

CRITICAL ANALYSIS ON COMMERCIALIZATION OF BORDER TOURISM AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Varying historical, political, and social tensions around border tourism raise implications for the complex relation of divided nations. Suk-young Kim, an expert in East Asian performance and cultural studies, explores various forms of inter-Korean border crossing based on emotional transactions, incorporating aspects of trauma tourism and its transition to a leisure activity.¹ In contrast, Astrid M. Eckert, a historian of modern Germany and Europe, discusses factors that constituted tourism at the border of West and East Germany.^{2 3} While the two writings share parallels, the two authors' nuances are distinct, as one examines actively changing forms of tourism on an existing border, while the other constructs a retrospective account of border tourism that has ceased to exist. Based on this difference in nature, Eckert's account provides considerable points that supplement Kim's explanation of border tourism along the DMZ. Specifically, Kim's notion of the transition from trauma to entertainment-focused tourism is restrictive because it neglects the ensuing political and social consequences. Eckert's assessment of border tourism and its impact on West German conceptions of division portends the reinforcement of separation among South Korean people, which may deter discussion on reunification.

A substantial aspect of Kim's interpretation of border tourism is the coexistence of trauma and leisure at the historic sites. Proposing 'Imjingak' as the frontier of border tourism

1. Suk-Young Kim, "Nation and Nature Beyond the Borderland," in *DMZ Crossing: Performing Emotional Citizenship along the Korean Border* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), pp. 137-175.

2. Astrid M. Eckert, "Greetings From the Zonal Border," in *West Germany and the Iron Curtain: Environment, Economy, and Culture in the Borderlands* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 85-123.

3. "Astrid M. Eckert," Department of History, 2021, <http://history.emory.edu/home/people/faculty/eckert-astrid.html>.

for South Korean citizens, Kim provides examples of recreational activities such as amusement rides and stars' handprints that have been introduced to this venue of solemn commemoration.⁴ Kim claims that the two distinct emotional transactions of visitors with the space are not mutually exclusive.⁵ She further proposes the notion that South Koreans are ready to "deviate from oversaturated war-related reflections...by openly facing war legacies with humor and pleasure."⁶ Likewise, commercialization of the border zone is accentuated by the example of Paju Premium Outlet, a developmental project that aims to establish a tourism belt along the borderline.⁷ Such advancements suggest a new paradigm of border tourism that prominently advertises historically irrelevant attractions. However, the new strategies at the border imply consequences that may alter the course of politics between North and South Korea.

Regarding the consequences of commercialized border tourism, Eckert's account of East and West Germany offers lessons that apply to the case of North and South Korea. Eckert assesses visits to the borderline for West Germans as experiences not only "to indulge in the anti-Communism" but also "to embrace their own half of Germany as the superior one."⁸ The trips were "designed to allow visitors to feel indignant about the GDR," and endorsed the "growing realization and eventual acceptance that partition was an element of a

4. Suk-Young Kim, "Nation and Nature Beyond the Borderland," in *DMZ Crossing: Performing Emotional Citizenship along the Korean Border* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), pp. 137-175, 141.

5. Kim, 151.

6. Kim, 152.

7. Kim, 155.

8. Astrid M. Eckert, "Greetings From the Zonal Border," in *West Germany and the Iron Curtain: Environment, Economy, and Culture in the Borderlands* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 85-123, 87.

new enduring postwar reality...”⁹ In fact, vibrant and accessible tourism along the border reinforced the partition rather than helping to overcome it.¹⁰ As such, Eckert highlights that West Germans’ indifference towards the status quo as a separated state intensified through frequent visits to the borderland.

Similarly, developments in border tourism along the DMZ may heighten the sense of separation between North and South Korea, encouraging the perception of “us” and “them” among South Korean visitors. Reinforcement of contrasting identities may hinder discussion on reconciliation between the North and South among citizens. Although creative advances in border tourism may increase visitors, much caution is necessary to avoid the surge of indifference towards separation on the South Korean side.

9. Eckert, 111, 122.

10. Eckert, 122.

Bibliography

“Astrid M. Eckert.” Department of History, 2021.

<http://history.emory.edu/home/people/faculty/eckert-astrid.html>.

Eckert, Astrid M. “Greetings From the Zonal Border.” Essay. In *West Germany and the Iron Curtain: Environment, Economy, and Culture in the Borderlands*, 85–123. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019.

Kim, Suk-Young. “Nation and Nature Beyond the Borderland.” Essay. In *DMZ Crossing: Performing Emotional Citizenship along the Korean Border*, 137–75. New York: Columbia University Press, 2014.

“Suk-Young Kim.” UCLA School of TFT, May 10, 2021.

<https://www.tft.ucla.edu/blog/2016/07/25/suk-young-kim/>.