with nothing at all behind it.” The tour guides were busy explaining why the set looks small (it is 70 percent of actual size, because the screen enlarges objects). Without the characters, computer graphics, and audio, the physical sets are stripped of most of their aura. Similar levels of disenchantment are also felt with city placements. On a day in 2011 marred by severe sandstorms, I met a couple of young female tourists who were visiting Cheongju to explore the film locations of *Bread, Love, and Dreams* and *Cain and Abel* (*Kaingwa Abel* 2009). Both talked about being disappointed by the undramatic landscape they actually encountered there: “Without this sign (that notifies people that it was used as a film location), we wouldn’t even be able to recognize this building (which featured as the bakery, the main backdrop for the drama). . . . It certainly isn’t all because of the weather. . . . And the neighborhood is very different from what we saw in the dramas.”

The site is decontextualized from the surrounding localities. It only functions as “produced” background; that is, it takes on a particular meaning only within the context of the drama. When the stories and characters are not present, the drama location is merely part of the ordinary view.

The second category comprises drama-inspired tourists (both domestic and from overseas), in large and small groups. The drama enthusiasts are mostly repetitive watchers of particular dramas and returning visitors to their shooting locations. The intensiveness and frequency of drama location tours mean that most of them have in-depth information about the particular scenes that were shot in particular locations and about the locations themselves. As their decisions about places they want to visit are largely motivated by the dramas they find so compelling, their behaviors differ from conventional tourists’ spectatorial sightseeing. Reconstruction of scenes from the drama is one. *The 1st Shop of Coffee Prince* (aka *Coffee Prince*, *Keopipeurinseu Ilhojeom*, 2007) is a drama series depicting a romance between a tomboyish woman (Eun-chan), who dresses like a man to get work, and a young food empire mogul (Han-kyul). Since the drama’s astonishing success in Korea and overseas, the coffee shop that was used as the main background for the drama has become a tourist hot spot. Still operating as a coffee shop and with the same name as the title of the series, the film location keeps much of the setting of the drama, including the waffle vendor, the picture that Eun-chan drew on the glass wall, and the original soundtrack. I met a small group of Japanese tourists, one of whom informed me: “I have watched *Coffee Prince*
more than twenty times and have visited Seoul eight times. Watching the drama, I really miss my younger days. And visiting here (the café) makes me feel young. I appreciate this place still looks just as it did in the drama. Looking at the old couple making coffee (the current store owners), I feel that is what Eun-chan and Han-kyul would be like if they had aged in the drama.”

To drama fans, the café is not just a commercial space; it is a place where the drama is still going on, evoking memories of particular moments and emotions. The way the informant described the current storeowners as embodying the distant future of the couple in the drama suggests that audience-tourists do not simply receive an image of a place that figured in the drama; rather, they reconstruct it through personalized interpretation and their imaginations. Their consumption of the location is, therefore, subjective and emotional.

Reenactment is a critical practice among drama-driven tourists. *My Love from the Star* garnered phenomenal attention in China in 2015 (see ch.1 for details) and the popularity of the series sparked an unexpected craze for chicken and beer in China, as the lead characters often had chimek (a combination of chi, short for chicken, and mek for mekju, meaning beer) in the drama. Things that are done or seen on screen get played out in real life—this applies not only to food but also to tourist sites. Incheon, whose locations were used as backgrounds for the television show, has become a must-see place for Chinese tourists. One of the most memorable moments in the series is the scene in which Do Min-joon (the male lead acted by Kim Soo-hyun) uses his supernatural powers to stop Song-yi’s car from falling over the cliff.

Someone puts Song-yi (the female lead performed by Jun Ji-hyun) in danger, placing her in a car whose brakes have been cut. Awakening in the moving car as it races toward a cliff, Song-yi yells for Min-joon to save her. He sharpens his hearing and listens intently; figuring out her location, he materializes out of thin air and drops in front of the car, slamming his hands down on its hood and bracing all his weight against it to stop it from going any further. The car tilts up on its front wheels, then crashes back down in a dead halt. Snow falls, a storm brews, and both Song-yi and Min-joon gather their breaths. Song-yi raises her head slowly, and sees him there in front of her.

