

**The Useful Koreans: Labor, Ethnicity, and Form  
in Contemporary South Korean and Korean-American Literature**

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**Dedication**

To Hyeryung & Woo-Jin

**Abstract**

In a 2004 interview in *Amerasia Journal*, the Korean-American literary scholar Elaine H. Kim insists on the “continuity” between two important historical events, the May 1980 Kwangju Uprising in South Korea and the April 1992 Los Angeles Riots (*sa-i-gu*) in Korean-America. “Don’t kid yourself,” a South Korean acquaintance had told her, “*sa-i-gu* is not on the level with Kwangju,” an assessment she considers “patently unfair.” His idea, Kim says, was that Kwangju was more important than the riots because it was related to “global issues, such as labor exploitation, global capitalism, flexible accumulation.” And that response was unfair, she argues, because, like other South Koreans, he didn’t understand the situation of Koreans in America—“what it’s like to live as a racialized person in this country, where race shapes people’s daily lives.” If the crucial problem for her Korean acquaintance was the global exploitation of the working class, for Kim, it was the racialization of Korean-Americans of all classes.

My dissertation, “The Useful Koreans: Labor, Ethnicity, and Form in Contemporary South Korean and Korean-American Literature,” is not about taking sides in this debate or even, in the end, accepting its terms but about

understanding its significance and, in particular, its meaning for the development of two different but, I argue, significantly related literatures. "The Useful Koreans" looks simultaneously at the development of South Korean and Korean-American literature during a twenty-year span between the mid 1970s and the mid 1990s, a period during which South Korea emerged as a newly industrialized country, gaining its reputation as the "Miracle on the Han River," while South Koreans in America emerged as one of the U.S.'s most successful immigrant groups, gaining their reputation as a model "model minority." Juxtaposing texts like Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictée* (1982) and Se-hui Cho's *A Little Ball Launched by a Dwarf* (1978), I show that despite or even because of their fundamental formal differences, they can usefully be understood in relation both to each other and to the development of a world political economic structure that produced the ethnic question of what it means to be Korean in America in conjunction with the economic question of what it means to become middle class in South Korea. My contention is not simply that ethnicity mattered in America and class in Korea since, for example, I also show that in Leonard Chang's *The Fruit 'N Food* (1994) and Mun-yol Yi's *Guro Arirang* (1989), what makes the question of who you are

essential for Korean Americans is their desire to be middle class and what makes the question of what you own essential for South Koreans is their desire to be Korean. Rather, I argue for a dialectical interplay between ethnicity and class, and, going on to read texts by writers like Younghill Kang, Kichung Kim, Ed Park, and Ae-ran Kim, I show the ways in which the related but by no means identical demands of class and ethnic membership have contributed to redefining and sometimes altering the relationship between aesthetic and political praxis.

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**I. Introduction: Class, Ethnicity, and Economic Miracle  
in Leonard Chang's *The Fruit 'N Food* and Mun-yol Yi's *Guro*  
*Arirang***

**I.1 Class into Ethnicity, Ethnicity into Class**

In Leonard Chang's *The Fruit 'N Food* (1996), Thomas Pak, a young Korean-American, returns to his hometown of Kasdan, Queens to find work after being laid off from a waiter job at a restaurant in Boston. The most important consideration for Tom in finding work, it certainly seems, is to earn a proper, if not decent, wage. After losing his job, the narrator says, "he was constantly worried about money. . . . He wanted to get settled right away" (8). For example, it was because of the minimum wage that Tom decided to stop working in a fast-food place: "He couldn't stand the low pay," the narrator says, "That was why he decided to move somewhere different" (8). Surprisingly, however, the new job Tom finally lands is as a clerk and a cashier in the Korean-run Fruit 'N Food grocery store, which really does not pay him properly. When the owners, Mr. and Mrs. Rhee, say, "We pay . . . four dollar," Tom—although he asks in wonder, "Isn't that below minimum wage?" (11)—answers, "Okay. I'll take it" (12). Tom accepts

this laborious and poorly paid job because he believes that working at the Korean owners' grocery can perhaps remind him of his dead parents, thereby allowing him to "live somewhere familiar" (3). Tom, as the narrator says, "knows now that part of the attraction of the Fruit 'N Food was some inexplicable link to his past" (13). It thus turns out that the Rhees' Korean ethnicity is in fact more significant to him than their low pay.

Indeed, when the Rhees have business-related intergroup conflicts with black residents or customers, Tom takes the side of the Rhees, who share his ethnicity, rather than the side of blacks, who probably share his class. After hearing the news that "[a] crowd of approximately two hundred protested the Fruit 'N Food grocery in Kasdan, Queens. This is the third day of this demonstration, and organizers say they hope to shut down the store and put the owners out of business" (159), Tom comes to see the Rhees to say, "I wanted to help." In order to "protect store," "what can I do?" (167). Considering that the black boycott of the Fruit 'N Food grocery stems, in essence, from the way in which the Rhees' exploitation of black community resources—or in the protestors' terms, the way "you come in here and suck the money from the

neighborhood and take it to your Long Island house and treat us African brothers and sisters like we nothing" (118)—Tom's choice to worry about and protect the Rhees shows that he sets no store by the fact that he is in the same class position as African-American protestors: both he and they are being exploited by the Rhees. He primarily cares about how he can reinforce and maintain his ethnic solidarity with the Rhees to stand together against the black boycott.

In Mun-yol Yi's *Guro Arirang* (1989), the nameless protagonist is a young South Korean working in the Guro Industrial Complex in Seoul and referred to as *Gongsuni* (factory girl). She is under investigation by the police for organizing a radical labor demonstration in the Complex. The reason for the protagonist's engagement in the demonstration, it obviously seems, lies in the fact that the Complex owners exploited their workers in a ruthless way. "Why," the protagonist shouts at the police, "do we have to live from hand to mouth while working our asses off? Why do we have to have very little money for food or clothing? Why do we have to rent small and shared rooms? . . . We're doing this because they never listen to us, our request for a little better life" (7). Ultimately, however,

economic exploitation as such is not the main reason the protagonist leads the demonstration. Rather, the real reason is class-related ethnic discrimination against factory workers by college students. "Stop calling us *Gongsuni*!" The protagonist says, "Are you saying college students are the only ones who deserve to be treated like human beings? We, too, like them, have eyes, noses, ears, and mouths. We're a people with human qualities. We're entitled to go on a demonstration" (8). What causes the protagonist to lead the demonstration is that the ethnic difference or separateness between college students and factory workers has formed the foundation of the horrible economic exploitation of factory workers. It is thus revealed that factory workers' ethnic integrity becomes very important to the protagonist when she cares about their class disadvantage.

For example, the protagonist is deeply inspired, first by her college-student-mentor and then by her lover, Hyun-sik. She is especially moved by Hyun-sik's talk of how to foster labor organization and collective bargaining, not because she values his ideas about class redistribution, but because she thinks he behaves with great respect towards her—that he, in other words, performs the act of

ethnic recognition. "Hyun-sik was very nice to us." The protagonist says, "He said we're in the same camp, we're friends. We were so moved by him. Think about it. College students usually didn't see us as human beings" (5). Hyun-sik, as the protagonist continues, "was utterly different from other college students who were only interested in driving us to fight against the company" (5). So, under investigation, the protagonist's concern is less with whether her demonstration will succeed, whether, that is, factory workers will achieve class equality in the workplace, than with whether or not Hyun-sik could be a fake college student, whether, that is, factory workers' call for ethnic equality with college students could be futile. When the police disclose to her that Hyun-sik is actually "a bum who never went to college," the protagonist cries in despair, "Oh no! If it's true, what should I do?" (9). To her, it matters little that "he taught [her] not only about human rights and the dignity of labor, but also how [she] could recover from labor oppression and exploitation" (6).

The question that arises regarding both Chang's Tom, a Korean American impoverished worker in the early 1990s, and Yi's protagonist, a South Korean impoverished worker in the

mid-1980s, is why they ultimately place the most importance on ethnicity, the issue of whether or not they are recognized as Koreans, while at the same time insisting on the importance of class, the issue of how much they get paid. The question is, in other words, why they prioritize their desire for ethnic belonging, while simultaneously arguing for the priority of their desire for class redistribution. Why do they come to face ethnic problems as they face class problems? How exactly do they understand the relationship between ethnicity and class in early '90s Korean America and in mid-'80s South Korea? In this introductory chapter, I will attempt to answer these questions. Reading Chang's and Yi's novels in the contexts of the 1980s and '90s Korean American ethnic collective action and the 1970s and '80s South Korean democratic *minjung* movement, respectively, my principal aim is to demonstrate that Chang and Yi view the relationship between ethnicity and class as a matter not of priority or choice but of complex intersectionality. In doing so, I will make critical judgments about the social and political meanings of their novels.

The common and most distinctive feature of Chang's and Yi's novels is that their two main characters could hardly



be seen as the representative or typical figures of early '90s Korean American and mid-'80s South Korean societies. During a twenty-year span between the mid-1970s and the mid-1990s, South Korea emerged as a newly industrialized country, gaining its reputation as the "Miracle on the Han River," while South Koreans in America emerged as one of the U.S.'s most successful immigrant groups, gaining their reputation as a model "model minority." In a speech in the early '80s President Chun Doo-hwan stated, "Over the past twenty-years, [South Korea] has become an example and a pattern to all developing countries with its economic miracle of rapid growth" (2). Around the same time President Ronald Reagan said, "Overcoming great hardships, [Korean (or Asian) Americans] have lived the American dream, and continue as exemplars of hope and inspiration" (4). In both societies, the new-well-educated and hard working-middle class started to be considered a representative or typical group of people. But Chang's Tom and Yi's protagonist are a clerk/cashier and a factory worker, representative of the working or underemployed poor, who are clearly being left out of the economic prosperities of Korean American and South Korean societies. As the dark side of late twentieth-century Korean America's

and South Korea's economic miracles, they serve to expose the truth that not all Koreans benefited from the miracles.

Indeed, in their 1995 study on the Korean diaspora in America (especially Los Angeles), Nancy Abelmann and John Lie claim that the mainstream depiction of the Korean American story "[has] largely neglected class distinctions among Korean Americans" (108)—namely, that the model minority image of Korean Americans, what Abelmann and Lie call "the Korean veneer" (99)—has functioned to camouflage the intense class divisions within the Korean ethnic group. Their point is that in the naive assumption of Korean American ethnic homogeneity, the concerns as well as the presence of poor and unemployed or working class Korean Americans are overlooked and ignored. "Overshadowed by successful self-made entrepreneurs," Abelmann and Lie say, "working-class and unemployed Korean Americans felt consistently neglected by the media and by the Korean American community" (113). And in his 1993 research on the working-class in South Korea, Hagen Koo contends that South Korea's economic growth "has engendered an acute sense of distributive injustice . . . among the lower class" (145)—namely, that the nature of the Miracle on the Han River is the state's (the Park Chung Hee regime's) leading role in

economic development, particularly its policies facilitating accelerated growth at the expense of equitable distribution. Koo's point is that in pursuit of state-led industrial policies, tremendous economic disparities expanded between those who participate in the benefits of economic growth and those who are excluded from those benefits. What the Korean economic growth entails, Koo says, is the newly formed *minjung* group: "a category of the 'alienated,' those who are alienated from power, from economic distribution, and from cultural life as well" (145).

Chang's and Yi's novels, from this standpoint, can be said to offer fundamental critiques of the Korean American model minority and the South Korean Miracle on the Han River myths. The main characters' non-middle-class position might definitely represent or even embody the inconvenient fact that the benefits of the two Korean societies' economic success have been poorly divided and that many Koreans are being left behind. It is moreover essential to note of these novels that, just as their main characters value ethnicity (the matter of whether or not they are recognized as Koreans) over class (the matter of how much they get paid), the narratives too eventually shift their

focus from dealing—more or less directly—with the class disparities of Korean societies to treating the ethnic identities of Korean societies. Note, though, that it would probably be a mistake to simply understand this shift as a refusal or a failure to handle the matter of class relations only to tackle the matter of ethnic relations in their stead. For it seems very plausible that the underlying shared assumption of the novels is in effect that the matter of class relations can link and lead to, rather than being distinct from or opposed to, the matter of ethnic relations. Which is to say that if in the two Korean societies lower-working-class Koreans have been excluded from the benefits of economic successes due to their ethnic alienness or otherness, then recognizing them as Koreans, that is, re-including them in the Korean ethnic group, could absolutely be imagined as a good way of helping them participate in those benefits. The desire for ethnic belonging is the desire for class redistribution.

As he describes in a 2014 interview, Leonard Chang adopts the lower-working-class clerk/cashier, instead of the middle-class model minority, as the main character of his novel because his goal as a writer is “subverting stereotypes and investigating injustice,” especially “class

injustice" (114). He aims to "depict [Korean (or Asian)] Americans in ways never seen before" in order to "engage in the [] pursuit of . . . social justice" (114). And as Chang goes on to describe, the injustice of class difference in Korean American society is chiefly involved in the issue of being "distanced and removed from any sense of belonging," the problem of an "alienated sense of community" (105). For Chang, the clerk/cashier's effort to "find some kind of community" to which to belong is conceived as a way to restore class justice. Meanwhile, as he remarks in a 2014 interview, Mun-yol Yi makes the lower-working-class factory worker, rather than the Miracle on the Han River middle-class, the main character of his novel because his ambition as a writer is to achieve a society in which lower-working-class people's relationship with middle-class people is not "vertical" but "entirely horizontal." He wants to "formulate a model that ensures a high level of differentiation of social roles that are necessary for promoting better horizontal equity among members of society." And as Yi goes on to remark in another interview, the situation of class hierarchy in Korean society is causally linked to "the impurity and degeneration of community." For Yi, the factory worker's struggle to

"recuperate the purity and sincerity of community," a "single society," is imagined as a way of producing a harmonious, non-hierarchical society.

Chang and Yi share the idea that lower-working-class Koreans have been prevented from sharing the benefits of economic growth and rising into the middle class, whether in the U.S. or Korea, because they have been arbitrarily and unjustly excluded from belonging to society or community; therefore, the best way to help them economically is to acknowledge their equal and genuine humanity, their Koreanness. To put it more generally, Chang and Yi believe that the problem of ethnic exclusion is oftentimes the cause of the problem of class disparity, so solving the problem of ethnic exclusion often becomes a way of solving the problem of class disparity. But, as suggested earlier, their novels do not just show that not all Koreans participated in the benefits of economic growth: more importantly, they exemplify that the two Koreas' high and rapid economic growths occurred in periods characterized by the severe class exploitation of the Korean people by other Korean people. Indeed, Chang's clerk/cashier and Yi's factory worker live in poverty and cannot enter the middle-class, because they are exploited

terribly by their co-ethnic employers, the grocery and the Complex owners.

The crucial point is that the novels can—somewhat unintentionally—serve to illustrate how the two Koreas' economic successes were possible in the first place, the truth that their successes depended on how some Korean people are exploited by other Korean people. They do not merely point out that the benefits of the two Koreas' successes have been poorly divided and that many Koreans are being left behind (although this may be their first and foremost purpose). The more crucial point is that their plan to enable lower-working-class Koreans to gain the benefits of economic success through the recognition of them as Koreans and the inclusion of them into society or community, in short, their idea of solving the problem of class disparity by solving the problem of ethnic exclusion, turns out to be a contradiction. For if it is true that the two Koreas' economic successes were owing to the class exploitation of co-ethnic Korean labor by co-ethnic Korean capital, then the idea or claim that the lower-working-class Koreans deserve to benefit from the economic success because they can be seen as rightful members of Korean society is simply to deny the possibility and the key

source of the economic success altogether. How is it logically possible that they come to benefit from economic success if there is no such thing as Korean economic success without numerous Korean people suffering from poverty and exploitation? And this question concerning the relationship between ethnicity and class in mid-'90s Korean America and in late-'80s South Korea can be asked not only of Chang's and Yi's novels but also of the 1980s and '90s Korean American ethnic collective action and the 1970s and '80s South Korean democratic *munjung* movement.

### **I.2 Theories of Korean American Ethnic Collective Action and South Korean Democratic *Minjung* Movement: A Critique**

In their 1985 research on the growth of Korean immigrant entrepreneurship in America, Kwang Chung Kim and Won Moo Hurh proclaim that utilizing "ethnic resources" was for post-1965 Korean immigrant entrepreneurs one of the most effective means to overcome their "disadvantages" in the general labor market—not only cultural and language barriers but also racial discrimination by American (white) employers (85)—and eventually to establish their economic position as "self-employed petty bourgeois" (105). Kim and Hurh explain that potential Korean immigrant business



owners—who had been hired by co-ethnic businesses for several years after their difficulty in finding jobs in the general labor market—raised their initial capital from three types of ethnic financial sources: first, money brought from the homeland; second, family savings in the U.S.; and third, loans from their Korean friends and kin (101-02). After setting up businesses, Korean immigrant owners hired Korean immigrant workers who were “more trusted than non-Korean workers,” and, more importantly, who were willing and able to “work more diligently” “for longer hours” (98). Kim and Hurh thus argue that Korean owners and workers benefited from a sort of “reciprocal support”; the owners obtained a “reliable, loyal, and cheap” work force that, by decreasing the cost of operating a labor-intensive business, gave them a competitive edge over their rivals, and in exchange, the workers received “on-the-job training and aid towards setting up a business of their own” (103), in addition to their employment in a tight job market. Another way to put this is to say that the relationship between Korean immigrant owners and workers was founded much less on a contractual wage agreement than on a mutual help system: “Korean workers’ employment at Korean stores,” Kim and Hurh state, “serves

the economic interests of both Korean employers and employees" (103).

