

ESCAPING HELL-JOSEON

Hope for a better life among youth Korean migrant in berlin

*Hell-Joseon

Hell-Joseon is a term that deteriorates the Joseon Dynasty, the former dynasty of Korea, which began to be used on Internet sites to criticize the regressive aspects of Korean since 2015. Since then, the term Hell-Joseon, which has received the attention of the media, started to be used as an implication of the youth's extreme aversion to Korean society.

Overview

Over the past decade, the expression of hatred, ridicule, the frustration of Korean society among Korean youths have been pervaded, pointing out that their precarious and oppressed lives. The result of the argument from the current Korean society by youths is 'Hell-Joseon discourse'. What the youths imagine is a fantasy of living abroad, 'Escaping from Korea'. My interlocutors in Berlin particularly those who did not have enough economic and cultural capital should encounter a precarious life, unlike their imagination, struggling to earn a living and working in a Korean restaurant. The condition of the work resembles life in 'Hell-Joseon', filled with unfair treatment, hierarchical relations, and burned out.



The Life Condition of Korean Youths (Cartoon: Hankyoreh)

Research Question

I permeate into my interlocutors' daily lives to apprehend how the migration project has been shaped in Korea, what fantasies or hopes they have brought into Berlin, and how in reality it has been worked. In doing so, I would like to unravel the relation between hope and their immigrant projects.

Methods

Participant observation during 6 months of staying in Berlin and five months of working in a Korean restaurant as a kitchen-hand has been done, where my colleagues and Korean youths become my interlocutors. Interviews, including informal, semi-structured, focus group interviews, have been conducted in the meantime.



Colleagues of Korean Restaurant

Research Findings

- The Korean youths, experienced 'Hell-Joseon', appear as an age group who hold a similar sentiment, which can be analyzed as a sort of 'habitus', and they shape a fantasy of a better future overseas.
- Some who do not have the capitals should work in a Korean restaurant to earn a living, by doing so, they cannot focus on their initial migrant project and should confront 'Hell-Joseon' situation again in the restaurant, such as unfair treatment and generational conflicts.
- Nevertheless, the interlocutors are placed in a difficult circumstance to escape from this daily-life routine, due to their visa and money, as they keep staying in Berlin. Still, they do not consider returning back to Korea rather keep their adjusted hopes.



The works in Korean Restaurant in Kitchen and Basement