This scene mirrors the moment when Min-joon first landed on Earth four hundred years previously (during the Chosun dynasty) and saved Ihwa. As
the story suggests that Song-yi might be the reincarnation of Ihwa, the cliff is where Min-joon has saved Song-yi’s life twice. The two scenes were filmed in Seoksan, an abandoned rocky mountain site, once a quarry, located in Songdo, Incheon. Grasping the fact that the useless site had now been turned into a valuable commodity as a result of their sponsorship of the drama, the municipality installed the same red car near the cliff, so that drama tourists can reenact the car-stopping scene. Renaming the site “Love Cliff,” the city of Incheon also arranged an activity around Song-yi’s binyeo, a traditional Korean hairpin that Ihwa passed to Min-joon at the moment she was killed. Tourists are supposed to hang a mass-produced binyeo on a fence erected for the purpose after writing their wishes on a red star. This so-called storytelling tourism product, designed by the sponsor city, has actually attracted thousands of Chinese tourists. Despite the embarrassingly undramatic present condition of the stony mountain, drama tourists become involved with the location, because what they want is neither the authentic experience nor the actual local context. Posing in the same posture that Min-joon adopted to stop the car, the drama tourists imitate his supernatural power. Since it is used as a critical storytelling tool in the drama, the binyeo also helps drama fans to materialize their personalized reconstructions. “Hanging up the ‘love binyeo,’ I could feel the sympathetic love of Ihwa, who died in Min-joon’s place.”

The drama enthusiasts want a personal embodiment of the drama’s scenes, practicing rituals of reenactment that are subjective and motivational rather than disciplined. The practice of reenactment connects the fans, the memorable scenes from the drama, and the shooting location. Through bodily enactment, consumption of the drama site becomes haptic and corporeal, and the bleak stony cliff turns into an affective site filled with special emotion.

The last category of visitors, celebrity fans, consists mainly of Japanese women who are members of Hallyu star fandom. Celebrity fans go to any place associated with their beloved stars and tend not to focus on particular drama locations. Yet holding celebrity fan meetings at sites where dramas were filmed or that are scheduled to be used for filming was once a surefire means of publicizing both dramas and municipalities. Star agencies, production firms, municipalities, and Japanese travel agencies worked together to bring in those who wanted to attend the meetings and who would pay for the privilege. Song Seung-heon, who starred in East of Eden, had a fan meeting in 2008 at the Hapcheon Movie Theme Park, a major filming venue.
for the drama. Before the meeting, a press conference about the drama series also took place on the set, before an audience of hundreds of Japanese fans. The translator was able to evoke the atmosphere of the convention: “The fans wanted to get ‘the scent of the star.’ Most of them sat on the stairs where Song had been in the drama, posing in the same posture as he did. Some of them even smelled the scent of the stair railings. They hoped to have ‘their own special secrets’ by getting to know what the star did while on the set.”

Bae Yong-iun, a star who achieved honored status in Japan and was called “Yon-sama,” had his fan meeting before the shooting of The Legends of Four Gods on a site in Jeju that was planned to be used as a set. The account of a provincial civil servant who observed the event is remarkable: “The site on which set construction was planned was just somewhere on the middle of the mountain with no sign of the scheduled drama. But the Japanese fans seemed to be already acquainted with the place. According to the translator, many of them remarked, ‘I am just happy to be in the same place where Yonsama will work. Inhaling the same air as Bae will refresh me enough.’”

“Celebrity involvement,” defined as the tendency to develop a heightened affection and attachment to a celebrity (Lee, Scott and Kim 2008, 809), is the critical reason members of the fan community of Hallyu stars decide to visit particular places. As celebrity involvement is often tantamount to worship, visiting a destination associated with the adored star can be perceived as a pilgrimage. That is to say that any places associated with the star are meaningful to fans and visiting them is a way for fans to build stronger empathy with him or her. Yet what differentiates tours undertaken by fans of Hallyu stars from conventional pilgrimages is that they are not only about following in the footsteps of their favorite performers but also about appreciating the characters that the stars played in a particular drama. The filming sites of Winter Sonata and All In have life-size cardboard stand-ups of the two main characters in each drama, but with the female characters’ faces cut out. Female fan-tourists are usually eager to poke their faces through the cutout hole, thus momentarily becoming the female character. Taking the female role in this way is both a form of reenactment of scenes from the drama and a way of appreciating its characters. The celebrity fans take on their personalities and try to conjure up what they must have felt and experienced in particular scenes. In drama-driven Hallyu, star empathy is pretty
much equated with character empathy, and gatherings of fans materialize this character appreciation in locations where the drama took place.