In their 1986 study on immigrant enclave economies, Alejandro Portes and Robert D. Manning note that pursuing "collective" upward mobility, that is, aiming to support the "entire" ethnic group, not a few individuals, in "[moving] up through the social hierarchies" (48) is the telling feature—or, in fact, the central virtue—of Korean immigrant entrepreneurship. Portes and Manning assert that Korean-type ethnic collective action organized around establishing an enclave economy functions to ensure a whole ethnic group's steady shift from earlier socio-economic hardship caused by racial discrimination to later class and social mobility through the formation of a labor market where the "informal" promotion ladders are available to the workers (unlike the "primary" labor market, where native or skilled migrant workers make use of formal promotion opportunities, and the "secondary" labor market, where unskilled minority workers rarely have access to promotion opportunities). Accordingly, in "Gaining the Upper Hand" (1992), Alejandro Portes and Min Zhou suggest that ethnic minority groups might be able to escape the poverty generated by racism precisely by developing the Korean type

of enclave economy, a "community-based business ownership" marked by a common bond between owners and workers reinforcing the norm of reciprocity. Portes and Zhou insist that the reason why certain inner-city ethnic groups (such as blacks, Latinos, South Asians, and so on) can do nothing but resign themselves to racial subordination, thereby suffering from high rates of misery and unemployment and failing to build their own ethnic business bases, is that they simply lack ethnic cohesiveness—or, in Portes and Zhou's own terms, "bounded solidarity" and "enforceable trust" (516)—so they cannot utilize ethnic resources in entrepreneurship.

In their 1999 research on ethnic peace in the American city, therefore, Edward T. Chang and Jeannette Diaz-Veizades propose Koreans' outstanding network of ethnic community organization as a model for other ethnic minority groups. They argue that the best way to resist American racism is to make an effort to expand the range of the Korean-type ethnic economy and its reciprocal system so that it includes all minority groups. If all minority groups could possess a significant level of pan-ethnic solidarity and trust, and thus generate a pan-ethnically extended enclave characterized by mutual help, then they

would be able not only to solve the problem of the urban minority groups' misery and unemployment, mostly caused by racial oppression, but also to bring an end to the inter-ethnic conflicts among themselves. (Chang and Diaz-Veizades claim that, insofar as the inter-ethnic conflict between blacks and Koreans has arisen because of Korean ethnic business dedicated solely to protecting one group's interests and well-being, while ignoring or even harming other minority groups' interests and well-being, the solution for resolving those conflicts should be to "bring hostile parties together in coalition" and "build a multiethnic [collaborative] community" [138], thereby "providing opportunities [of social and class mobility] for those people most marginalized by the existing system" [141].) Chang and Diaz-Veizades's point is that only a "broad" "political consciousness among nonwhites of different ethnicities" presupposed and articulated by race relations in America can make possible a pan-ethnic enclave economy (111). Therefore, the politics of pan-ethnic collectivity must be seen as an attempt to organize and deploy minority groups' unionized insurgencies against the white majority group, a form of resistance that can threaten the racial order and reconstitute it differently.

It can be said, in this light, that Korean America's ethnic collective action for enclave economy was grounded in the idea that tackling the problem of class disparity between the white majority and the minority groups requires tackling the problem of ethnic exclusion among the minority groups.

In his 1995 research on nationalism and reunification, Nak-chung Paik declares that the 1980s Korean democratic *minjung* movement began, above all, with regarding and recognizing the *minjung* (the people or the masses) as the subject of history, and so tracing them as a new agent of social change; they must be defined, to use Namhee Lee's terms, as "those who are oppressed in the socio-political system but who are capable of rising up against it" (5). Paik knows well that the *minjung* movement was actively involved in attempts to fulfill the *minjung*'s "class demand," their demand for total liberation from labor exploitation (this demand, of course, stemmed from the fact that they typically belonged to the lower-working-class). Ultimately, however, Paik argues that "the *minjung* cause" was not determined by their class demand only: rather, the real task of the *minjung* movement, he argues, was "a healthy combination" of "labor movements" and "national

unification" (190). His point is that the *minjung* movement centered not merely on their class demand, but instead on their *minjok* (nationalistic) demand. By which he means that the *minjung* desired a "genuine freedom" from "the state-power" (203) that would "overthrow the national division of Korea" (not only among South Koreans, but also between North and South Koreans) (186) and so would allow them to belong to "a national community." According to Paik, thus, the intent of the Korean *minjung* movement was to bring the people together in a common bond of national solidarity; it sought to liberate the people from the state's oppressive power and to achieve national unity in a community of common respect and dignity; it was not to give priority to the working class movement, which aims to liberate the people from the capital's labor exploitation.

In *State and Society in Contemporary Korea* (1993), Hagen Koo advances Paik's point, insisting that the desire of the *minjung* for democracy can be interpreted as an aspiration toward "civil society," one of whose key purposes is to give rise to an autonomous economy, putting an end to the unity of the politic and economic that characterized the absolutist state. Koo, too, points out the class-struggle aspect of the *minjung* movement by

recognizing that it began in the first place as "a reaction to the consequences of capital accumulation led by monopoly capital" (143). His conception of *minjung* as "a broad alliance of alienated classes, people alienated from power and from the distribution of the fruits of economic growth" (131) takes note of their class status and demand. Koo's real contention, however, is that what is meant here by monopoly capital is not the capital itself but the state. In other words, the main agent that adopts economic policies (the so-called export-oriented-industrialization strategy) facilitating gigantic capital concentration and economic disparities is the absolutist state, not monopoly capital. When he sees the *minjung* movement as a reaction to capital, Koo is really claiming that it should be seen as a reaction to "the state's intervention in the economy and in labor relations" (133). In this sense, he emphasizes the movement as "a primarily political struggle": "The *minjung* movement in Korea is not simply an economic struggle," he says. "[In] their common opposition to the Park regime, . . . the *minjung* movement sought to reach and mobilize workers and farmers in struggles for political and economic democratization" (143). Its ultimate goal is to validate the emergence of a Korean civil society, which Koo

describes as "an arena of social activity that is 'market-regulated, privately controlled or voluntarily organized'" (6-7).

As Koo makes clear in *Korean Workers: The Culture and Politics of Class Formation* (2001), however, the *minjung* movement's focus on cultivating a civil society in South Korea should not be taken as an ignorance or repudiation of the *minjung*'s class struggle, but rather as an effective strategy to meet the *minjung*'s class demand. For, insofar as the *minjung* included, as Koo puts it, "all those who were politically oppressed, socially alienated, and economically excluded from the benefits of economic growth" (Koo 143), it cultivated a society that could guarantee and strengthen civil rights for the nation's entire populace to participate in fair economic and political activities. In this way, the movement effectively tried to stop the *minjung* from being excluded from the distribution of the benefits of economic growth. This is why Koo insists that "[at] the core of the *minjung* movement is an ideology that claims that *minjung* is the master of history and that Korean history is a history of the *minjung*'s oppression by the dominant class" (143). In short, the point of Koo's (and Paik's) understanding of the *minjung* movement is that



it fought the capitalist system by attempting to create a national alliance of all different social classes; this necessitated the avoidance of that class reductionism that would have resulted from identifying the *minjung* merely with the working-class, since this proposed class alliance for national solidarity could in the end be viewed as enabling the nation, or the whole of the people, to harmoniously cooperate with one another for a more stable, equitable distribution of the wealth and power of economic growth. It can thus be said that South Korea's *minjung* democratic movement rested on the idea that fulfilling the people's class demand precisely required fulfilling their nationalistic demand.

We can, in consequence, see that the problem with both the 1980s and '90s Korean American ethnic collective action and the 1970s and '80s South Korean democratic *munjung* movement is that they want to advance the economic prosperity of Korean society and to eliminate or at least alleviate the labor exploitation of Korean people all at the same time, despite the fact that the enormous prosperity of Korean society is only possible due to the brutal exploitation of Korean people. In fact, there is no such thing as the prosperity of Korean society without the

exploitation of Korean people. We must therefore say that, as already suggested regarding Chang's and Yi's novels, these movements' shared strategy of allowing working or underemployed poor Koreans to receive the benefits of economic growth by including them in the ethnic or national community—their plan, in short, to resolve the problem of class disparity by resolving the problem of social exclusion—is never free from serious logical difficulties or even impasses. We might raise, then, a question: if we are really interested in materially supporting working or underemployed poor people in Korean America and South Korea, why don't we just try to organize and develop a working class politics in each society that entails building the solidarity of the proletariat and especially engages those in the realm of fully proletarianized labor? Why don't we just try to solve the problem of class disparity straight away and directly, instead of solving it by solving the problem of ethnic exclusion?

### **I.3 Outline of the Dissertation**

In a 2004 interview in *Amerasia Journal*, the Korean-American literary scholar Elaine H. Kim insists on the

"continuity" between two important historical events, the May 1980 Kwangju Uprising in South Korea and the April 1992 Los Angeles Riots (*sa-i-gu*) in Korean-America. "Don't kid yourself," a South Korean acquaintance had told her, "*sa-i-gu* is not on the level with Kwangju," an assessment she considers "patently unfair." His idea, Kim says, was that Kwangju was more important than the riots because it was related to "global issues, such as labor exploitation, global capitalism, flexible accumulation" (236). And that response was unfair, she argues, because, like other South Koreans, he didn't understand the situation of Koreans in America—"what it's like to live as a racialized person in this country, where race shapes people's daily lives" (236). If the crucial problem for her Korean acquaintance was the global exploitation of the working class, for Kim, it was the racialization of Korean-Americans of all classes. But here it would be wrong to try to take sides in this debate or even, in the end, accept its terms, since, as we have seen in our discussion of Chang and Yi's novels, a large number of Korean American and South Korean literary works have the tendency to deal with class by dealing with race/ethnicity; the former seek to end racial/ethnic inequality in order to end class inequality, and the latter

seek to end class inequality only through ending racial/ethnic inequality.

And, more importantly, one of the great advantages of critically understanding the debate in this way is that it would eventually enable us to see that Korean American and South Korean literatures' vigorous inclination to insist on the intersectional relationship between class and race/ethnicity is profoundly connected to the globalization of American capital and the international migration of Third World labor forces. It is because dealing with class by dealing with race/ethnicity, while resulting in concealing and repressing the Koreans' labor-ethnicity duality, is involved with identifying the Koreans mainly as sources of new ethnic identities or cultures necessary for curbing American cultural hegemony, rather than as sources of new labor forces necessary for globalizing American neoliberal capital. Which is just to say that the central focus of both late twentieth-century Korean American and South Korean literatures has been on problematizing American cultural imperialism rather than problematizing American neoliberal capitalism.

This dissertation, then, concerns the relationship between class (or labor) and race/ethnicity (or culture) in

contemporary South Korea and Korean America, and tries to understand its significance and, in particular, its meaning for the development of South Korean and Korean-American literature. Juxtaposing texts like Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictée* (1982) and Se-hui Cho's *A Little Ball Launched by a Dwarf* (1978), I show that despite or even because of their fundamental formal differences, they can usefully be understood in relation both to each other and to the development of a world political economic structure that produced the ethnic question of what it means to be Korean in America in conjunction with the economic question of what it means to become middle class in South Korea. My contention, as I have already suggested in this chapter, is not simply that ethnicity mattered in America and class in Korea since, for example, I also show that in Chang-rae Lee's *Native Speaker* (1995) and Chang-dong Lee's *There's a Lot of Shit in Nokcheon* (1992), what makes the question of who you are essential for Korean Americans is their desire to be middle class and what makes the question of what you own essential for South Koreans is their desire to be Korean. Rather, I argue for a dialectical interplay between ethnicity and class, and, going on to read texts by writers like Younghill Kang and Kichung Kim, I show the ways in

which the related but by no means identical demands of class and ethnic membership have contributed to redefining and sometimes altering the relationship between aesthetic and political praxis.

In chapter two, "Wishing for a Home: Race, Class, and Global Capitalism," makes a case for the relation between a project to recover from identity loss in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictée* and a project to recuperate from labor alienation in Se-Hŭi Cho's *A Little Ball Launched by a Dwarf*. In Asian-American and South Korean literary studies, these texts have most often been read as involving a politics of racial identification. Lisa Lowe, for example, asserted that *Dictée's* aesthetic of infidelity through nonlinear and nondevelopmental narrative strategies can open up the possibility of formulating a politics of nonidentity, an alternative to the racial politics of uniformity. And Uchang Kim claimed that *Dwarf's* narrative of class alliance and human solidarity needs to be understood as enabling and energizing a politics of racial nationalism. Reading *Dictée* and *Dwarf* within the context of the rise of the world capitalist economy during the 1970s, I argue, demonstrates that they in effect revolve around the nexus of race and class; that is, *Dwarf's* economic

dislocation is an essential requirement of *Dictée's* racial dislocation, and so *Dictée's* race project ends up being inseparably intertwined with *Dwarf's* class project.

In chapter three, "This is a Family: Ethnic Enclavism and the Politics of Diaspora," I touch upon a crucial, underrated aspect of Chang-Rae Lee's *Native Speaker* (1995): its representation of the socioeconomic system of the *ggeh*—a Korean "money club" that collects and distributes wealth to uplift members of the community—and how these representations relate to the imagination of ethnic communities across generations and of cross-racial alliances. At the core of the article, then, is an intersectional analysis of race and class: Just like Korean Americans, who became one of the most successful minority groups through ethnic entrepreneurship, today's vulnerable or minority groups can improve their socioeconomic status by developing their internal resources as a basis for the pan-ethnic enclave. The basic claim is that the system of the *ggeh*, in the novel and in actual social contexts, ultimately reinforces capitalist principles of upward mobility and competition.

In chapter four, "Assimilation, Self-Identity, and Racism," therefore, I challenge the assumption that the

best way for Korean-Americans to resist American capitalism in the late twentieth-century is to resist American racism. Literary critics like Elaine Kim have read texts like Younghill Kang's *East Goes West* and Kichung Kim's "A Homecoming" in terms of their responses to racial oppression. The critics, equating racial discrimination with class exploitation, assumed that Koreans in America, victims of a racist-capitalist-imperialist regime, can help themselves economically most of all by making anti-racist efforts to claim their cultural identity and ethnic solidarity, and that activating and mobilizing such an anti-racist politics serves as one of the main purposes of Korean-American literary studies. But contrary to what the critics have read and seen, I argue, *East Goes West* and "A Homecoming" illustrate how racism and capitalism have differed from each other in a structural way in America, and thereby how the traditional Korean-American resistance to racism has been both critical of and complicit with a specifically neoliberal capitalism.

In chapter five, "Beyond Empathy: Neoliberal Unemployment and the Aesthetics of Utopian Collectivity," I critically examines the role that aesthetic empathy, with its capacity to elicit human warmth and sympathy for such



social others as the unemployed, plays in creating an alternative to capitalism. I wish to show how important the empathic appeal to equal humanity is to Fredric Jameson's utopian project, particularly his radical demand for full employment, and how Karl Marx's class project relates to an aesthetic that sets itself against cultivating empathy. The class project, as opposed to the utopian one, refuses to view the unemployed as social others and accepts them from the outset as an internal part of the working class. Using examples from novels such as Ed Park's *Personal Days* and Ae-ran Kim's *Contrail* and photographs such as Eric Kim's *Dark Skies Over Tokyo* and Woon-Gu Kang's *Embracing Evening*, I suggest that if we are interested in participating in the Marxian class project rather than the Jamesonian utopian project, we will find that a commitment to aesthetic ontology, an anti-empathic practice, is much better for our purpose than a commitment to political immediacy, a pro-empathic practice.

**II. Wishing for a Home: Race, Class, and Global  
 Capitalism in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictée* and Se-Hŭi  
 Cho's *A Little Ball Launched by a Dwarf* (Previously  
 published as Cha, D. (2014) "Wishing for a Home: Race,  
 Class, and Global Capitalism in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's  
*Dictée* and Se-Hŭi Cho's *A Little Ball Launched by a Dwarf*."  
*MLN* 129.5, 1097-1116.)**

**II.1. Two Dislocations, Two Desires**

Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictée* begins with a photograph of an anonymous wall carving, which says in Korean script: "Mother, I miss you, I am hungry, I want to go home to my native place."<sup>1</sup> And Cha finds her mother (Hyung Soon Huo) grappling with the desire to "go home." The reason she desires it is because her family's "exile" to Manchuria ("to escape the Japanese occupation") and her birth there have effectively located her "farther away" from her home, Korea (2000: 45). Her obligation to speak in "mandatory language" (Japanese), in particular, is taken to be indicative of her dislocation. "It is not your own. . . . The tongue that is forbidden is your own mother tongue" (45), Cha says. What Cha wants to suggest, however, is that

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1. This was probably scratched into a wall by Korean prisoners during the Japanese occupation.

her mother, although she is suffering from "the knowledge" "of having left," nevertheless can find a way to satisfy her "yearning" for "being home," proving that she "has not left" (45-46).<sup>2</sup> The way she does so is to speak her mother tongue "very softly" "in a whisper," virtually "in secret" (45), by which Cha means not that her mother can speak it covertly but that her use of it is "the mark" of her being home. When she utters the Korean word "MAH-UHM," she produces a thing that she can "carry" "in [her] chest"; it is not just a word that means "spirit," it is her "spirit-heart" (46).<sup>3</sup> Thus, the mother tongue she speaks secretly is a tongue that can be in itself her home rather than refers to it. This is why Cha calls it "the mark of belonging."

In fact, going home is actually more important to Cha herself who immigrates to the United States at an early age and has undergone Americanization. Cha, like her mother, raises her "voice" to "connect" herself to her home at a "distance" (56). "Bits of sound" she produces are "not

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2. Cha makes it clear that "my work, until now, in one sense has been a series of metaphors for the return, going back to a lost time and space, always in the imaginary" (1978: 2).

3. When Cha says, "You write. . . . From one mouth to another, from one reading to the next the words are realized in their full meaning" (48), what she means by the realization of the "full meaning" of the words is that they cease to refer to things and instead become a thing that can be referred to.

hollow" and "not empty," since they are "chips of stones" that can bear a material record of her home (what Cha calls its "dust" "particles") (56). But here, Cha's urge to return home is possible only "here" in the United States (a place, that is, "so far away from home") for which she has left.<sup>4</sup> For it is only when she "leave[s]" home (when, as Cha says, she becomes "American" and her nationality is replaced by "the other one") that Cha first has a "will" to "come back" home (57). Cha desires both to stay "the same" and to make "the difference" (56). Indeed, she cannot return home unless she already leaves home. For Cha, thus, the spatial rift caused by immigration is conceived as a rift that grounds the possibilities of both leaving and returning home, or, in her own terms, as a "void and space surrounding entering and exiting" (56).

Se-Hŭi Cho's *A Little Ball Launched by a Dwarf*, too, foregrounds the desire to go home as its central topic. A "dwarf" (Bul-Yi Kim) and his family who have lived in an "unauthorized dwelling" on the hillside of "the Hangbok Zone 3 Redevelopment Area" in Seoul and have received "a condemnation notice" are in danger of losing their home. "'So, finally,' Mother said. 'They're telling us the house

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4. Cha says, "I write. I write you. Daily. From here" (56).

has to go, aren't they?'" (2000: 81). The only choice left to them is to "sell" their "apartment occupancy rights" and "move" out of the town.<sup>5</sup> Yong-Ho and Yong-Hŭi, the dwarf's son and daughter, however, express a wish not to leave their home and ask their father not to sell their rights: "We're going to live right here. This is our home," they say, "We're not leaving. We've got no place to go" (84). Yet despite their earnest request, the rights are sold to "a man in a [black] sedan" at a little above the market price ("Two hundred fifty thousand won") (118). And precisely at the moment of "selling" it, Yong-Hŭi's effort to realize her wish for "a home," a wish, that is, to "buy an apartment," begins (104). She deliberately approaches the man who bought her family's rights and, after putting him to sleep, takes them back from his strongbox, along with "money and the knife as well."<sup>6</sup> The regained rights and

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5. Ideally, it is possible for them to move into a redeveloped apartment. But, as suggested in a conversation between the dwarf's wife and Myong-Hŭi's mother, they are short of money to lease or buy an apartment: "In any event, you folks won't be able to move into an apartment, either, will you?" (88).

6. In her dream, Yong-Hŭi tells her mother, "Our apartment occupancy rights are in his strongbox. I put them at the very bottom. They haven't been sold yet. I'll get them back before he sells them" (132). And in reality, she says, "I took what was ours from the strongbox" and "money and the knife as well" (133).

the stolen money enable her to "apply for apartment occupancy" (138).<sup>7</sup>

But the dwarf has died from falling inside the "tall smokestack" of the brick factory and the rest of his family have moved to another city while Yong-Hŭi is making the application for apartment occupancy.<sup>8</sup> The dwarf's death is no trivial matter in regard to her wish, for one of the terms and conditions of the occupancy is that "applicant and occupant must be one and the same" and she has "jotted down Father's name, address, and RRN" on the form (139).<sup>9</sup> Which means that Yong-Hŭi and her family, as a consequence of their father's death, have no choice but to "give up [their] right" to move into an apartment (82). One way to describe Yong-Hŭi's situation is thus as a situation in which she fails to fulfill her wish at the exact moment she succeeds in fulfilling it. Her success and failure, in

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7. "You bought it, didn't you?," the clerk asks Yong-Hŭi. "Yes, I bought it!," she answers (139). But it may be worth noting that Yong-Hŭi, in fact, has "said nothing": "I would have answered," she says, "if only I hadn't felt sick" (139). Which would imply that she knows by intuition that her wish is unlikely to be realized.

8. Yong-Hŭi hears about her family from one of her neighbors: "Your family was moving to Songnam, but your father wasn't here. . . . Your father's passed on. They found out the day they brought down the smokestack to the brick factory. The demolition people discovered your father—he'd fallen inside it" (143).

9. Needless to say, Cho knows the correlation between the dwarf's death and Yong-Hŭi's failure in realizing her wish, when he explains "the terms and conditions of the occupancy" in detail. RRN is an acronym for "Resident Registration Number."

other words, take place simultaneously. The function of the failure here, however, is not to bring an end to her wish, but on the contrary to reanimate it. It is because what produces for her a wish to buy a house is nothing but an act of selling a house. "There were only two kinds of people," says one of the dwarf's sons, "people selling their occupancy rights and people buying them" (112); without the former, there is no way the latter can exist. The way to keep Yong-Hŭi's wish for "a home" alive is to maintain the loss of her home, and the reason she can say that "that's our house" is that it is "not any more" (128).<sup>10</sup>

The idea that Cha's *Dictée* and Cho's *Dwarf* have in common, then, is that finding a desire is not the same as finding its object. Their characters can feel the desire to "go home" not because they believe their homes are wonderful and have unique qualities but because, owing to immigration and condemnation, they have lost and thus miss them. The point of both stories is that the capacity to miss something (or someone) is a prerequisite for the capacity to desire. That is, the object of desire must always be a *lost* object, and hence "the finding of an

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10. Likewise, the reason that Yong-Hŭi can "consider[]" "steal[ing] this briefcase" is that she "doesn't have a home to go back to anymore" (129).

object is in fact a refinding of it" (Freud 2000: 88).

Cha's way of putting this is just to say that the creation of a desire to obtain an object is at the same time a creation of a desire to lose it. The need, for example, to reveal the day (to "re move" "daylight") is at the same time a need to "re veil[] the day" (to "remove light") (2000: 124). And Cho's way of putting it is to say that the ideal of a fully satisfied desire is a mere fantasy, since the desired object, whether or not it is attainable, turns out to be a fictional surrogate for the original. As a desired object, the "Klein bottle," unlike "the usual type of bottle with an inside and a closed space," a bottle that has "a closed space with no boundary between inside and outside," although it is actually obtainable, exists "only in the world of imagination" (2000: 258-60). For them, the deferral or even suppression of satisfaction is necessary to the creation and preservation of desire.<sup>11</sup>

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11. In "On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love," Freud says, "It can easily be shown that the psychical value of erotic needs is reduced as soon as their satisfaction becomes easy. An obstacle is required in order to heighten libido. . . . It is no doubt true in general that the psychical importance of an instinct rises in proportion to its frustration," and so adds, "The final object of the sexual instinct is never any longer the original object but only a surrogate for it" (1995: 394-99). In short, what matters in the finding of an object is "the craving for stimulation" rather than the object itself.



There is, however, a crucial difference between Cha and Cho. The objects desired by the two, despite their apparent likeness as homes, are qualitatively different from one another. What Cha means by "home" is an identity (or a culture), while what Cho means by it is a labor (or a property). "One day," Cha writes of the day when she has acquired an "American Pass port," "someone has taken my identity and replaced it with their photograph" (2000: 56). Her point here is that she has been displaced from her original culture (Koreanness); in *Dictée*, thus, leaving home, required by immigration, involves and plays a role in causing a cultural dislocation.<sup>12</sup> Cho, on the other hand, writes of Yong-Hŭi's reply to "a woman" who has tried to buy her family's occupancy rights for "two hundred ten thousand won," "If we were to rebuild our house, we would need one million three hundred thousand won. This is the house my father has worked his whole life to build" (2000: 114). His point here is that the dwarf has been alienated from his own labor; in *Dwarf*, leaving home, enforced by condemnation, involves and has a role in producing an

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12. A similar point is made by another Korean American poet Myung Mi Kim who has come to the U.S. at the age of nine: "In this strange region of knowing and not knowing, I have access to Korea as a language and culture, but this access is shaped by rupture [leaving the country, the language]" (95).

economic dislocation.<sup>13</sup> All of which might be put more generally by saying that the fundamental question in Cha is the question of *who I am*, whereas what is at stake in Cho is the question of *what I own*.

What difference between Cha and Cho, then, is constitutive of their different accounts of leaving (and returning) home? What is their difference that constitutes the difference between the desire for a recovery from identity loss and the desire for a restoration from labor alienation? Obviously, the writer of a story "stronger than bone"<sup>14</sup> shares an aesthetic with the author of a story "non-destructible" by "knife."<sup>15</sup> They both seek to make works that would count as materials rather than writings. But their political positions diverge; "I have started writing stories that I once quit," Cho says, "because of the grim realities of the land where I was born and raised," because

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13. This point is clarified by Cho's remarks in an interview that "when I was writing *Dwarf* thirty years ago, I was hoping that there would be no more this sort of tragedy, inequality, and unjust distribution in the future. . . . Leaving these poor people to die alone is nothing but another kind of massacre. The problem *Dwarf* sought to deal with was the housing problem" (2008).

14. See the epigraph to *Dictée*: "May I write words more naked than flesh, stronger than bone, more resilient than sinew, sensitive than nerve."

15. See the introduction to *Dwarf*: "When I was writing stories in a small notebook with a small 'pen' in a time of 'knife' where many people were deprived of their human rights, I thought those stories which, even though they individually were small fragments, were non-destructible in unity must have been delivered alive to the readers."

of "the economic oppression as well as the political persecution" of its people (2000: 9). But Cha says, "I am presently writing a historical novel" for the purpose of "lessen[ing] the physical geographical distance as well as the psychological distance of the Asian people from other ethnic cultures," for the purpose of "the understanding of Korea and Asia as whole cultures, not merely stat[ing] their economic and political status as nations" (1980: 1-2). Cho pursues a class politics, Cha a cultural politics. At bottom, they respond to different historical conditions.

## **II.2. South Korea, a Source of Cheap Labor for U.S. capital**

Cho's *Dwarf* was published in South Korea in 1978; Cha's *Dictée* was published in the United States in 1982. Since the mid-1960s, South Korea had emerged as an eligible exporter of manufactured goods to developed countries, and the United States was its biggest export customer. In 1978, for instance, Korea exported \$4.06 billion worth of goods to the US, accounting for 31.9 percent of all its exports, and up by more than 164 percent (or \$2.5 billion) from 1975 (Bank of Korea 194-95). Meanwhile, South Korea was a major source country for immigrants in the U.S. By 1975 Koreans had become the third largest group entering the U.S. next

to Mexicans and Filipinos, and the number of Korean immigrants in the U.S. has exceeded 30,000 annually since 1977 (Koo and Yu 2-10). A total of 600,000 Koreans immigrated to the United States between 1965 and 1989 (Kim and Min 123). Was it a mere coincidence, or some kind of necessity, that the rise in Korean immigration paralleled the rise in manufacturing exports to the U.S.?

It is important above all to remember that what was essential to the emergence of South Korea as a leading exporter of manufactured goods was the internationalization of U.S. capital. "The huge rise in manufactured exports to the U.S. from South Korea," as Ivan Light and Edna Bonacich put it, "reflected the utilization . . . of the relatively cheaper labor power in South Korea" (37). The extraordinary increase in imports from Korea, in other words, was a reliable indicator of U.S. capital's stake in Korea's efficient labor market. Indeed, Korean laborers in the 1970s not only earned low wages (e.g., from 1970 to 1975 Korean wages hovered at around one-tenth of U.S. wages [ILO, 1977: 517-18]) but also worked long hours (e.g., in 1976 Korean laborers worked an average of 50.7 hours per week, ranked second among twenty-one countries [522-24]). Capitalists in the U.S., who, as the International Labour

Organization (ILO) report points out, were confronting the problem of "rising wages" and therefore "the need to remain competitive at home and abroad," were attracted to "the cheapness of labor" in Korea and took advantage of it through "trade" and "investment" there (1976: 11). We thus find that Korea's growth in manufacturing exports in the late 1960s and 1970s was, in effect, matched by a progress in its integration into "the world capitalist economy." The point of Korea's export-oriented industrialization was to provide a source of cheap labor for U.S. capitalism, which was in a struggle to secure a higher rate of profit (against what Karl Marx called "the tendency of the rate of profit to fall" in developed economies [1981: 317-38]).

In this sense, the export-fueled economic development (or "modernization") of South Korea, to be later named the "Miracle on the Han River," it turns out, was the strictly limited development that Andre Gunder Frank has called "the development of underdevelopment." U.S. capital's exploitation of Korean cheap labor (through "loans, subcontracting, and participation in the importation of cheap goods," in addition to direct investments) was accompanied by U.S. policies to keep Korean labor cheap not directly but through support for the military regime led by

Chung-Hee Park. Thus, Korea's positioning in the world capitalist system was a central cause of its laborers' economic impoverishment. The lower price of Korean labor, however, resulted not just from the interventions of the U.S. government and capitalist class but also from Korea's population growth that brought about the "dislocation and discontent of certain classes," particularly "the urban middle-class" people who benefited from the increase in general level of public education, as well as "the urban underemployed" who included a sizable group of displaced rural people (Light and Bonacich 112).<sup>16</sup> "[College-] educated white-collar workers," because of overpopulation and, of course, mainly because of U.S. policy that generated large numbers of labor-intensive (low-wage, low-skill) jobs in Korea, could not or barely find jobs commensurate with their training. "These dislocated

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16. According to Kenneth G. Clare, et al., between 1949 and 1975, the Korean population grew 72 percent, an average of 2.8 percent yearly. And between 1970 and 1975, the population increased at an annual rate of 1.8 percent. Compared to developed countries like the U.S. (0.8 percent) or Japan (1.2 percent), Korea's population was growing rapidly. And between 1970 and 1977 the number of junior college, college, and university students increased 12.1 percent yearly. In the same period, the nation's population increased only 2 percent yearly. By the 1970s, thus, South Korea has a population whose education level was exceptionally high relative to the economic development of the country (Republic of Korea 376).

people," Light and Bonacich say, "were the most likely candidates for emigration" (117).

The inflow of a large number of Korean immigrants to the United States since the late 1960s was made possible by the Immigration Act of 1965 that abolished the quota system based on national origin and encouraged immigration through family reunion and occupational qualification. According to data aggregated by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), a high proportion of Korean immigrants from the mid-1970s to the early 1980s consisted—partly due to U.S. law's preference for professionals and skilled workers in short supply in the country—of "professional, managerial, technical, or clerical workers" (who might be broadly defined as white-collar workers) rather than of blue-collar laborers and farmers (Yoon 66). In short, they were primarily from the urban middle-class backgrounds, and their prime objective in moving into the U.S. was to enhance their socio-economic status for themselves and their children.<sup>17</sup> Yet the majority of Korean immigrants, despite their "education and ability," could hardly find and succeed in white-collar professional occupations

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17. A survey conducted in Korea in 1978 with 510 prospective emigrants who were in the process of emigration at the time showed that three reasons for immigration were most frequently mentioned: 1) economic reasons, 2) educational opportunities for children, and 3) family union (Hong and Kim).

because of their "language barrier" and "unfamiliarity with American customs," and they turned to "small business" (or "self-employment"). They considered it a means of achieving "upward mobility" (Min 349). Thus the post-1965 immigration of Koreans to the U.S. was structurally linked to U.S. involvement in Korea; those who came to the U.S. were the very people who had been economically dislocated by world capitalism in Korea.

Once we put the point this way, we begin to see a systematic affinity between Theresa Hak Kyung Cha and Se-Hŭi Cho. For although they seem to contradict each other, the desire to retrieve one's identity thematized in Cha's *Dictée* originates in nothing but an effort to satisfy the desire to reclaim one's labor, which is the main theme of Cho's *Dwarf*. One cannot feel and experience cultural dislocation unless one migrates out of one's homeland to another for certain reasons, no doubt one of which, as the history of Korean immigration in the U.S. proves, is that one wants to avoid economic dislocation in one's own country. So if it is the case that the internationalization of U.S. capital led to the immigration of Koreans to the U.S., then it must be true that Cho's *Dwarf* and its desire for a restoration from economic dislocation (created by



world capitalism) is a condition of possibility for Cha's *Dictée* and its desire for a recovery from cultural dislocation (created by labor migration). The "ethnic diaspora" invoked in *Dictée* should be understood, as E. San Juan Jr. puts it, as "the most telling symptom of uneven development caused by the new international division of labor" (66).

But, of course, this does not mean that we can think of the form of *Dictée*'s underlying economic dislocation as being identical to the form of *Dwarf*'s. Falling out of the urban middle-class (being, say, dissatisfied with one's job) is starkly different from being part of the urban underclass (being, say, dispossessed of one's livelihood). Perhaps we might say that the former form, as in the case of *Dictée*, can furnish a motivation for immigration, while the latter, as in the case of *Dwarf*, a motivation for "revolution."<sup>18</sup> From the standpoint of world economic system, however, the role of South Korea, no matter what class its laborers are in, is to provide a surplus labor—that is, a big pool of potentially available labor—for the development of U.S. capitalism. It sought out cheap labor in Korea not only because of its cheapness but

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18. In "The Spinyfish Entering My Net" chapter, Father says, "We're always trying to think of a revolution that we can achieve through action" (265).

also because of its effectiveness in constituting a new reserve army of labor that can substitute for the exhausted reserves of U.S. domestic labor markets.

The conclusion drawn from this study of U.S.-Korea relations is that *Dictée's* cultural politics and *Dwarf's* class politics are mediated by the construction and expansion of the newer world economic system. As we begin to witness *Dwarf's* economic dislocation turn into *Dictée's* cultural dislocation, we grasp *Dwarf's* and *Dictée's* politics as an inseparable opposition, and we learn that *Dwarf's* politics is in fact the condition for *Dictée's*. But the important thing to note here is that this dialectical oscillation between class and culture occurring through *Dwarf* and *Dictée* is rendered virtually invisible, as they both come to be absorbed into the educational institutions of the U.S. and Korea (Asian American literary studies and Korean literary studies programs) through a process of "canonization," a process in which literary works are chosen to be canonized because, as John Guillory puts it, they can "represent"—or more precisely, express the "values" of—the "social groups" to which their authors

belong (10, 28).<sup>19</sup> As we shall see, *Dictée* is read as a discourse of anti-American imperialism, thereby making a commitment to Asian American cultural identity, and *Dwarf* as a discourse of social-class reconciliation, thereby making a contribution to Korean national identity. Indeed, we will want to argue that such readings of *Dictée* and *Dwarf* as involved in the politics of "identification" are only made possible by the ignorance or even denial of their dialectical appeal to class politics.