Although they do it to different degrees and in a variety of forms, drama location visitors all engage in the affective consumption of the places shown in dramas. By ‘affective consumption’ of place, I mean the ways drama fans develop emotional and empathetic involvement with sites above and beyond their superficial consumption of them as spectacle or scenery. Television dramas mediate places and visitors, thus the place is not an entirely strange space as far as the tourist is concerned. A site featured in a drama is at least ‘somewhere I watched on TV’ or an affective place to which the audience-tourist is personally bonded (Kim 2012). The ways visitors develop this emotional involvement with drama locations include giving them personal meanings, reenacting drama scenes, reconstructing the presentation of the drama, and developing empathy with the character through the place—even disappointment can create emotional involvement, too.

Publicizing Drama Locations

Although being featured in television dramas is the primary way of advertising urban and rural places, sponsor cities also carry out their own various promotional efforts. In the secondary circuit of promotion, the most critical factor in publicity for places associated with dramas is, ironically, the presence of early-coming tourists. The conventional tactic when releasing press promotion of a drama site is to mention the number of drama tourists who have already visited and how they behaved while they were there. Some of the titles of press releases by Incheon advertising the drama locations for My Love from the Star have included ‘‘We Missed the Locations of My Love from the Star,’ 6,000 Chinese Tourists Visited Incheon,”33 “You from China Who Follow My Love from the Star,”34 “6,000 Chinese Landed in Incheon to Visit the Places in My Love from the Star and Enjoy a Chimek Party,”35 and “Like the Heroes of My Love from the Star, 4,500 Youkers (Chinese Tourists) Enjoyed a Chimek Party in Incheon.”36 The content of each release reports in detail the ways the Chinese tourists reenacted the red car–stopping scene and enjoyed chimek. Both the presence and number of foreign tourists grab media attention and advertise the locality. Most civil officials I interviewed
agreed: “The simple fact that thousands (or even just hundreds) of Japanese or Chinese tourists visit the drama location does work to enhance the municipalities’ public profile. Even if we cannot calculate the exact economic impacts, letting people know about our (local) municipalities via television dramas or press reports is worth the sponsorship.”

Yet drama-driven tourists do not always wait until after the airing of a series to pay a visit. It can happen even before the production is conducted as a result of one-off activities such as film premiers and festivals. Since 2000, Korean drama producers have customarily held a production press conference as a promotional effort to advertise their dramas to the public and media. Production press conferences often proceed with a roughly fifteen-minute trailer for a drama and interviews with the producers, directors, and actors. Some cities host this critical media event in the hope that the name of the sponsor city will be revealed in media reports. A comment from an interview I had with a provincial official is particularly notable: “When we planned to build a drama set, there was enormous opposition from environmental and civic groups because constructing the set would damage the ecologically valuable assets in the planned site. Promoting drama sponsorship was a daunting task against such local opposition. But a media event in the shape of a production report conference held on the planned site reversed the situation overnight. Thousands of media reports poured in not only introducing the drama but also highlighting our province and our sponsorship. The one-day media event not only publicized our province but enhanced local patriotism to mute the opposing voices.”