### II.3. *Dictée* and U.S. Imperialism

Calling into question whether "Third World regions" can "enjoy the freedom of postcolonialism" "after the end of formal colonialism between 1945 and 1970," Masao Miyoshi argues that "colonialism is even more active now in the form of transnational corporatism" (79). According to him, the global expansion of First World (or mostly U.S.) transnational corporations (TNCs) since the early 1960s—the expansion of "giant companies that not only import and export raw and manufactured goods but also transfer

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19. To be sure, the reason that Cha's *Dictée* and Cho's *Dwarf* are chosen for the comparison is not simply because they are canonical texts in the U.S. and Korea, but because they are texts effective and powerful in explicating the dialectical interplay of cultural politics and class politics involving U.S. and Korea relations during the 1970s.

capital, factories, and sales outlets across national borders" (84)—has marked not the end of colonialism but the beginning of a "TNC version of neocolonialism" (98). Similarly, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak says that because "the growth of post-industrial capitalism" after the demise of colonialism proper permits a form of "neocolonialism" "more economic and less territorial," the term "postcolonialism" is "totally bogus" (225). Miyoshi's and Spivak's point in insisting on neocolonialism is to insist that the global capital's "exploitation" of Third World labor should be understood as "a function of colonialism" ("TNCs continue colonialism" [96]). So what is crucial to them is the political approval of the notion of the Third World that would otherwise be repudiated under the guise of *post-colonialism*. They think that it can play, as Ella Shohat puts it, a "useful" role in offering a "common ground for alliances among such diverse [Third World] peoples" and thus in forming "a common project of [linked] resistances to neo/colonialisms" (111).

As Miyoshi and Shohat point out, however, the "exploitive neocolonial domination" of the Third World by the First World power takes place not only between nations but also within nations, in the situation of Third World

peoples' "post-independence immigration" to First World countries, eliding the geographical difference between First and Third world (Miyoshi 146). Neocolonialism, in addition to its evolvment in the Third World, must refer to "the Third World diasporic circumstances . . .—from forced exile to 'voluntary' immigration—within First World metropolises" (Shohat 102). And it is in this sense that Lisa Lowe describes Asian immigrants in the United States as "colonized subjects" (1996: 130). "Asian immigrants," she says, serve as "a necessary racialized labor force [that is, as "a flexible work force" (16)] within the domestic national economy" (5). Her point is that U.S. neocolonial capitalism accumulates and profits—or more accurately, deals with its "systemic crisis of declining profits" (12)—precisely by "racializing" Asian immigrant workers. She goes on to assert that insofar as the "racial exclusion" of Asian workers is foundational for capitalism in the U.S., the "political representation" or "inclusion" of them "through citizenship and rights" does not "resolve" but rather "institutionalizes" the material inequalities resultant from the exploitation of "racialized labor" (29). So what is important in Lowe's political program (what she calls "immigrant acts") is Asian immigrants' "agency" to

generate a "cultural struggle" for racial equality ("Culture is the material site of struggle" [22]).

In this respect, Lowe insists that *Dictée* performs a vital political function: it stages one of "the most powerfully suggestive critiques of dominant colonial and imperial interpellations" (130). If U.S. neocolonialism relies on the logic of "unified nationalist membership" (131), by which Asian immigrant workers are converted into what Lowe calls "abstract citizens" (her use of the concept is as a stress on "the negation of the material conditions of work and the inequalities of the property system" [2]), *Dictée's* "aesthetic of infidelity," one that is characterized by its refusal of "the demand for uniform subjectivity" through "nonlinear" and "nondevelopmental" narrative strategies (such as fragmented recitation and episodic unfluency), opens the possibility of establishing a politics of "nonidentity," embodying an alternative to the racial politics of "uniformity" (130). This is why Lowe finds as a major theme in *Dictée* "the colonized subject's antagonism to the empire" (130). But it would be a mistake to think that Lowe's *Dictée* attempts to deny the possibility of subject formations altogether. Rather, it is "the multiplicity of subject formations" (153) that she

thinks *Dictée* seeks to elaborate; which is to say that she thinks of *Dictée*'s aesthetic as a site for the formation of "new subjects of cultural politics" (1998: 49). For what she means by "infidelity" is the colonized subject's effort—in the effort to be "unfaithful to the original" (1996: 132)—to achieve a new form of unity that will combine "the heterogeneous and nonidentical 'fragments' of third world [immigrant] peoples" (131), in short, a "form[] of unity that [will] make [their] common struggle possible" (153).

Thus, in Lowe, as in Miyoshi and Spivak, retaining and sharpening the opposition between First and Third World (the opposition, in other words, between center and margin, major and minor, white and color, and so forth) that often happens within the First World is fundamental to understanding the globalization of U.S. capital. Third World peoples, along with Third World immigrants working in the First World, are the "new workforce," that is, the prime target of capitalist exploitation, within the global reorganization of capitalism; and the way to resist global capitalism is to forge a cross-racial, cross-ethnic "coalition" of various Third World peoples, laying the basis for an "imagination and rearticulation of new forms

of political subjectivity, collectivity, and practice" (158). Ultimately the whole point of Lowe's theory of neocolonialism is to claim the "liberation" of Third World racial and ethnic groups of people from the imperial power's (newly reformed, globalized kind of) economic "domination" or "oppressions." It is in the same spirit, for example, that Samir Amin invents the concept of "delinking" (62) which implies an essential rupture of the countries on the periphery from the world capitalist system, and that Arif Dirlik values the concept of "the local" (23) as a proper locus of resistance to and liberation from Euro-American and capitalist oppression. For both of them, the global expansion of U.S. capitalism is understood to depend entirely on the colonialist racialization of Third World workers.

The "leading" feature of the present-day "expansion" and "penetration" of U.S. capital into "the periphery," however, Raúl Trajtenberg says, is "not simply the availability of cheap labor and its utilization" but the enlargement of "the possibility of using cheap labor," the possibility of what he calls "a rediscovery of labor" (177). The point of Trajtenberg's insistence on the renewed possibility, not the immediate availability, of cheap labor



is that the "intention of replacing one labor force [U.S. labor] by another cheaper one" is to "affect[] capital-labor class relations" (178) through the international division of labor between U.S. high-cost and Third World low-cost one. Which is to say that in U.S. globalization Third World labor performs a double function: on the one hand, it becomes a new object of exploitation while, on the other, it becomes a new instrument of exploitation as it helps reduce the cost of U.S. labor "by depressing [its] wage levels or at least slowing their rise" (177).<sup>20</sup> To degrade and exploit one kind of labor, another kind of labor is mobilized.

This is what Trajtenberg means when he says that it would be useful to think of "the role of peripheral countries in the development of central capitalism partly as providing a vast reserve army of labor" (186). Their role is to curb and dismantle the power of "the American working class," an already somewhat "disorganized" and "depoliticized" one that, as Mike Davis notes, because of its lack of "any broad array of collective institutions or any totalizing agent of class consciousness" (8), has

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20. Trajtenberg says that "the effect" of "isolating the highly labor-intensive processes and transferring them to areas where labor can be used with no less intensity" is equivalent to "what would happen in the central country if hours and speed of work could be increased and, particularly, wages" (177).

started being incorporated into U.S. capitalism. Marx makes the same point by asserting that "the creation of a relative surplus population, or industrial reserve army" can lead to "the misery of constantly expanding strata of the active army of labour, and the dead weight of pauperism" (1992: 798). From this standpoint, Third World immigrant workers in the U.S. should be understood not merely as a cheap labor but as a surplus labor necessary for producing a larger industrial reserve army. What does result from U.S. globalization is not so much a neocolonial opposition between U.S. capital and Third World labor as it is a radical transformation and restructuration of "capital-labor class relations" in both the U.S. and the Third World. The construction of global capitalism, in this sense, involves the deracialization rather than the racialization of Third World workers. "Taking the work to the workers [in the periphery]," as Trajtenberg puts it, "is simply a more productive and less troublemaking way of exploiting the labor force" (177).

Since the 1970s, the U.S. ruling class's neoliberal project of "a restoration of class power" has consisted in creating a large reserve army of the underemployed, the effect of which has been to undermine workers' bargaining

power in wage negotiations and permit capitalists to make surplus profits (even higher than before), and one which has been impossible without the immigration (legal or illegal) of a great mass of Third World peoples (Harvey 16). As Carl Shapiro and Joseph E. Stiglitz put it, the "involuntary unemployment" that refers to a situation where "no job offers are forthcoming" for unemployed workers because there are fewer job vacancies available for them could have served as a method of "worker discipline" (433). For if unemployment is kept at a "sufficiently large" rate, workers are unavoidably compelled to be "willing to work" "rather than to take the risk of being caught shirking" (433), even when the firms apply to them a series of negative sanctions such as the withholding of wage increases, imposition of fines, denial of promotion, or demotion to less skilled jobs.

After all, then, Lowe's neocolonial theory that claims a cultural liberation of Third World racialized peoples can be said to have been at the center of the neoliberal project that has produced the industrial reserve army by deracializing Third World peoples. And Lowe's effort to discuss and interpret *Dictée* in terms of the racial relations between U.S. natives and Third World

immigrants—an effort, that is, to read it as a text that exhibits a cultural resistance to U.S. neocolonialism—is, in effect, an effort to neglect and thus conceal the class relations between U.S. capitalists and U.S. native and Third World immigrant workers. When Lowe describes *Dictée* as mainly about “the structures of domination and exploitation” marked by the “double articulation of class and race” (1996: 147), she does not think that *Dictée*’s cultural politics is inseparable (and in fact, arising) from a class politics. Rather, she thinks that *Dictée*’s politics does not need to be separated from a class politics from the outset, because she sees a cultural politics of anti-racialization as an ideal alternative to neocolonial capitalism.<sup>21</sup>

#### II.4. *Dwarf* and Korean Nationalism

“The proper development of national literature,” Nak-Chung Paik says, begins with “the realization that a nation’s autonomous existence and the welfare of the majority of its members are faced with a serious threat”

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21. It should be clear that Lowe’s politics of anti-racialization does not aim to deny and ignore the possibility of de-racialization or racial liberalism in the U.S.; its point is that the (neo-)liberal commitment to de-racialization should be thought of as a racist ideology to mask the capitalist logic of the exploitation of Asian immigrant labor.

(1993a: 559).<sup>22</sup> And he goes on to say that in the case of Korea the major challenge to the survival and dignity of the nation has been generated by the "imperialist invasions" of "foreign powers" (560), most notably the Japanese colonial rule from 1910 to 1945 and the neocolonial intervention of the global capitalist system since the 1970s. Thus, for Paik, the "basic physiology" of Korean national literature lies in "a thoroughgoing criticism of and resistance to imperialism and colonialism" (568) that can be deployed to defend Korea's "autonomy" (*chaju*) from foreign powers. But what he wants to emphasize here is that such criticisms and resistances can become "meaningful" only insofar as the subject (or agent) of national literature forges and treats them as "a struggle against oneself" as well as "a struggle against enormous foreign powers" (570). That is, the Korean national literature must assign itself above all the task of overcoming "division system[s]" on the Korean peninsula—the division of South and North Korea, to take a standard example—that must be regarded as a complex legacy of "an older colonialism and [the newer] neocolonial domination"

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22. It is important to see that Paik wants to distinguish the "theory of national literature" from "those ultranationalist theories of literature or culture which being by designating the nation as a permanent entity or the supreme value."

by foreign powers (577). For this reason, Paik finds in the demand for "national reconciliation" and "reunification" a root cause and origin of South Korea's national literature movement (1993b: 72).

The concept of class is rendered "problematic" from this standpoint. Paik says that in the situation of the divided nation the term "*Korean working class*" "would hardly make sense" (1998: 227, italics original). For if national reunification is a "practical aim," the concept of class or class conflict will be an obstacle to rather than a means of achieving the aim. So what is necessary for Paik's nationalism is "an inevitable deconstruction of any simplistic conception of . . . class" (227). And the best way to fight against the capitalist world system ("sexist and racist" as well as capitalist) is to create national (or transnational) "alliances" of different "social classes" by transcending, if not easily by cancelling, the structure of class conflict—which is what Paik means when he affirms the importance of taking into account "the relation of [a] particular class . . . with various other social classes and strata within [the peninsular]" (227). The kind of literature, in other words, Paik thinks of as produced by "the eye of the awakened worker" is not a labor

literature, "a kind of literature that represents only one or two of social classes," but a national literature, "a kind of literature that reflects an allied power of diverse social classes or strata" (1984: 28). "We must avoid," he says, "falling into classism and identifying national people [*minjung*] with working-class people who is only a small part of it" (36).

Indeed, this account of class alliance as a key to Korean national literature can be found in Uchang Kim's reading of *Dwarf*. "This novel," Kim says, "is not only about the formation of the Korean working class, but it is also a deep reflection on the universal ethical ideals of human life" (2008: 156). When, of course, he remarks that "*Dwarf's* narrative of labor movement ends up with the worker's murder of the capitalist," he is very much aware that its way of dealing with the problems of the evictees' adversity and poverty is not to call for a "legal struggle" but rather to require a "violent struggle" (166), and that "a theory of class struggle is indispensable for [the workers'] violent revolution" (171). Kim's point, however, is that *Dwarf* (especially Chi-Sop, a young intellectual) "does not seem to believe that the class struggle can be a driving force for social progress" (171). Which is just to

say that it is "a [whole] human being, not a particular class," that should be considered a primary concern in this novel. "Workers and employers," in Kim's terms, "are one and the same producer, so that they do not need to break apart into two different class groups, having conflicting interests" (171). That is why he declares that "love" (and "peace") actually becomes the central theme of the novel. For Kim, meanwhile, this narrative of class alliance and of human solidarity is understood as enabling and energizing an anti-capitalist movement, since it can eventually be viewed as describing "an industrial situation, largely a consequence of the Western impact" (1983: 112).

Of course, it is important to note that Kim's literary humanism is significantly different from Paik's literary nationalism. Although Kim acknowledges the function and usefulness of nationalism in establishing "the basis of a political community," he criticizes it for simply being based on the "clear distinction of friend and enemy" and thus for presupposing the presence of "an enemy" (not only "an outside" but also "an internal enemy") (2007: 192-93). Even though nationalism seeks to overcome the division system, it remains structurally and constitutively dependent on it. Yet Kim never wants to dismiss nationalism



as a mode of—or as a means to legitimate—an  
 “authoritarian [or totalitarian] politics” (193); instead,  
 he weighs it “on the scale of universal humanity” (197).  
 Thus he projects a form of political community so universal  
 that it would no longer assume the presence of any enemies.  
 This is the point of what Kim calls the “passage from the  
 political to universalist humanism” (200). The “democratic  
 politics,” he says, “should remain completely open . . . to  
 universal human values, even at the risk of losing communal  
 cohesion and embracing in it enemy as well as friend”  
 (197). In the end, then, Kim, like Paik, discovers in  
 literature the possibility of constructing a human  
 communality and particularly in *Dwarf* the possibility of  
 building an inter-class communality that will implicitly  
 lead to the construction of a national community—which he  
 then imagines to “truly represent universality” (212).<sup>23</sup>

In fact, however, Chung-Hee Park appealed to Korean  
 nationalism even before Kim and Paik. Stressing the fact  
 that Koreans are of “one race and one people” and they all  
 share a single, common ancestor, Dangun, he said in many  
 speeches during his presidency (1965–1979), “We are *one*  
*entity* with a common destiny, bound by one language, and by

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23. Kim says, “The fundamental concern of literature is the  
 ‘community’” (Kim, Paik, Cho, and Kim 12).

one history and by the *same racial origin*. . . . We must quickly recover our identity as *the inseparable Han race*. . . . We have never given up our pride nor our dignity in being a homogeneous people" (qtd in Shin 264, italics original). Park's ethnic nationalism was premised on the idea that nation is more important than any class or individual and the state is bigger than any party or organization. And radically unlike Kim and Paik who understood ethnic nationalism as a basis for the resistance to global capitalism, he took it as a means of devising and launching state-led development strategies. Under the Park regime, that is, ethnic nationalism was employed as an ideological machine for increasing industrial workers' morale and productivity because, as Hagen Koo points out, it could be combined with "developmentalism and military rhetoric, equating industrial workers with soldiers fighting for national defense," whose effect was to turn the workers' labor activity into "a patriotic act" that they "could be proud of" (140). In the late 1960s, for example, industrial workers who generally put in long hours for low wages in the name of what Park called the "modernization of the fatherland" came to be called industrial warriors (*sanŭp chŏnsa*), builders of industry

(*sanŭp ŭi yŏkkun*), the leading force of exports (*suchul ŭi kisu*), and so forth.

Seen in this light, Park's logic of ethnic nationalism conforms to Benedict Anderson's definition of the nation as "a community," "regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each," that is "always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship," to the extent that it makes it possible for "millions of people" to "willingly" "die for" it (7). Anderson's idea here is that one of the fundamental functions of the organization of national community is to assert the primacy of nation over class. Indeed, the development of the Korean national community during the 1970s was primarily marked by, as Gi-Wook Shin puts it, "the rise and dominance of 'nation' as a major source of collective or categorical identity over nonnational or transnational forms [class, for example]" (3). And the real purpose of Park's insistence on the racial homogeneity of the Korean nation was to replace categories of class with those of race, and the struggle between classes with that of all classes for racial unification, transforming the workers' labor activity enforced by capitalism into a voluntary and non-obligatory self-sacrifice for which they should be honored. The whole

point, then, of Korean ethnic nationalism, quite contrary to Kim's and Paik's expectations about its possible resistance to global capitalism, is, by repressing the conflict between classes, to provide an imperative politico-cultural precondition for the continuation or even intensification of capitalist exploitation and of the accumulation of wealth by the bourgeois ruling class (*chaebols*). Consequently, Kim's reading of *Dwarf* as a story of class alliance and human solidarity has little to do with entering into an anti-capitalist politics but much to do with retreating from it. And Paik is far more anti-imperialist than anti-capitalist; in his national literature movement, the class struggle is reserved and, ultimately, defeated for the struggle against foreign powers and for the engagement in foreign affairs.

### II.5. Concluding Remarks

We have seen in the previous two sections that Cha's *Dictée* and Cho's *Dwarf*, as they have been canonized in Asian American literary studies and in Korean literary studies, have lost their joint connection and appeal to class politics and have settled firmly into race (or cultural) politics. The problem both with Lowe's theory of

U.S. imperialism and with Kim's and Paik's theory of Korean nationalism (or humanism) is that they fail to grasp the organizing principles of the new global capitalist system; indeed, it is the *deracialization*—that is, the liberalization—rather than the racialization of Third World immigrant workers that has been a hallmark of capitalism in the U.S. since the 1970s, and in Korea it is the *racialization*—that is, the nationalization—of domestic industrial workers that has become its trademark rather than a resistance to it. That is why they can never explain how, if in the U.S. racialization can count as a central mechanism of capitalist exploitation, it is possible for Asian Americans to attain a higher degree of economic success and class ascension than the population average and especially white, and how, if in Korea racialization can count as a valid way of resisting capitalist exploitation, it becomes possible for a small group of big capitalists (plutocrats and conglomerates) to dominate the national economy and possess most of the country's wealth under Park's nationalism-oriented government. Thus, in order not to make the mistake of seeing racialization as a mechanism of or as a resistance to the labor exploitation under global capitalism, we should first and foremost recognize

that Cha's *Dictée*, contrary to Lowe's reading, is not about class but about race, which is to say that it is a story about a dislocation from identity and a desire to recover it, and that Cho's *Dwarf*, contrary to Kim's, is not about race but about class, which is to say that it is a story about an alienation from labor and a desire to restore it. It would be more accurate to say that *Dictée* and *Dwarf* show in a symptomatic way how a race project can be conditioned by a class project (by initiating its race project in the history of Korean immigration in the U.S.) and how a class project can be conditioned by a race project (by relating its class project to the history of slavery [*nobi*] in Korea), respectively.

### **III. This is a Family: Ethnic Enclavism and the Politics of Diaspora in Chang-rae Lee's *Native Speaker***

#### **III.1. Money Club and Ethnic Ties**

In Chang-rae Lee's *Native Speaker* (1995), while helping out in his father's Madison Avenue store, Henry Park hears a "rich old woman" calling him and his father "Oriental Jews" (53). Henry and his father are first- and second-generation Korean Americans, and between Jewish and Korean Americans certainly there was a similarity of economic activities for settling themselves down in their new country. A large number of Jews in the 1960s and 1970s and Koreans in the 1980s and 1990s served as middlemen (such as small traders, money lenders, subcontractors, and so forth) in black or inner-city minority neighborhoods, and they both became the most successful immigrant ethnic groups in the United States. So, in the earlier and later ages, respectively, they have been portrayed by the press and the

media as "model minorities." (Of course, it needs to be noted that Asian Americans in general have been construed as a model minority.) The *New Republic*, for example, featured an article extolling Korean Americans that "like Jews, who experienced a similar pattern of discrimination and quotas, and who first crowded into a small range of professions, [they] have shown an ability to overcome large obstacles in spectacular fashion" (Bell 1985).<sup>24</sup> This celebratory depiction of Korean Americans as a successful or model group has been warranted by the fact that the average family income of native-born Korean Americans, at \$38,610 in 1980, was much above the non-Hispanic white average of \$26,535 (See Harrison 1992 172-73). In this context, it could be seen as a way of verifying his model minority status that Henry's father responds to Henry with a "laugh" and a remark that "You rich kid now, your daddy rich rich man," when his son opposes a plan to move to a "nice neighborhood, over near Fern Pond" because "all the rich kids live there" (Lee 1995 64).<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> In this article, David A. Bell writes that President Reagan called Asian Americans "our exemplars of hope and inspiration," that *Parade* magazine featured an article on Asian Americans titled "The Promise of America," and that *Time* and *Newsweek* stories boasted headlines like "A Formula for Success," "The Drive to Excel," and "A 'Model Minority.'"

<sup>25</sup> Of course, the significant difference between Jewish and Korean (or Asian) ethnic groups is that the former group has been



Far from taking it as a compliment, however, Henry is so unhappy about or get angry at the woman's designation of him as an Oriental Jew. He inwardly, if not forthrightly, wants to retaliate against her: "I felt I could [have] said anything smart, like, 'Does madam need help?'" (53-54).<sup>26</sup> Why does he dislike being called an Oriental Jew? And why does he have no interest in or even deny his elevated socio-economic position, that he has become rich or, at least, upper-middle class so that he no longer needs to care much about economic problems? (Remember that the reason why he resists the idea of moving to a district near Fern Pond is that it is a nice rich district.)<sup>27</sup> It is exactly because his first and overriding concern is about his racial and cultural position rather than about his socio-economic position. Although he has

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absorbed into the white majority group and thus has eventually and successfully overcome its minority status, while the latter group has been considered a racial/cultural minority until now and thus has not been able to overcome its minority status.

<sup>26</sup> In fact, it is not only Henry but also many Korean American critics who have been very dissatisfied and discontented with the idea of Korean Americans as a model minority. They have argued that it is merely an "image" or a "myth," and that it has served as an effective ideological means of hiding, ignoring, and unrepresenting the "racial-ethnic relations . . . handicapped by the assumption of a biracial system divided between whites and blacks" (Kim and Hurh 1983, 17).

<sup>27</sup> But eventually, Henry cannot help but acknowledge that he is rich: "He had raised me in a foreign land, put me through college, witnessed my marriage for my long-buried mother, even left me enough money that I could do the same for my children without the expense of his kind of struggle" (49).

been free from every economic problem, he still (or now) has racial and cultural problems, the central one of which is that he suffers from the refusal of "other men" to "see" him in his country of birth: "I wasn't there." Henry says, "I was a *comely shadow* who didn't threaten them" (53; my emphasis). Thus, the woman's statement that he is an Oriental Jew is looked at by Henry in a quite racist way implying—or painfully reminding him—that he is not yet native or fully American. A list of epithets Lelia, Henry's wife, makes to describe Henry's "character or nature" confirms that the main issue for him is racial and cultural: "You are" an "illegal alien," an "emotional alien," a "Yellow peril," a "neo-American," a "stranger," and a "spy" (5).<sup>28</sup>

In short, as Tina Y. Chen (2000, 645, 649) clearly puts it, the true problem for Henry is the "silence" and "invisibility"—the state of being "unmarked, unspoken, and unseen" by others—that causes a lot of severe "psychological damages" to him, and therefore what he really is anxious to get is not so much an idea about where he is located between high and low classes (i.e., an idea

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<sup>28</sup> The rest of the list includes "surreptitious," a "B+ student of life," a "first thing hummer of Wagner and Strauss," a "genre bug," "great in bed," "overrated," a "poppa's boy," a "sentimentalist," an "anti-romantic," a "\_\_\_ analyst [you fill in]," a "follower," and a "traitor" (5).

about how much he owns) as an idea about where he is located between Korean and American races/cultures (i.e., an idea about who he is). The point here is that insofar as he is "marked as a foreigner although he is American by birth" (647), insofar, that is, as he belongs, as a hyphenated subject, to both of Korean and American groups and neither of them at the same time, it is unavoidable for him to be caught in the middle between being a Korean and being an American: namely, "he is a man whose very identity is in question" (649). (And it is nothing other than his invisibility or doubleness that qualifies him to be a capable and reliable spy.) Chen thus says that Lee's *Native Speaker* can be seen as "a meditation about fractured identity, the loss of internal coherence, and the longing for a wholeness that is ever deferred, ever impossible to attain" (649). The task Henry confronts in his American life is, putting it in Lee's words, to find "his truest place in the culture" (1995 118) or to have a "truthful ontological bearing" (22); it is not to find his place in the economy, a successful businessman's son, as it were, or to occupy a financially higher or stable position in the American class structure. And the saying that is far more important to him is a Filipino American therapist Dr.

Luzan's that "You'll be yourself again, I promise" (22) or an anonymous passerby's that "You belong here, or you make yourself belong, or you must go" (344) than his father's that "You rich kid now, your daddy rich rich man."

Indeed, it is for this reason that in Asian American literary studies, *Native Speaker* has been adopted since its publication in the mid-1990s as one of the most essential and vital canonical texts. Henry's commitment to understanding his racial and cultural (rather than class) relations in American society has perfectly corresponded to Asian American literary studies' principal commitment to defining "the term Asian American" (Wong 1993 4), its effort to define Asian Americans by examining the question of what it means to be racially and culturally divided subjects in the American context (If, instead, Asian American literary studies has made an effort to define Asian Americans by examining the question of what it means to be socio-economically wealthy subjects, then its commitment to defining the term Asian American would have not been made relevant and plausible in the first place). Multiple pioneering literary critics such as Patricia P. Chu, Sau-ling Cynthia Wong, and Elaine H. Kim, for example, have argued that one of the core missions performed by

Asian American literary texts is to construct "unitary" and "authentic" Asian American subjects who could well transfer themselves from the realm of "the other" to the realm of "American" not only by addressing the racial and cultural dislocations unique to Asian immigration but also by transforming the existing narratives about American identity (See Chu 2000 3-4, Wong 1993 4-9, and Kim 1992 xi-xii). In other words, finding "the best way for the group to 'claim America' [to employ Maxine Hong Kingston's term in *China Men*]" (Wong 1993 14) is the whole point of Asian American literary studies and of its launch and growth as an emergent academic discipline. All of which, of course, does not mean that Asian American literary studies has simply pursued a choice or an one-way shift between being different and being the same, between "eternal alien" and "assimilated mascot"; rather, as Elaine Kim (1992, xii) astutely points out, it has sought a new alternative identity that can "assert [a] political unity [between being Asian and being American] against this binarism and its implicit hierarchy of values."

From this standpoint, then, it could be said that for the last two decades as an exemplary work in the canon of Asian American literature, *Native Speaker* has in effect

functioned to prevent one from paying attention to Asian (or Korean) Americans' class position, to their truest place in the American capitalist economy.<sup>29</sup> In fact, as John Guillory (1993 10) argues, the canon *Native Speaker's* function as an insistence on the primacy of the Asian (or Korean) American subject's social identity must be considered as directly connected to the process of literary canonization itself, where "it is precisely the fit between the author's [or, as the author's alter ego, the protagonist's] social identity and his or her experience that is seen to determine canonical or noncanonical status." Which is just to say that in Asian American literature, the reason why certain texts have been chosen to be canonized is that they can "represent," or express the "values" of, the "social groups," not the "social classes," to which their authors and their protagonists

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<sup>29</sup> Of course, it is inaccurate or over-simplistic to say that Asian American literary studies has always failed to deal with or has neglected class issues. But the problem is that it has absolutely tended to see class issues as being directly connected to racial/cultural issues and as being virtually indistinguishable from it, because the difference in class almost consists with the difference in race/culture (e.g., it can be said that whites belong to a higher class, whereas blacks belong to a lower class). This what Kim means when she says that "Asian American identities have never been exclusively racial but are tied as well to other things [like] class" (xii). It is important, however, to see that class issues and racial/cultural issues are fundamentally different and should be distinguished from each other. For a more extended discussion of this, see Cha, 2014.

belong (10, 28). Thus, the problem with the canon *Native Speaker* is that it could probably have played a crucial role in replacing a politics that would arise from class problems or, in Guillory's terms, "a program for the abolition of want" (13) with a "politics of representation," what Peter Osborne regards as a program that "ends up reducing political to social identities" (quoted in Guillory 1993 13).

In this sense, Walter Benn Michaels classifies and declares *Native Speaker* as a "novel of identity": "Novels like *Native Speaker*," he says, "make the central problems of American society a matter of identity instead of a matter of money" and "encourage us to think that the important thing about Henry Park is the question of whether he's truly at home in American culture instead of the fact that, as his father says, he's a 'rich kid'" (2011 1023). His idea here is that since as a novel of identity *Native Speaker* has concentrated on disconnecting rather than connecting the Asian American subject's racial/cultural status and socio-economic success, that is, on making the subject's identity more matter than the subject's wealth, it has fundamentally failed to deal with or actually tended to neglect the issues of social class and capitalism in

America such as, in particular, the rise in economic inequality that has been the mark of American society since the late 1970s. Moreover, according to Michaels, inasmuch as in the novel of identity, questions of racial/cultural "recognition" are considerably more notable than questions of socio-economic "redistribution," to use Nancy Fraser's terms, Lee's novel's focus on identity ought to be thought of as functioning not merely to detract people from the increase in inequality but to legitimate it. He insists that the notability of identity makes it hard or even impossible for people to bring forward the matter of the inequality American (neoliberal) capitalism has produced, and so to imagine any real alternative to American capitalism (See 2011 1027-28).

Yet it is important to see that to say that the major issue for the canon *Native Speaker* (for Henry, say, at the beginning of the novel) is racial and cultural is not at all to say that the major issue for the non- or pre-canon *Native Speaker* (for Henry, say, at the end of the novel) is also non-economic and non-capitalistic. For *Native Speaker* as a non- or pre-canonical text, as Min Hyung Song (2005 173) argues, needs to be viewed as basically taking the form of what Lisa Lowe (1996 45, 98-99) characterizes as a



"political bildungsroman," the primary novel form for narrating "the protagonist's development from the uncertainty, locality, and impotence of 'youth' to the definition, mobility, and potency of 'maturity.'" And so it must be admitted to be true that Henry is a character who undergoes so many significant changes throughout the course of the novel, especially through his relations and interactions with characters like his father and John Kwang who can be said to be profoundly involved in the issues of social class and capitalism in America. Indeed, Jodi Kim suggests that "*Native Speaker* at once conjures and complicates earlier racial discourses and figurations of the Asian American . . . by connecting [two] varieties of capital [Henry's father's "ethnic small business capital" and John Kwang's "racialized undocumented capital"] to those discourses and figurations" (2009 118). Her point is that Lee's novel, by exposing the link between race and capitalism, offers a cogent political diagnosis of the contradictions of liberal democracy and global capitalism (See 2009 121-23). Thus, Michaels's analysis that *Native Speaker* has failed to deal with or even tended to neglect the issues of social class and capitalism is somewhat misleading and incorrect. It would rather be right and

appropriate to think that *Native Speaker* is ultimately a novel of capitalism, which revolves around a narrative of minority capital formation, rather than a novel of identity, which only centers on a narrative of minority subject formation.

"I thought his life was all about money" (49), says Henry about his father, defining him as an overworked merchant controlled by the unseen forces of capitalism. Henry's father, who came to America as a non-English speaker ("just a few words of it") with a small amount of cash ("two hundred dollars") and his family ("a wife and baby"), has built a successful wholesale grocery business in ghetto areas in New York City in twenty-five years. The problem with his success in business, according to Henry, is that he has got "money" but lost his "countrymen." Before his economic success—when he ran only "one store" and lived in "a tiny apartment in Queens" (51)—the ethnic ties of him with his fellow Koreans were very strong; through the "Korean-American business association," he knew every his man and met with them regularly, and especially, he took his family to the association's annual gathering (50–51). But as his business grew and prospered, he became "busier and wealthier and lived farther and farther apart"

from his "friends"; for example, he moved to a "big house" in the suburbs and joined social "clubs" there cultivating acquaintance with "Americans" (51). For Henry, acquiring money is conceived as completely opposed to retaining countrymen. He thus wonders "if [his] father, if given the chance, would have wished to go back to the time before he made all that money, when he . . . had a joy" with "his Korean friends" (52).

In fact, however, Henry's curiosity to know whether his father wanted to return to the past or not is quite wrong, since to him acquiring money is not opposed to retaining countrymen, but rather is made possible by it. Actually, he owed his success to his ethnic ties. First, he gained "capital" for his first business from "a *ggeh*, a Korean 'money club'" in which "[his co-ethnic] members contributed to a pool that was given out on a rotating basis" (50). Second, he took advantage of his cheap and diligent ethnic labor force: the two Korean employees, Mr. Yoon and Mr. Kim, "worked twelve-hour days six days a week for [only] \$200 cash" (54). (Of course, it is important to note that his business was self-employed so that he relied primarily on his own and his family's [often times,

Henry's] unpaid labor.)<sup>30</sup> In short, what made him earn a great deal of money was nothing other than his close and intimate ties with his countrymen—as his capital and labor providers. One way, then, to describe Henry's father's business is as exemplary of ethnicity-based immigrant small business. And if, as Henry believes, his father has got money but lost his countrymen, it is precisely because he has got money thanks to his countrymen. In other words, the fact that he has created a successful business must be taken to mean that the ethnic ties of him and his fellow Koreans have all the time been strong and strengthening rather than weakening and breaking up.

### **III.2. Ethnic Business and Inter-Ethnic Conflicts**

As Kwang Chung Kim and Won Moo Hurh put it in "Korean Americans and the 'Success' Image," post-1965 Korean immigrant entrepreneurs' "utilization of their ethnic resources" was one of the most effective means by which they can overcome their "disadvantage" in the general labor market (which derives from their language barrier rather than from discrimination by American employers) and

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<sup>30</sup> For example, Henry's father himself "worked from before sunrise to the dead of night" (47). And he made Henry "go with him to one of the new stores on Sunday afternoons to help restock the shelves and the bins" (53).

establish their economic position as "self-employed petty bourgeois" (105). According to Kim and Hurh's research, potential Korean business owners—in general, Korean immigrants who have been hired in co-ethnic businesses for several years because of their difficulty in finding jobs in the general labor market—raised their initial capital from three ethnic financial sources; money brought from the homeland; family savings in the U.S.; and loans from their Korean friends and kin (101-02). After starting their own business, Korean owners hired Korean workers who were willing to "work more diligently" "for longer hours" and could also be "more trusted than non-Korean workers" (98).