Due to the snowball effect whereby the initial publicity attracts more visitors, all three categories of drama tourists matter to the sponsor cities. To attract group tourists, cities rely heavily on local travel agencies, lobbying them to include places depicted in dramas on major tour routes. As the on-site manager of a drama set said in an interview: “Our major job is lobbying the tour bus and tour taxi companies that virtually dominate the tourism industry in this area. Because the tourists that these tour companies carry daily outnumber independent visitors, our interests lie in forging connections with these agencies.” Although television dramas advertise Korean cities to a broad stratum of viewers both inside and outside of Korea, in practice, local players do matter in actually bringing them to the places seen on the screen. Small groups of viewers, organized mainly by individuals sharing their drama-watching experiences through online fan sites, compose the majority of
drama tourists. After visits to filming sites, some of the passionate ones go back to the Web and post detailed information about the sites (photos, directions, and tips), furthering discussions about the drama and the site-visitor experience.40 Recognizing these groups of active fans, or scattered pioneers, and the marketability of drama tourism (Korea Tourism Organization 2011), both Japanese and Korean tourism agencies have developed more organized trips to drama sites in association with “star fan meetings.” In 2006 alone, Japan boasted two hundred fifty organized tours to the filming sites of Korean dramas.41 Most of those were three- or four-day intensive trips to sites connected with one particular Korean drama. One of the most common ways to draw loyal celebrity fans is, as discussed above, to host a fan meeting with a Hallyu star in association with Korean entertainment agencies and Japanese tourism agencies. Hallyu star fan meetings often draw particular media attention because the celebrities are likely to create a sensation.

Publicity methods reveal the mechanism for selling televised places. To a superficial understanding, the primary marker of place is a television drama that creates emotional connections between viewers, the drama, and the location. The drama’s power lies in turning a merely physical space into a place filled with emotion, imagination, and fantasy through the representation of stories, characters, and cinematic scenes. This emotion-laden place attracts prospective tourists by evoking interest, enchantment, and yearning. At a deeper level, however, the essential advertiser of a place associated with a drama is the audience that has reacted to the affective values that a drama generated there. This is evidenced by the fact that the municipalities’ primary promotional asset is the presence of drama tourists itself. The affective resonance that commercial entertainment confers on space dramatically advertises cities on the one hand; on the other hand, the actual selling process capitalizes on the audience-tourists’ consumption of the drama locations, harnessing their emotional engagement with the place.

**When the Tale Fades Away**

Cases that involve either drama set construction or city placement have demonstrated that the production and consumption of popular culture are closely connected to the production, marketing, and consumption of place. The production of television dramas is associated with the production of
Chapter 2

place, while, at the same time, the consumption of television dramas facilitates the consumption of the televised space. In such cases, the relations between culture and space go far beyond the mere depiction of space in culture or the adoption of cultural images in spatial (re)organization. Culture and space intersect to produce each other and promote each other’s consumption. In terms of the economic effects of advertising, the synergistic association between television dramas and cities is obvious inasmuch as each capitalizes on the other’s attributes. The production of television dramas taps the space, place, and funding that the cities provide, so that drama production and urban production take place together; television dramas, likewise, extend, expedite, and dramatize the marketing of cities. By these means, culture and cities can promote each other’s consumption in the short term.

The marriage, however, does not always go smoothly. Conflicts arise because of the differences in the nature of operation and management between popular culture and urban space. Drama-mediated city promotion seeks to capitalize on the broad and fast reach of popular culture. As discussed in chapter 1, however, nobody knows whether a drama series will be a hit or not. Sponsorship from cities comes before or during the airing of a drama series; the outcomes of the investment, and thus the fortunes of cities, rely on the unpredictable popularity of television dramas. City promotion via television drama can, therefore, have only limited stability. If the viewer ratings of a drama remain low, the promotional efforts of a sponsor city are muted. Youngyang County spent $300,000 on sponsorship for the drama *The Return of Iljimae* (*Doraon Iljimae* 2008), but the drama finished earlier than scheduled due to low viewer ratings and the county never enjoyed the publicity it had paid for. Pocheon City and Goyang City invested $100,000 and $1 million, respectively, but did not gain the amount of publicity they expected. Not a few local officials have remarked: “Sponsoring drama is like gambling. Although drama producers stake their fate on promising directors, writers, and star actors, these big names do not guarantee publicity for us. It is a risky venture.” This unpredictability, however, appears to boost speculative expectations among sponsor cities, in the same ways that drama producers gamble on the uncertainty of a drama series. The growing number of cases of drama sponsorship by cities proves that municipalities are by no means averse to speculative ventures.