Kim and Hurh's point is that Korean owners and workers benefited from "reciprocal support"; the owners obtained a "reliable, loyal, and cheap" work force that, by decreasing the cost of operating a labor-intensive business, gave them a competitive edge over their rivals, and in exchange, the workers received "on-the-job training and aid towards setting up a business of their own," in addition to their employment in a tight job market (103). So the relations between Korean owners and workers were founded much less on a contractual wage agreement than on a mutual help system. "Korean workers' employment at Korean stores," Kim and Hurh

say, "serve[d] the economic interests of both Korean employers and employees" (103).

In this respect, then, Henry's judgment on his father that his life was all about money, or that he "like all successful immigrants . . . not so gently exploited his own" co-ethnic workers, is somewhat unfair (54). Henry's father understood his relationship with his workers not as an employer-employee one but rather as a mentor-mentee one, which is why he said, "This is way I learn business, this is way they learn business" (55). He was certain that for his co-ethnics to work in his stores would act for them as a form of OJT whose price cannot be reckoned in dollars alone. Furthermore, the fact that he participated in the *ggeh* even after his huge success proves that he steadily made efforts to aid his co-ethnics to set up their own business with easy credit (When he was no longer involved in any *ggeh* due to the breakdown of trust among members, he truly lamented about it: "In America, . . . it's even hard to stay Korean" [51]).

Thus, it is merely half right to say that Henry's father's life was all about money; his concern was not only with making his private money, but also with assisting his co-ethnics to make their money. Indeed, what must really be

meant by the description that Henry's father and his fellow co-ethnics have become wealthier and lived farther apart from one another is not that Henry's father exclusively has become rich and left his fellow co-ethnics, but that through the use of their ethnic resources, *all* of his fellow co-ethnics, as well as Henry's father, have become rich and drifted away from one another—in order to enter the American mainstream as (upper) middle-class citizens. And this is the whole point of Henry's another remark on his father that "for him, all of life was a rigid matter of family" (6), that his life was substantially about "the intimate community of his family" (182), not just about money.

Thus, as Alejandro Portes and Robert D. Manning indicate in their study on the immigrant enclave, the central feature—or the great virtue—of Henry's father's ethnic "enclave business" is its emphasis on "collective" upward mobility, which is to say that it seeks to help the "entire" ethnic group, not a few individuals, "move up through the social hierarchies" (48). Portes and Manning argue that the Korean type of ethnic enclave can ensure an immigrant group's gradual shift from earlier economic hardship and discrimination to later socio-economic

mobility, namely what Henry calls "the classic immigrant story" of success (49), by creating a labor market where the "informal" promotion ladders are available to the workers (unlike the "primary" labor market where native or skilled migrant workers make use of the formal promotion opportunities and unlike the "secondary" labor market where unskilled minority workers rarely have access to the promotion opportunities).

Hence, in "Gaining the Upper Hand: Economic Mobility among Immigrant and Domestic Minorities" (1992), Portes and Min Zhou suggest that the issue of urban minority poverty must be seen as closely related to ethnic enclave economy. The reason why certain inner-city ethnic groups (such as black Americans, Mexican Americans, mainland Puerto Ricans, and so forth) are besieged by high rates of poverty and unemployment, and cannot construct their ethnic business base is because they lack ethnic cohesiveness—or, in Portes and Zhou's terms, "bounded solidarity" and "enforceable trust"—so they cannot utilize ethnic resources in entrepreneurship (516). Portes and Zhou therefore propose as a key solution to urban minority poverty "community-based business ownership" marked by a common bond between owners and workers fortifying the norm of reciprocity.



Likewise, Pyong Gap Min, stressing the function of the Korean ethnic group's small business in helping the most of its members to achieve economic mobility, asserts that "the development of minority small business is one effective way of moderating economic inequalities on the part of minority groups" (1988 132).<sup>31</sup>

Seen in the light of Korean American ethnic entrepreneurship, then, it is a lack of comprehension and scrutiny for Henry to think that Korean Americans would want to be committed to racial/cultural identity, while at the same time forgoing or repudiating being committed to socio-economic class. As Henry's father shows, for Korean Americans, the commitment to racial/cultural identity is never separated from and opposed to but entirely consistent with and identical to the commitment to socio-economic class. Their *ggeh*, the iconic kernel of their ethnic economy's reciprocal system, for example, "work because the members all know each other, trust one another not to run off or drop out after their turn comes up" (279); if what is essential to the formation of the *ggeh* is their

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<sup>31</sup> Min argues that "self-employment in small business is a better alternative for most Korean immigrants, who cannot find professional and white-collar occupations commensurate with their educational levels," and goes on to say that "as a scholar I should be honest about this information, which is useful to both Korean immigrants and policy makers" (57).

commitment to racial/cultural identity, then running the *ggeh* is what finally amounts to their commitment to socio-economic class; and which is why the notion that "the lessons of the culture will be stronger than a momentary lack, can subdue any individual weakness or want" matters to them (279-80).

Thus, as regards Korean American group members, the question of where one is located between high and low classes—the question, that is, of how much one owns—can only and should be answered by an account of where one is located between Korean and American races/cultures—an account, that is, of what one is—and the reason for this is that the Korean American group's ethnic economy is founded on the idea that since Korean people in America share the same racial/cultural identity, they all have to belong to the same socio-economic class. Consequently, Lee's *Native Speaker* can be said to focus upon revealing how race/culture and class are understood and treated by Korean Americans as complementary rather than contradictory to each other; it does not simply aim at showing how much race/culture is important to Korean Americans.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Jodi Kim suggests that "*Native Speaker* at once conjures and complicates earlier racial discourses and figurations of the Asian American . . . by connecting varieties of capital to those

But it is not correct to impute Henry's failure to understand the nature of Korean Americans' intricate commitments to race/culture and class altogether to his ignorance and unintelligence. In fact, the situation in which Henry stands in America is very different from the situation with which Henry's father faces in America. As a first generation immigrant, Henry's father's utmost interest is in the elevation of his socio-economic position; the reason that he has chosen to come to American has something to do with overcoming "the 'big network' in Korean business" blocking him, "someone from the rural regions of country," from having a successful business in Seoul, despite his higher education (57). What counts for him as a moneyless immigrant is the class difference between him and Americans, so that he wants to reduce and remove the class difference between him and Americans. He does not really care about the racial/cultural difference between him and Americans—he believes that he is a Korean in America.

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discourses and figurations" (118). Her point is that Lee's novel, by exposing the link between race and capitalism, offers a cogent political diagnosis of the contradictions of liberal democracy and global capitalism. Thus, it would be more plausible to think that *Native Speaker* is ultimately a novel of capitalism, which revolves around a narrative of minority capital formation, rather than a novel of identity, which only centers on a narrative of minority subject formation.

On the contrary, as a second generation Korean American, Henry's key interest is in the assertion of his racial/cultural identity; for his father's business success has made him cease to care about the class difference between him and Americans—he really does not need to care about it, since there is no longer class difference between him and Americans. What counts for him as “a rich kid” is the racial/cultural difference between him and Americans, which has become more evident after his class ascension, so that he wants to reduce and remove the racial/cultural difference between him and Americans. After all, then, it is due to their different interests in different situations that Henry and Henry's father generate different (or contrasting) ways of understanding the nature of Korean Americans' commitments to race/culture and class.

The crucial thing to note here is that the fact that Henry considers race/culture more important and pertinent than class should not be taken to mean that he has no more interest in class. Henry is of great interest to the Korean way of being committed to class enough to think about its dark and negative side: “We [Korean Americans] believed in making money, polishing apples in the dead of night, . . . shooting black people, watching our stores and offices burn

down to the ground" (52-53). Indeed, a serious problem with the Korean style of ethnic business is that it frequently was a major cause of inter-ethnic conflicts—between the new entrepreneurial immigrant groups and the existing impoverished urban minority groups.

Korean immigrants, for example, preferred to do business in black (or other minority) areas in which mainstream corporations were notably absent owing to the costs of dealing with violent and crime-ridden masses. By developing a retail niche, by performing, that is, a "middleman" role distributing the corporations' goods and services to inner-city minority residents, they made greater incomes and enhanced their chances of attaining upward mobility (Min and Kolodny 1994 183-94). In their contacts with inner-city minority customers (or on occasion, with non-Korean minority workers), as Edna Bonacich and Tae Hwan Jung put it in their research on the Korean small business in Los Angeles, Korean merchants "faced, and syphoned off, . . . the hostility of the poor and minorities toward the establishment" of their business (91).

One of the most credible explanations for the underlying cause of the Black-Korean conflict is an

economic one that while urban minority markets were important sources of income for Korean merchants, the Koreans almost never shared their gains and sources with urban minority residents; instead, they shared them only with their co-ethnic members. Korean merchants, as Kwang Chung Kim and Shin Kim say in "The Multiracial Nature of Los Angeles Unrest in 1992" (1999), were portrayed by local minority residents as "outside invaders who exploit [them] and undermine [their] communities' economic autonomy by preventing [them] from establishing their own businesses in the community" (31). This is linked to the central and defining feature of the Korean ethnic business itself; even though it focuses on the entire group's mobility rather than the individual's, it has a tendency to aim at the mobility of only one particular group rather than the whole groups of poor minorities in the end.

No doubt Henry's father, a successful practitioner of the Korean ethnic business, had bad experience and conflict with black people in his stores. According to Henry, he usually saw his black customers as "adversaries" and treated them with a "stone" (or "iron") attitude: "He didn't follow them around the aisles like some storekeepers do, but he always let them know there wasn't going to be

any *funny business* [like shoplifting] here" (185; italics original). His dislike or even hatred for blacks, of course, was attributed to the terrible incident in the past involved black men who "had robbed the store," "beaten him up," and tried to "shot him in the head" (56): "To him a black face meant inconvenience, or trouble, or the threat of death" (186). The question raised here is why then, despite the danger of murder, he did not bring his business out of the black area. It was just because, as Henry puts it, he could "[not] afford a store anywhere else but where [blacks] live" (186), which means that the black market—namely black people as clients—was a necessity for his business.

And yet the crucial thing about his business was that the blacks were at the same time never regarded as partners or co-workers necessary for it; one obvious example is that he refused to hire black workers by the reason that blacks are short of diligence and conscientious labor.<sup>33</sup> What can

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<sup>33</sup> "In one of his first stores," Henry says, "he [Henry's father] hired a few black men to haul and clean the produce. . . . But none of them worked out. He said they either came to work late or never and when they did often passed off fruit and candy and six-packs of beer to their friends. Of course, he never let them work the register. Eventually, he replaced them with Puerto Ricans and Peruvians" (186-87). Edward Chang points out that "many African Americans perceive Korean merchants as a threat to their own economic survival," and thus "African American complaints against Korean merchants often focus on the following economic issues:

be grasped from Henry's summary of his father's tension with black people that "we believed in making money, polishing apples in the dead of night, . . . shooting black people, watching our stores and offices burn down to the ground"<sup>34</sup> is thus that the root cause of the tension was the fact that it was the black areas where the Koreans—the very group who Henry refers to as 'we'—made money, but the blacks were utterly excluded from the business of making money. Indeed, it was not a coincidence that, when he had a soccer game with "some black men" in a picnic, Henry's father pointed out that "they were *African* blacks," not American blacks (50-51; italics original).

Hence, in *Ethnic Peace in the American City* (1999), Edward T. Chang and Jeannette Diaz-Veizades criticize the Koreans' outstanding network of community organization in regard that it has mostly worked as an "ethnic-specific provider without the aim of building cross-cultural [or cross-ethnic] coalitions and partnerships" (135). Chang and Diaz-Veizades's idea is that insofar as the inter-ethnic conflict between blacks and Koreans has arisen because of the Korean ethnic business solely dedicated to protecting

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(1) they [Korean merchants] do not hire African American workers; (2) 'they overcharge African American customers for inferior products; (3) they do not contribute their profits back to the African American community" (48).

<sup>34</sup> No doubt this is a reflection of the 1992 Los Angeles riot.



one group's interests and well-being, but ignoring or even harming other minority groups' interests and well-being, the proper solution to the conflict should be a process of "bringing hostile parties together in coalition" and of "building a multiethnic [collaborative] community" (141), thereby "providing opportunities [of upward mobility] for those people most marginalized by the existing system" (138).

In other words, it is an effort to expand the range of the Korean-type ethnic economy and its reciprocal system to the extent to which it includes black (or other minority) groups; if all minority groups could possess a significant level of pan-ethnic solidarity and trust, and thus generate a pan-ethnically extended enclave characterized by mutual help among them, then they would be able not only to put an end to the inter-ethnic conflict between them, but also to solve the problem of the urban minority groups' poverty and unemployment. It is in this context that Jennifer Lee imagines aiding African Americans to "learn about the sale[s]" methods of the Korean-type retail business, along with offering "equal opportunity to buy and operate the retail stores" (195), as the best way (or public policy) to ameliorate the Black-Korean conflict.

### III.3. The Politics of Diaspora

Indeed, John Kwang, a Korean American and New York City councilman who is currently running for mayor in *Native Speaker*, argues that the relevant alternative to "the tragedy of strife between the communities" of blacks and Koreans is to see and recognize that "it is the problem of a self-hate," that because blacks and Koreans are the same each other ("they're like us, they are us") in "want[ing] a chance to own something for themselves, be it a store or a cart," their "hate" for each other should virtually be thought of as a hate toward themselves (152). From Kwang's analysis, the reason why blacks, unlike Koreans, "can't" "own [their] own store[s]" (or "buil[d] up from nothing") is that "they do not have the same strong community [Koreans] enjoy, the one [they] brought with [them] from Korea, which can pool money and efforts for its members" (153). The goal for him—what he probably hopes to achieve as a mayor—is thus a social state where blacks and Koreans not only stop coming into conflict but also cooperate with each other on the principles of "dignity," "respect," and "trust" that makes it possible to organize a "giant money club" "for all" modeled on the *ggeh*, which is

to say, to "run a *ggeh* with people other than just [one's] own" (280), by which the project of constructing a pan-ethnic enclave economy would be put into effect.

Kwang's "huge *ggeh* for all [blacks and other minorities]," as Henry puts it, aims at "giving to them just the start, like other people get an inheritance, a hope chest of what they would work hard for in the rest of their lives" (334). This is why he proclaims the importance of "the pure idea of family" rather than the standard idea of family as a team with biological connections: his version of family, like Henry's father's, functions as "the basic unit of wealth," but, contrary to Henry's father's, it "must have nothing to do with blood" (146). In short, what he calls a family is an extended one of all minority groups, not a limited one of a particular ethnic group. The key to the success of his pan-ethnic money club is for each ethnically different member to "remain loyal" (277) to others based on the notion that "*This is a family*" (279; italics original).<sup>35</sup>

Here, the way that Kwang promotes cooperation between blacks (or other minorities) and Koreans is to place an

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<sup>35</sup> "Small *ggeh*," Henry explains, "work because the members all know each other, trust one another not to run off or drop out after their turn comes up. Reputation is always worth more than money. In this sense we are all related" (279).

emphasis on their identical historical experience of victimization by the ruling power: "Remember, or now know, how Koreans were cast as the dogs of Asia . . . by the Japanese," he says in a speech delivered at a black neighborhood church, "I ask that you remember these things. . . . Know that what we have in common, the sadness and pain and injustice, will always be stronger than our differences. I respect and honor you deeply" (153). His point is that blacks' and Koreans' shared experiences of economic exploitation, political subjugation, and racial/national repression in Korea and America (e.g., the Japanese colonial rule of Korea and the American enslavement and segregation of blacks respectively), as Chang and Diaz-Veizades put it, ought to lead them to constitute a "broad" "political consciousness among nonwhites of different ethnicities" (111) which plays an essential role in paving the way for the creation of a pan-ethnic enclave economy. It is in this sense that Min Hyung Song understands Kwang's speech on the tragic sentiment of "historical trauma" common to Koreans and blacks as an attempt to initiate "a diaspora without ethnic restrictions" (185), as a newly defined concept, one that is grounded much less on "single-ethnic solidarity" than on

"multiethnic coalition-building" (191). Kwang's endeavor to bring Korean Americans into political cooperation with other ethnic groups, in other words, can be seen as a devotion to what Song calls the politics of multiethnic diaspora.

Another way to put this—particularly, in the American context—is to say that Korean middlemen and urban blacks at the outset should not be conceived as having an antagonistic or hostile relationship to one another; rather, they should be deemed as lying exactly in the same position as victims of white racism. Indeed, the fundamental reason that the urban blacks became poor needs to be understood as rooted not so much in their conflicts with the Korean middlemen as in their racial oppressions such as slavery and the Jim Crow laws by white people. And from this standpoint, the Black-Korean conflict needs to be revealed as its true nature to have been a powerful political and ideological means by which the whites use the Korean middlemen as a scapegoat to absorb and cushion in the middle the urban blacks' (or other minorities') racial hatred, discontent, and violence toward them.

This is the whole point of what Clare Jean Kim calls a "theory of racial triangulation," which states that since

1965 Asian Americans have been racially triangulated vis-à-vis blacks and whites through the processes of "valorization," whereby the white group valorizes the Asian group over the black group in order to dominate both groups, and of "ostracism," whereby the white group forges the Asian group as a rigidly foreign and unassimilable race in order to ostracize them from the body politic and civic membership. Valorizing Korean Americans helps "to deflect black demands for racial reform," and therefore the racial triangulation of the Koreans ultimately serves to "protect white privileges from both black and [Korean] American encroachment" (1999 126). Accordingly, as James Kyung-Jin Lee says in "Where the Talented Tenth Meets the Model Minority" (2002), to affirm the legitimacy of a racial order established by the triangular racial system, or, put another way, to accept the Koreans' model minority status uncritically, is to be "complicit [with the whites] in the oppression of other racial minorities" (251). And in this light, as Lee continues, Kwang's politics of diaspora is an effort to organize and deploy the black and Korean groups' unionized "insurgencies" against the white majority group that can "threaten the racial order" and "reconstitute [it] differently" (252).

By the end of the novel, however, Kwang's political project results in failure because of his campaign volunteers, Eduardo and Henry; Eduardo, one of Kwang's most trusted volunteers, turns out to have been "a traitor" who works undercover for a rival candidate, and Henry's report on Kwang's money club discloses that he has run it with hundreds of "illegal" immigrants, which eventually leads to his resignation and arrestment. One is tempted to think that by Kwang's ruin, the novel implies a deep uncertainty or skepticism about his diasporic enclave project, about if there is any real possibility of accomplishing it successfully in contemporary America, as affirming "the idea of John Kwang as a man losing control over his people" (301). But his downfall must not be employed to mean that the novel intends to rebut or dismiss Kwang's ambition to create a diasporic enclave economy in the end, because it is none other than Henry himself, the novel's protagonist and the writer's alter ego, who, in a quite implicit but unmissable way, takes over Kwang's project.

Henry's task as a spy in Kwang's campaign is to obtain "the list of Kwang's people," the list, that is, of his multi-ethnic club members; a multiplicity of ethnicities is the essence of his project. And Henry, after the decline of

Kwang's campaign, quits working as a spy and begins to make his own version of the list: in a school class, Lelia makes a "name" badge for each immigrant child, a "foreign language speaker," based on the "class list," and Henry "press[es] it to each of their chests," hearing Lelia "calling all the difficult names of who we are" (349). So the novel does not end with an allusion to the unlikely possibility (or the impossibility) of Kwang's project; rather, it ends with an indication of its future probability, this time, with Henry, who has waken up to the importance of constructing an American diaspora, a "we" made of "foreign languages" and "difficult names."

But what is imperative to note here is that the fact that John Kwang (and ultimately, Henry and the novel) pursues a new pan-ethnic or diasporic enclave does not mean that he views the previous (Korean-style) ethnic enclave as a bad thing, and so wants to reject it as totally wrong and inadequate; in fact, he has no problem with how it works, but the only problem he has with it is its scope. He believes that if it is pan-ethnically extended enough to include all the minority groups, it is a good thing for urban poor groups' upward mobility. If the point of the ethnic enclave is that ethnic people should all belong to



the same class, then the point of the pan-ethnic enclave is that multi-ethnic people should all belong to the same class. (It is not a contradiction that Kwang argues for the formation of a pan-ethnic enclave, while at the same time being himself an owner of the Korean ethnic business, much more successful than Henry's father.)<sup>36</sup>

#### **III.4. Ethnic Enclave Economy and Capitalist Exploitation**

From a critical perspective, therefore, the central problem with Kwang's politics of pan-ethnic enclave is that, even though (or whether or not) pan-ethnically extended, it is at heart a pro-capitalist project in the sense that, as Edna Bonacich explains it in "The Other Side of Ethnic Entrepreneurship" (1993), "it accepts the basic premises of capitalism: that people should strive for upward mobility within a competitive framework and that the social welfare can be more or less left to take care of

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<sup>36</sup> Henry says, "He [John Kwang] himself once ran a wholesale shop on this very row, long before all of it became Korean in the 1980s. He sold and leased dry-cleaning machines and commercial washers and dryers, only high-end equipment. He expanded quickly from the little neighborhood business, the street-front store, for he had mastered enough language to deal with non-Korean suppliers and distributors in other cities and Europe. . . . He wasn't bound to 600 square feet of ghetto retail space like my father, who more or less duplicated the same basic store in various parts of the city. . . . Kwang, though, kept pushing, adding to his wholesale stores by eventually leasing plants in North Carolina to assemble in part the machines he sold for the Italian and German manufacturers" (182-83).

itself" (686). Its way of helping the poor groups is not to eliminate or mitigate the exploitation of their labor by capitalists, but to (attempt to) support them to become petty bourgeois or middle class who would likely be in a position to exploit others rather than a position to be exploited by others.<sup>37</sup>

Indeed, this is the true meaning of the reciprocity between owners and workers in the ethnic or even pan-ethnic enclave economy. Of course, it might be possible for a few of the workers (like Henry's father) to have their own business in the near future and become self-employed petty bourgeois through the enclave economy's mutual help system. But the problem is that this scenario is simply impossible without the sufficient and constant supply of co- or pan-ethnic workers who, as mentioned earlier, are willing to work more diligently for longer hours than regular workers, which is just to say that it is not possible without the presence of the proletariat, without the capitalist structure of labor exploitation. The Korean American group's old ethnic economy and the diasporic group's new

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<sup>37</sup> Of course, the point here is not that the petty-bourgeoisie or middle-class Korean entrepreneurs would be in a position never to be exploited by others, but that they should be considered as well-paid laborers (or managers) who eagerly aid upper-class capitalists in exploiting poorly-paid laboring masses; in other words, it is that they are an exceptional kind of labor being able to supply a cheap and desirable work force for capitalists.

pan-ethnic economy, therefore, must be understood as being necessarily founded on the pro-capitalist idea that co- or pan-ethnic owners can rely on and benefit by the labor of co- or pan-ethnic workers, as well (or much) as on the racial/cultural idea that co- or pan-ethnic people should all belong to the same class.

In short, the assumption underlying Kwang's idea that the black and Korean groups' coalition building based on their economic and political interests and their commonalities is vital to bring their conflicts to an end and thus, as a first step, Korean merchants should not be reluctant to hire black people is, in effect, that black people can be regarded as docile and hardworking employees as much as Koreans. Which means that the systemic exploitation of black labor by Korean small-scale capital is the inevitable outcome of his pan-ethnic enclave economy. As Bonacich puts it, pan-ethnic enterprise creates a false illusion that "capitalism works, even for those who are clearly oppressed by the system, if only they girded their loins to take advantage of the system" (1993 691).

So it is a complete mistake to think that the growth of Kwang's wide-ranging ethnic enclave could be an ideal solution to the poverty and deprivation of urban minority

groups; it is still a problem rather than a solution. As Peter Kwong clarifies in his study on illegal Chinese immigrants and American labor, it is one of today's "dominant neoconservative" political strategies to induce American people to recognize "the lack of a work ethic and the failure of family values" as the prime causes of the national malaise, and thus to look "with envy" upon the Korean (or Asian) immigrants' ethnic enclave entrepreneurship (whose maxim is that "loyalty is superior to profit") as "a superior form of economic entity" for making and keeping high profits (1997A 135). For example, in *Migrations and Cultures* (1996), Thomas Sowell, an eminent conservative economic and social theorist, puts forward a claim that "the rise" of a remarkable group of immigrants (in his case, the Japanese) "from their initial role as low-paid, unskilled laborers to middle-class occupations in the second and later generations" can be understood as posing a challenge to "widely held beliefs as to the historical causes or contemporary prospects for advancing poorer racial or ethnic minorities" (137).

Sowell's main idea is that "future improvements [in the national economy] depend upon how much of present efforts go into developing the internal resources of a

group [what he calls cultural or social capital]" (383) as a firm basis for the ethnic or pan-ethnic enclave. Yet the problem with this idea is that, as already suggested, it deliberately denies and neglects the social and economic costs borne by the working members of the group under the guise of development, namely the fact that it involves reforming or, more precisely, removing all existing labor laws, labor benefits, and union protections for them. Kwong contends that "this form of ethnic chauvinism ignores the conditions of class exploitation suffered by the [ethnic] immigrants at the hands of their co-ethnic employers," and goes on to affirm that "lowering our labor standards and compromising our democratic principles in exchange for discipline and productivity . . . is not a responsible solution to our national crisis" (137).<sup>38</sup> Another more controversial way to put this would be to say that the Kwong-type pan-ethnic enclave economy, which aims to lift

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<sup>38</sup> Here, it is worth quoting Kwong's main contention in full: that "the ethnic enclaves thesis exaggerates the ethnic solidarity and mutual aid tendencies, and ignores the equally important problems of competition and exploitation within these communities"; that "within the [ethnic] immigrant community, while ethnic support and mutual-assistance exist, those who have wealth, education, and arrived here [America] earlier, established a dominant position to speed up their capital accumulation by exploiting less fortunate co-ethnic newcomers"; and, in conclusion, that "'ethnic solidarity' has increasingly been manufactured by the economic elite within the [ethnic] community to gain better control over their co-ethnic employees" (1997B 366).

urban minority people out of poverty, is one of the best  
and most brutal ways to plunge them into poverty.

#### IV. Assimilation, Self-Identity, and Racism in Younghill

##### Kang's *East Goes West* and Kichung Kim's "A Homecoming"

#### IV.1. Koreans as Labor, or the Nature of the Model Minority

##### Myth

In America, "[h]ow will he eat?" (39), Elaine H. Kim asks anxiously about Chungpa Han, the protagonist of Younghill Kang's 1937 novel *East Goes West*, in her seminal book *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context* (1982); Chungpa has just been completing his journey to America and congratulating himself on having escaped "futile martyrdom" (a danger of "death" from "torture") in Korea under the Japanese colonial rule. But the joy of his escape is short lived and he begins to suffer from hunger and poverty: "[I]n utter solitude and with a chilling heart, I feared pavement famine with plenty all around but in the end not even grass to chew." Chungpa says, "[I]t was hard to concentrate. Even in the midst of Hamlet's subtlest soliloquies, I could think of nothing but food" (Kang 32-33).

Kim emphasizes that even though Chungpa seeks "an opening into American life" through scholarship and study (in particular, Shakespeare scholarship), he is simply

denied a job at the Harlem YMCA, which is "reserved for whites" only, and must instead work as a domestic servant for a white family who treat him "like a cat or a dog" (39-40). Chungpa, of course, does not cease to hope that he will some day open the "closed book" of the true New Yorker and enter into a new and exciting American life. But to the end of the novel, as Kim points out, Chungpa is mocked by "an endless series of locked doors" to the American life (40); his experiences in every possible area of America only reinforce his "essential isolation and misfit" (43). Kang's *East Goes West* tells the story of a Korean exile being alienated from American society and so desperately wanting to assimilate into it.

A problem with eating food, if not precisely the bread-and-butter problem, Kim notes, is of great significance to Namshin, the protagonist of Kichung Kim's 1978 story "A Homecoming" as well. Namshin, who has returned to Korea after a long residence in America to visit his aged parents, can hardly bear to "eat the poor [Korean traditional] fare his mother prepares for him"; furthermore, he is highly displeased by "his father's noisy chewing and swallowing" (Kim, *Asian American Literature* 277). Rather, it is his uncle who had lived for thirty



years in America that Namshin can feel comfortable with. Although the uncle had not been "anything but an alien . . . [in America], never for instance becoming familiar enough with the language to understand the jokes on television," Namshin finds it easier to talk to him because the elder man knows about America and because they can "drift into English" (Kim, "A Homecoming" 128-29).

Namshin cannot just think of himself as a Korean the way he used to: "Although it is impossible for him to be accepted by the Koreans as an American," as Elaine Kim explains, "he wants to view Korea and Koreans as an American might" (Kim, *Asian American Literature* 277). At the same time, however, despite the fact that "he'd taken a job and taken out citizenship papers," Namshin is forbidden full membership in American society by a rigid sense that he is a mere "guest" in his new home country. Throughout the story, he is caught between America and the land of his parents, and "finally forgets who he is" (273). Kim says that Korean immigrants such as Namshin, having "a feeling of homelessness, of not belonging anywhere," "do not feel that they are real participants in American life, yet they know that they would be unable to resume the life they left behind them" (276). Kichung Kim's "A Homecoming" tells the

story of a Korean alien being deprived of his identity and so pursuing a search for it in America.

Hence, perceiving their thematic similarity (an issue related to eating food), Elaine Kim distinguishes between *East Goes West*, an early immigrant autobiography that expresses the immigrant's desire to obtain his own livelihood in America, and "A Homecoming," a contemporary Asian American writing that presents the immigrant's attempt to construct a self-defined cultural identity. In her view, while Kang's novel involves a commitment to assimilation, Kim's story involves a commitment to self-identity. The point, then, of her distinction of the two texts would be that they are not just different but they are effectively opposed: for while, as she observes, the commitment to assimilation (the commitment, say, to "bid for acceptance in white society by turning [one's] back on [one's] past") is entailed by an act of self-denigration, the commitment to self-identity (the commitment, say, to "regain [one's] strength and dignity by recreating [one's] past through [one's own] eyes") is required by an act of self-definition (*Asian American Literature* 229, 232). Indeed, if the former is a rejection of the latter, then the latter is a refusal of the former. "The option of

assimilation," Kim says "is in fact cultural genocide because it threatens to rob Asian Americans of their true past," of their "cultural integrity" (257). In this respect, it seems plausible—and even clearly right—to think that *East Goes West* and "A Homecoming," set in two different time periods, the early and late twentieth centuries, are telling two conflicting stories and making two conflicting commitments.

Kim's ultimate contention, however, is that these two texts should not be understood as opposed to one another, since they should be understood as, of course in a different way, responding to American racism. The reason why Kang's and Kim's protagonists, Chungpa and Namshin, come to have desires for assimilation and self-identity, respectively, is that they as Korean (nonwhite) immigrants are prevented from being integrated into or fully and equally participating in mainstream white society, and thus constantly relegated to the status of foreigners in a racially/culturally divided world. In Kang's case, for example, Chungpa remains a foreigner in the political and economic status; he is not permitted to achieve citizenship and an authorized job. And in Kim's case, Namshin remains a

foreigner in the ethnic and cultural status; he suffers from paranoia, a split personality, and an identity crisis.

*East Goes West* and "A Homecoming" make similar efforts to struggle against and to overcome American racism, a political-economic racism or an ethnic-cultural racism. What Chungpa's self-denigration—by way of assimilation—really means is that he aspires to be political-economically an authentic native in America by getting citizenship and a job. And what Namshin's self-definition—in favor of self-identity—really means is that he aspires to be ethnic-culturally a true native in America by recovering from paranoia and an identity crisis. Chungpa and Namshin's common goal, in other words, is to bring an end to a racist division and discrimination between American natives and Korean foreigners, thereby constituting and establishing their new nativeness in their new country. Elaine Kim might thus claim that Chungpa's commitment to assimilation, insofar as it aims to gain a new *identity*, is turned into a commitment to self-identity, and Namshin's commitment to self-identity, insofar as it aims to gain a new identity, is turned into a commitment to assimilation.

As has already begun to be shown, however, the real difference between the two texts that Kim seems to fail to clarify is that Chungpa wishes to be an American native in much the political-economic sense, whereas Namshin wishes to be an American native in much the ethnic-cultural sense. In short, they are responding to two different kinds of racisms. If, for Chungpa, American racism is a political-economic kind blocking Korean immigrants from acquiring a social-class position (i.e., the rights to work and private property), for Namshin, American racism is an ethnic-cultural kind excluding Korean immigrants from obtaining a social-subject position (i.e., the rights to cultural identity and selfhood). They do not undergo and suffer from each other's particular racisms. Chungpa, for example, is not the victim of a racism to which Namshin falls victim: though he has difficulty in achieving citizenship and an authorized job, he does not suffer from paranoia and an identity crisis. Obviously Chungpa still considers himself Korean, an exile who feels "keenly" "the terrible fear of dying among strangers far from home"; he believes that his homeland is Korea. And Namshin is not the victim of a racism to which Chungpa falls victim: though he suffers from paranoia and an identity crisis, he has no difficulty

in achieving citizenship and an authorized job. Namshin has "taken a job and taken out citizenship papers" without any notable obstruction; he belongs to the middle class. One brief—but probably very clear—way of describing the difference between the two kinds of racisms would thus be exactly as the difference between Jim Crow racism in the segregationist era in the early twentieth-century and Double Consciousness racism in the post-segregationist era in the late twentieth-century.<sup>39</sup>

In this light, the first and primary account of the relation between *East Goes West* and "A Homecoming" is a historical one: namely, they deal with two different racisms of two different time periods. *East Goes West* might be said to depict how the white men in the early twentieth century America treated the Koreans, as Ronald Takaki puts it in *Iron Cages: Race and Culture in 19th-Century America* (2000), as "a permanently degraded caste labor force," that is, as "a unique 'industrial reserve army' of migrant laborers forced to be foreigners forever, aliens ineligible for [naturalized] citizenship" (236). Meanwhile, "A Homecoming" might be said to portray how the white men in

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<sup>39</sup> On the historical and critical accounts of the distinction between Jim Crow and Double Consciousness types of racisms, see Adolph Reed Jr., *W. E. B. Du Bois and American Political Thought: Fabianism and the Color Line*.

the late twentieth century America subjugated the Koreans, as David Palumbo-Liu puts it in *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier* (1999), to "the debilitating dualism of schizophrenic pathology" by which they are looked upon as "perpetual ethnic [and] diasporic foreigners" who can be broken down into their American part and their Korean part (303, 387). But the second and more important account of the relation between the two is a theoretical (or logical) one: eradicating and defeating one type of racism, Kang's Jim Crow racism, is in fact a necessary precondition for creating and sustaining the other type of racism, Kim's Double Consciousness racism.

In Kang's Jim Crow racism, the main problem is that because you are a Korean, you cannot achieve citizenship and an authorized job, which is to say that you are not an American but still Korean. In this situation, it is almost impossible for you to raise a question about selfhood, a question of who you are. You know who you are: you are a Korean. In Kim's Double Consciousness racism, however, the main problem is that since you are stuck between America and Korea, that is, since you are neither an American nor a Korean, you do not know who you are and suffer from paranoia and an identity crisis. Only in this situation, it

becomes eventually possible for you to raise a question about selfhood, a question of who you are. One crucial thing to note is that: to say that you are neither an American nor a Korean is actually—and entirely conversely—to say that you are a half-American/half-Korean, or, more precisely, that you are regarded as an American in Korea, while on the contrary you are regarded as a Korean in America. “[T]he ontological grounding for racial duality,” as Palumbo-Liu says, “is produced by the fact that the racial subject is at once marginal and central, like and not like” (300). Thus, it is only when he becomes a half-American, only when he partially (“incompletely” in a positive sense) accomplishes the task of assimilating into American life, that a Korean immigrant can have a question about selfhood in the first place; if he is not an American at all yet, a Korean immigrant can hardly have that question.