Even successful dramas offer limited sustainability to sponsoring cities. Television dramas move swiftly through fads and fashions, so the consump-
tion of television dramas is inherently short-lived. The immediacy of television drama has, nevertheless, a lingering effect on physical spaces, that is, on drama sets and sponsoring cities. Apart from a few sets that are continuously reused in the production of several dramas, most witness a few years of boom followed by a dramatic drop in tourist numbers and effects on the local economy. The *Seodongyo set*, in which Buyeo County invested $6 million for the drama *Seodongyo* (2005), received 200,000 visitors in 2006, its first year of opening, but had only 87,000 in 2007, 49,000 in 2008, and 27,000 in 2009. Within just three years, the number of tourists had fallen by 90 percent. On the brink of demolition after five years of deficit, the run-down set only survived thanks to massive renovation in 2012 and 2015.44 NAju City’s Samhanji Theme Park, in which the megahit drama *Jumong* was filmed, likewise boasted 510,000 tourists in 2006, but confronted dramatically dropping numbers of tourists and continuously rising management costs. After years of deficit operation, the municipality resigned the operation of the set to a private entity.

The most striking example is Jeju’s gigantic set for *The Legends of Four Gods*. In 2005, every municipality’s eyes were on Jeju because it was officially chosen as a major filming venue for *The Legends*. Combining the best talent in the industry—director Kim Jong-hak, writer Song Ji-na, and then top Hallyu star Bae Yong-jun—the series was nicknamed “Lotto in the drama industry” even before its airing. Jeju Province allocated 51.46 acres of publicly owned land for set construction and spent a total of $50 million on the series.45 This astonishing investment was part of a bigger plan to create a media theme park consisting of the set, condos, and museums, which would attract 2 million tourists a year to Jeju. Obviously, it was the drama production company that came up with the idea for the construction of a theme park under the local development plan. With the full support of the provincial government, the production firm was able to buy the land at a reduced price46 and was designated as a codeveloper of the media theme park. The administrative procedures that any developer was supposed to go through, including an environmental impact evaluation, were waived thanks to the provincial government’s cooperation. After six years of operation after 2007, the set was demolished in 2012. Local people say that the set in which such an enormous amount had been invested was forcibly removed because the drama producer “dined and dashed.” During the sponsor-seeking period, the production firm was determined to paint a rosy picture, but it never took any
action after the filming was finished and simply packed up and left Jeju. The provincial government did not even receive back the $250,000 that it lent the producer to assist with habitat preservation and mountain restoration costs incurred during the construction process.47 Some locals who sold their land with the intention of opening a restaurant and snack bar within the set also ended up not receiving their deposit back from the production firm.

Television dramas enjoy the benefits of instant popularity, which sells advertisements well. Drama producers and broadcasters try to extract maximum profit from their popularity at its short-term peak. Conflicts arise, however, when the instant features of popular culture are transmitted into physical space, because the urban environment and local communities do not work in the same way as volatile television dramas. Drama producers have little concern about the impact of drama-driven tourism; once they have completed their on-location filming, they simply leave. As discussed earlier, since the producers’ initial selection of locations has a lot to do with seeking sponsorship, an early-stage decision about a filming site is not based on any consideration of the long-term impacts on the community. While drama producers insist that sponsorship comes as a result of municipalities’ own decisions, sponsoring cities have to deal with long-term management and utilization issues when the popularity of a drama fades away.

Drama sponsorship is the very state’s projects as local governments dominate decision-making processes without listening to residents’ views.48 As shown earlier, there is a perfect match between the financial needs of drama producers and the political ambitions of elected local leaders. Although local councils are supposed to pass budgets, the city mayor and county governors, as the local budget’s primary executors, have absolute power to promote drama sponsorship. This exclusive process often results in a situation in which the authorities confront the opposition of local residents. Suamgol is a disenfranchised neighborhood in Cheongju City. Originally a place for refugees from the Korean War, the neighborhood was transformed into a mural village as local artists began painting on the walls of buildings and alleyways as a means of postponing or canceling upcoming redevelopment schemes. Yet the shantytown unexpectedly won national fame when the drama *Cain and Abel* used it as one of the shooting locations for episodes 9 and 10. While the drama represented the village romantically by featuring it as a background for the sad but sweet love story of the main characters, the actual residents were rather embarrassed by the unwelcome attention they received.
In contrast to the nostalgic images presented in the drama, displacement and poverty were the actual realities of life for the residents, and they felt uncomfortable about the exposure of their shantytown in the mass media. Witnessing the power of the media, and regardless of the local people’s willingness or otherwise, the city government promoted Suamgol again by sponsoring another drama, *Bread, Love, and Dreams*. Thanks to the drama’s being a megahit, the inflow of tourists increased even further. But the residents’ sense of deprivation deepened as a bakery that was used as a set for the series turned out to be the only local actor that made a lot of money. Finally, the residents’ complaints surfaced again when the city began building a set for yet another drama series, *Glory Jane* (*Yeonggwangui Jaein* 2011). Suffering from the constant noise, lighting, parking problems, and the incessant tourists, the residents’ collective action expressed their rejection of filming that never brought any tangible economic or social benefit to the neighborhood.

The above story reveals not only the distance between the state and local residents but also the distinction between representation and reality. Representation involves a broad set of meanings that go beyond designation. As a representational medium, television drama is not a neutral space that merely mirrors the “real” but a communication practice through which meanings and power are mediated (Aitken and Zonn 1994; Hopkins 1994; Bollhöfer 2007; Fletchall, Lukinbeal, and McHugh 2012). Representation in drama creates new local images/histories/identities, which are often detached from the actual ones. One striking example showing the distinction between fantasy and reality can be found among the drama-inspired tourists visiting Chuncheon, where *Winter Sonata* was filmed. As drama and celebrity fans with a high degree of emotional attachment to the city enjoy its tranquil landscapes, some of them are moved to wonder about the presence of a U.S. military base in the area, raising questions such as “why are there U.S. military bases in Korea?” and commenting on “how much of a contrast there is between the peaceful landscapes of the drama locations and the military site.” Problems arise when such pseudoimages/histories/identities narrow, distort, and erase the actual realities of an area, flattening the richness and complexity of a community. The Suamgol case shows how local residents may be forced to deal with a distorted media representation, the state’s arbitrary decisions, and the unwelcome gaze of tourists. Local reality is veiled when places are represented in television dramas, but drama tourism highlights the discrepancy between fantasy and reality, ironically accentuating
local problems. In Suamgol, drama tourism turned out to be a conflictual and contradictory process that simultaneously disempowered localities and created new pressures for local autonomy and resistance (Gotham 2005).

Given such challenges that cities might bear after their association with popular culture, it is noteworthy to observe what has happened to those so-called failed cases. If the drama sponsorship does not yield enough of a tax base through the tourism boom, the municipal account might continue to have a deficit. Some politicians failed to be reelected, while some other mayors and governors survived even after the unsuccessful efforts at place selling. Local councils that approved the budget assignment for drama sponsorship seem to remain unaffected and sometimes indifferent. Who had taken and should take responsibility for such “budget-wasting” cases? All the city and county officials I interviewed stated that their municipalities achieved enough publicity through their sponsorship of television drama, “While the media may criticize the fact that our drama set has become useless, we reaped more in publicity effects than we invested. Even short-term publicity is better than nothing.”

Despite the politicians’ insistent claims, how to measure the intangible publicity effects remains questionable. There is a critical gap between the municipal governments’ rosy expectations about the possible outcomes of the drama sponsorship and the lack of systemic mechanism to check local governments’ use of taxpayers’ money. Criticism from residents and the media is often reduced to the individual level, causing local politicians to loose reelection at best.

*Learning effect* is the measure both the local government and society have developed to prevent potential budget wasting through drama sponsorship. Given the cheap, quick, and potentially sensational outcome of drama sponsorship, local states are always tempted to practice it, especially small-sized cities and counties. Recently, one small county I will call county A received a suggestion from a drama production firm to shoot a drama in the area and the producers asked $700,000 in exchange for the potential advertisement effects. After intense discussion about the drama sponsorship among the county government, the local council, and local residents, county A decided not to do it. More exactly, the county budget was not large enough to venture into the sensational project. Surprisingly, county A blamed county B, which had recently sponsored $1 million for a drama series, for its extravagant spending on the drama sponsorship. A county official remarked, “County B’s overspending has raised the bar, which has the effect
of increasing the overall amount of sponsorship, affecting other municipalities.” Learning from other cases not only leads to blind pursuit of the same practice but also provides an opportunity to reflect on their actual financial situation.

Local societies also learn about the failure cases, preventing their own municipalities’ attempts to engage in the same practice. Anseong City once actively tried a drama sponsorship with a plan according to which the city delivered $9 million to a drama production firm that would produce a television series featuring Baudeogi, a celebrated artist of the Chosun dynasty and Korea’s first official entertainer. Born in Anseong, Baudeogi led the development of Namsadang, a renowned troupe that combines regional traditional arts, such as acrobatics, singing, dancing, and circus performances. Thus, the drama sponsorship was part of the mythification and commodification of Baudeogi in promoting the city and the then—city mayor. While opinions were divided, most local residents and the local council opposed the drama sponsorship, eventually nullifying the government’s attempt. Claiming that the spending of taxpayers’ money should be cautious, the local council, in particular, asked for a formal process to collect citizens’ extensive opinions. One local media criticized the city’s effort with the following remark: “The city is trying to raise the supplementary budget of $9 million not for the free school lunch program, not for the unemployed, not for the economically struggling farmers, but for a drama production firm.”

Local politicians were also critical of the then—mayor’s entrepreneurship, stating, “Observing other municipalities that wasted their resources and are left only with deteriorated drama sets, we should have a comprehensive feasibility study by inviting investment experts, cultural experts and residents.” Learning from other cases, people in Anseong successfully prevented the possible budget misuse case.

The above two examples in which the attempts to carry out the drama—featured place promotion failed, however, are the only cases, as far as my collected data indicate, to halt the state’s project. Despite multiple limitations and controversies, many municipalities still practice drama sponsorship, and the number of cases has actually grown in recent years. Why do Korean cities continue the practice even after witnessing several cases of failure? We have to go back to the instant and speculative nature of television drama to answer this question. As mentioned earlier, the limited capabilities of small regional cities, in addition to the legal restrictions imposed on them, drive
them to build the virtual urban rather than to initiate real urban projects. The underlying political reality is that drama sponsorship costs less than building infrastructure. Moreover, when the sponsored drama is a hit, the gains on investment become exponential. Such cheap, quick, and potentially profitable ventures cannot be unattractive to elected local leaders who long to be reelected. It is definitely worth a try so long as local criticism of their spending taxpayers’ money is endurable. Regional cities’ very marginality leads to such speculative ventures, putting them in an ironic situation in which such speculativeness accentuates or deepens their peripheral status.

The speculative nature of drama production opens a window onto the co-production of story and place. Drama-channeled place marketing is equally speculative. Anticipating both the tangible benefits of boosting the local economy and the intangible benefits of raising awareness and accumulating political capital, many municipalities wager on the slim chance of achieving successful place promotion through the medium of drama. The marketing of place via television dramas tells us a great deal about gambling on something that has limited stability and sustainability. Essentially, drama-featured place marketing entails the commodification of urban or rural space through fabricated representation, artificial images, and pseudohistories. Creating a fantasy costs significantly less than improving reality, but it reduces the public’s role in actual reality and drives it toward a superficial level. Korean television dramas insert urban spaces like products, trifling with their material realities and carelessly presuming to redirect urban or rural fortunes. Ironically, superficial representation has the power to draw deep audience engagement by generating affective value in the places featured in the dramas. The commodification of drama-featured urban space capitalizes to the maximum on such consumers’ emotional and empathetic spatial attachment. The sponsor cities may neither intend nor expect such an accelerated and sophisticated commodification process, but by attracting consumers’ emotional investment in the televised places they certainly try to extract maximum publicity from minimum investment.