What, then, does it exactly mean for him to be half-American/half-Korean? As well exemplified by Kim’s *Chungpa*, it means that one is political-economically American as a middle-class citizen, but one is ethnic-culturally un-American as a racial/cultural Other. Indeed, since the late 1960s, as Eui-Young Yu notes in her 1982 research on the



occupation and work patterns of Korean immigration, "discrimination at work on the basis of ethnic or racial origin has been largely eliminated at least somewhat in the legal sense," and for this reason, "the clear majority [of recent Korean immigrants] den[y] that they [have] experienced discrimination at work" (67). And, as Yu goes on to add in her 1983 study on Korean American communities, at the moment when they have reached middle or upper ranks in their jobs, at the moment, that is, when they have been fully assimilated to the middle-class American political-economic life, the Koreans become aware that they "likely remain outside the social circles of the white majority," and come to feel "cultural ambivalence, fear of social rejection and identity crises—all resulting in feelings of powerlessness, frustration, and self-degradation" (46).

That Korean immigrants no longer have the problem of a political-economic blockage is therefore formulated as the logical requirement that they have the problem of an ethnic-cultural exclusion. Which is just to say that the rise of Kim's Double Consciousness racism has to count as a crucial mark of the decline of Kang's Jim Crow racism. The fact that Korean Americans fall victim to Kim's Double Consciousness racism can function to testify to the fact

that they do not fall victim to Kang's Jim Crow racism.

The point here is that Korean Americans face an identity problem, since they have become economically stable and secure; it is not that they face an identity problem, even though they have become economically stable and secure. It is only when the political-economic differences or gaps between minority Korean and majority white somehow disappear that the ethnic-cultural differences between them begin to appear and come vividly into the fore.

At the same time, however, it would be wrong to say that Korean Americans currently no longer have the problem of political-economic assimilation, but they only have the problem of ethnic-cultural identity. For the problem of identity must be understood to eventually lead back to the problem of assimilation; as Kwang Chung Kim and Won Moo Hurh put it in their 1983 critical study on the success image of Korean Americans, Korean Americans are, as ever, made "relatively more difficult" to attain and maintain "a level of social status and privileges similar to that of the dominant group" because—even though they can be considered a successful ethnic group in America—they are confined as "a culturally or physically distinct group of people" "singled out for differential and unequal treatment

and therefore excluded from full participation in the life of the society" (7). Although Koreans can feasibly rise and belong to the same high class as whites (in the early 1980s, as Kim and Hurh stress, the Koreans have already achieved equal or even higher levels of education to that of whites and gained access to professional-technical occupations proportionally higher than whites), they must make greater costs or investments than that of whites for such an achievement or reward. From this standpoint, the function of ethnic-cultural exclusion is to put Korean Americans in perpetual jeopardy of political-economic blockage, of threatening and damaging their social-class position, not merely their social-subject position.

Hence, Kim and Hurh insist that the notion of Korean Americans as a model minority should be seen as a "myth"; middle-class Koreans are still a disadvantaged minority within the American labor market when compared to the same class whites. They could be assumed to be no longer a disadvantaged or minority group only if they make costs or investments equal to that of middle-class whites for the same rewards or achievements. In the end, then, with regard to Korean Americans' identity problem, it might be more

plausible to say that just as what mattered in their assimilation problem was their social-class position, what matters in their identity problem is also their social-class—not merely their social-subject-position: namely, the steady upward ascension and promotion (as well as the stability and security) of their social-class position. Their efforts to establish a self-defined identity, their efforts to get out of a half American state, need to be understood as intimately related to their struggles to remove or minimize *all* obstacles to attaining and preserving their social status and privileges—as a high or middle class.

One fundamental question that should thus be raised at this point is that: Are Chungpa's desire for assimilation and Namshin's desire for self-identity really about being a new American or a sincere Korean American? What are the true natures of their desires for assimilation and self-identity? Ultimately Chungpa's desire for assimilation does not seem to be about being a new American. It is because the matter of achieving citizenship and a job is, in effect, not the same as the matter of being a new American. The question of whether you are middle class or not, the question of how much money you own, is different from the

question of whether you are an American or not, the question of who you are. Likewise, Namshin's desire for self-identity does not seem to be about merely being a new American. It is because what is truly at stake in the matter of recovering from paranoia and an identity crisis, insofar as its aim is to remove the relative difficulty of being middle class, is not so much the question of whether you are an American or not, the question of who you are, as the question of whether you are middle class or not, the question of how much money you own. Consequently Chungpa's and Namshin's desires for assimilation and self-identity must be understood not (or not just) as ethnic-cultural projects but essentially as political-economic projects. Their shared project for being a new American is primarily motivated and even presupposed by a project for entering and staying in the middle class.

Indeed, for Koreans in America there are no ethnic-cultural issues that are not intimately linked to political-economic issues because they have come to America not as Koreans, an ethnic tribe, but as labor, to be more precise, a potential labor force. The point, in short, is that their old and new immigrations to America should be viewed as labor migrations rather than the sorts of archaic

mass exoduses that register refugee migrations. Their resistance to Kang's type of racism in the early twentieth century was virtually a struggle to earn group recognition for their rights to free wage labor and private property, and after the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s and the Immigration Act of 1965 that made it possible for them to win that recognition, their resistance to Kim's type of racism in the late twentieth century was a struggle not only to defend but also to demand more recognition for their approved labor and property rights. And if it is true that Koreans in America have fundamentally been a labor force rather than an ethnic tribe, it will also be true that they have played so significant a role in creating profits (or surplus values) for American capital, true that they have provided their labor for capitalists at a cheap price, even though they have succeeded in lifting themselves into the middle (or even upper-middle) class. "Korean immigrants were the kind of workers U.S. Capitalists were likely to welcome." As Edna Bonacich and Ivan Light remark on the economic character of labor

emigration from Korea to America, "Korean labor was cheap and desirable to U.S. Capital" (124).<sup>40</sup>

But it would be profoundly incorrect to say that Korean immigrants have served simply as a cheap and desirable labor force for American capitalists, to say that they have been somewhat passive and helpless victims of labor exploitation by capital, because, as earlier mentioned, they have been economically quite successful compared to other minority or migrated ethnic groups—particularly, they have been considerably prominent in small business entrepreneurship. Between 1972 and 1982 (mostly in Los Angeles and New York), as Bonacich, Light, and Charles Choy Wong describe it in their research on Korean American entrepreneurship, large numbers of Koreans moved into small business (that tended to be concentrated in certain lines such as wholesaling and retailing, service shops, independent professions, and garment industry subcontracting) and achieved a modest but nevertheless substantial growth of their business to the point where

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<sup>40</sup> It should be noted that, as Light and Bonacich emphasize, immigration from South Korea to the U.S. in the late 1960s and 1970s was causally connected to Korea's involvement in world capitalism. This means that the majority of Koreans who decided to immigrate to the U.S. (or the Koreans who were the most likely candidates for emigration) were derived from the classes economically dislocated by U.S. capitalism in Korea, that is, by their extensive use of Korean cheap labor.

they could make a decent living by American standards (See 177-78). In 1980, for instance, the median family income of Koreans (\$20,459) reached up to 97.4 percent of that of whites (\$21,014), while the incomes of other ethnic groups, blacks (\$12,627) and Hispanics (\$14,712), were only 60.1 percent and 70 percent of it ("A Cohort Analysis of Korean Immigrants' Class Backgrounds and Socioeconomic Status in the United States" 77).

For Korean entrepreneurs, according to Bonacich, Light, and Wong, there were two unique-internal and systemic-factors by which they were able to succeed. First, the cheapness of the Korean business, enabled by "mobiliz[ing] [Korean or other] immigrant cheap labor," "utiliz[ing] paternalistic ties with the workers in order to subvert discontent and avoid unionization," and "bear[ing] the costs of management," allowed it to be more competitive relative to other groups' businesses. Second, American monopoly capitalism, the so-called big corporations, encouraged the Koreans to enter small business and play a middleman minority role to the crowds, especially disprivileged minorities, "helping to distribute corporate products, and bearing the brunt of hostility, crime, and low profits accruing to retailers and service



shops in poor areas" (179-80). After all, then, it could be said that Korean entrepreneurs occupied a very ambiguous class position between the corporations and the immigrants; on the one hand, they, like the corporations, were in a capitalist position to exploit the immigrants, but on the other, they, like the immigrants, were in a laborer position to be exploited by the corporations. This ambiguity, however, is so soon resolved, since it is revealed that insofar as they performed a middleman service for the corporations, they were in a (middle-)manager position to help the corporations exploit cheap immigrant labor, which was kept docile and nonunionized through paternalism and community ties. The point is that Korean entrepreneurs need to be seen as well-paid laborers who aided the American capital in exploiting poorly-paid laboring masses; in other words, they were not just a cheap and desirable labor force for capitalists, but an exceptional sort of labor being able to supply such a cheap and desirable labor force for them.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> For more on the middleman economic role of Korean immigrants in America, see Pyong Gap Min, *Caught in the Middle: Korean Communities in New York and Los Angeles*, and on a more general theory of middleman minorities, see Edna Bonacich, "A Theory of Middleman Minorities."

The question, then, is: if Korean Americans have served as a labor for American capital, that is, if they have been the victims of labor exploitation by American capital (though it is true that as a middleman group, they have been exploited in a very different way than other laboring masses), why have they always been regarded as the victims of American racism, Kang's Jim Crow type in the early twentieth century and Kim's Double Consciousness type in the late twentieth century? Why, from this perspective, has the sort of politics that could be significant for Korean Americans always been thought to be an anti-racist one, through which they strive to be recognized as new or sincere Americans? In their 1996 book *East to America: Korean American Life Stories*, for example, Elaine Kim and Eui-Young Yu make a crucial statement that Koreans in America, "consider[ing] their ethnic community organizations essential to their immediate psyche and material survival," have to try to "suggest new ways of thinking about America and different ways of being American" (xxi-xxii). Kim and Yu's claim is that the Korean group's efforts to resist racism by claiming their own racial unity as well as their new-Americanness is the best way to help themselves materially and financially by

resisting capitalism, and that such anti-racist efforts must be the whole point of Korean American literary studies and politics. Evidently, thus, Kim and Yu have a tendency not to separate and decide between anti-racist and anti-capitalist politics. Or, more precisely, they tend to fail to see the difference and to comprehend the exact relationship between racism and capitalism.

Of course, it should not be neglected that there may be a possibility for the anti-racist politics to be an ideal form of resistance to capitalism, to the exploitation of labor by capital. But just the opposite is true; it is because racism (and for that matter, anti-racism) must be deemed to operate for the benefit of capital in the sense that it can obliterate or render invisible the relation between labor and capital by making people solely focus on the relation between races, mostly between whites and nonwhites. The basic assumption of racism is that whites are the beneficiaries of the American racial regime and nonwhites are its victims. Yet seeing that the racial regime must in fact be the capitalist one, while it may be right to say that exploiters are whites and exploited are nonwhites, it may *not* be right to say that whites are exploiters and nonwhites are exploited. "[T]he racial

dichotomy [of whites and nonwhites],” as Harry Chang sharply puts it in his 1985 essay on the Marxist theory of racism, “is not directly translatable into the class distinction [of capital and labor]” (42). The mere racial fact of being a nonwhite tells “little” about whether a person is a laborer or a capitalist. The problem with anti-racism is thus that by failing to consider the relation between classes, between laborers and capitalists, not only within the same race but also across all races, it could produce deep internal divisions and conflicts amongst laborers and so effectively interrupts the unionization of laborers (it really has done it very well for the last half century). That is, the problem is that the Korean group’s anti-racist projects of assimilationism and identitarianism have never spoken for the whole of the working class but only for the small section of the middle class.<sup>42</sup>

A succession of social transformations during the 1960s and 1970s in Korea such as industrialization, urbanization, and the expansion of higher education, according to In-Jin Yoon’s 1997 research on Korean Businesses in America, gave birth to “a new urban middle

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<sup>42</sup> On the distinction between the working-class class politics and the middle-class sectional politics, see Sam Gindin, “Unmaking Global Capitalism.”

class" that had growing expectations of upward mobility. But, Yoon notes that it was hardly possible for the members of this class to realize these expectations within the country, for the standard of living in Korea was so "low" that their chances for upward mobility were thoroughly and from the beginning hindered by lack of job opportunities and high level of labor exploitations that included long hours at very low wages (98). (Per capita income in Korea was \$251 in 1970. It increased to \$1,355 in 1980, but it was only 1/8 of per capita income in America in the same year [Min 9].) Hence, many middle-class Koreans chose to immigrate to America as a means to overcome the ("structural and cultural") limitations of satisfying their desire for upward mobility in their native country; "the dominant strand" of Korean immigration to America from the late 1960s to the early 1980s, as Yoon puts it, was the "movement of middle-class people seeking better economic and educational opportunities" in a new and far more advanced nation (98).

The crucial thing about Korean immigration to America is therefore that it has had at the outset something to do with a desire to fully take advantage of American capitalist system, a desire to maximize the chances of

success within the system; it has had nothing to do with a desire to eliminate or, at least, mitigate the capitalist exploitation of labor.<sup>43</sup> The Korean group's anti-racist movements in America have been originated and deployed primarily for the purpose of entering and staying in the (upper-)middle class. Which means that they have been quite so pleased to become simply active and voluntary victims of capitalism in their new country, since, even though they have benefited from the system in terms of the growth in their wealth, they have been nonetheless unalterably subjected to exploitation by the system in terms of their role as laborers in class structure. The adequate and only possible way that they can produce a class politics which aims to eliminate the exploitation of labor by capital—the way, that is, in which they can cease to be the victims of capitalism—would be first and foremost to shift their focus away from the racial relations between whites and nonwhite Koreans to the class relations between capitalists and laborers, and thereby to attempt to develop a class

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<sup>43</sup> The reason why many Korean immigrants, who, despite their education and ability, could not find and succeed in white-collar professional occupations owing to their language barrier and unfamiliarity with American customs, turned to small business or self-employment was that they considered it an effective means of achieving upward mobility. See Pyong Gap Min, "From White-Collar Occupations to Small Business: Korean Immigrants' Occupational Adjustment."

consciousness, telling that they are not an independent section of the middle class or, even worse, a lower part of the bourgeois, but an upper part of the working class, a part of the proletariat.<sup>44</sup>

#### **IV.2. The Critique of Korean-American Cultural Politics**

Nevertheless, there seems to be room for reasonable doubt that the Korean group's anti-racist politics of class ascension, though it ends up being nothing other than a sectional petty-bourgeois politics, will not necessarily be incompatible with the working-class politics of class abolition, and thus that the Koreans will probably be able to be committed to both of the sectional and the class politics all at once. Indeed, it does not seem to be an impossible idea that insofar as and because the Koreans must be ultimately identified and acknowledged as members of the working class, their sectional efforts to improve

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<sup>44</sup> Here, it may be worth noting that there is a deep logical problem with the idea of the middle class as such. The middle class can in principle be defined as an intermediate one that stands between the bourgeoisie (the capitalist class) and the proletariat (the working class); which is to say that they own their means of production but at the same time they sell their labor power to make their livelihood. But this idea is wholly contradictory because one owns one's means of production should mean one does not have to sell one's labor power and one sells one's labor power should mean one lacks one's means of production. So it would not be logically possible for a class to belong to both of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat at once.

their socio-economic status will barely contradict the entire laborers' class efforts to improve their socio-economic status. The idea is that, as Kim and Hurh argue, if American capitalists have sought higher profits and greater controls over the labor processes through the use of labor market segregation, a mode of racial and ethnic oppression by which minority workers, quite unlike white male workers, are refused "entry" into the "favorable labor market" (14-15) (by which, as already suggested, they are kept as a disadvantaged minority within the American labor market), then the politics of granting and ensuring minority workers such as Korean immigrants an "equal" and "full" access to the labor market will be one of the key, if not the absolute, ways of resisting the exploitation of labor by capital. Indeed, this is what Michael Omi and Howard Winant have in mind in their influential 1986 book *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*, when they claim to view race as "a profound determinant" of "one's location in the labor market"; "the allocation of workers of distinct places in dual/segmented/split labor markets," they assert, "ha[s] been dependent on race as organizing principles or rules of the game" (67). For Omi and Winant, producing the anti-



racist politics of a fair and inclusive labor market can properly count as a major contribution toward class politics.

The problem with the idea of a fair labor market, however, is that it actually fits into the economic logic of neoliberal capitalism, the American ruling class's project of restoring their class power, namely a massive upward redistribution of wealth to the richest group at the top, by re-building an efficient labor market that makes it possible for the system to do well in managing its structural crisis in the smooth and continual accumulation of profit and capital or, more precisely, in controlling what Karl Marx called "the tendency of the rate of profit to fall" in advanced economies (See *Capital Vol. III* 317-38). In his classical 1962 text *Capitalism and Freedom*, for example, the nation's leading neoliberal economist Milton Friedman has asserted that "discrimination against groups of particular color . . . is *least* in those areas where there is the greatest freedom of competition" and has added that in the neoliberal economy capitalists must "use resources as effectively as he can, regardless of what the attitudes of the community may be toward the color, . . . or other characteristics of the people he hires" (109; my

emphasis). That is, what has been at the very heart of neoliberalism since the late 1960s is a project of disconnecting economic efficiency from all the characteristics of the individual such as race and ethnicity, which is just in line with anti-racist political projects to get rid of all the forms of refusals to hire workers because of their race and ethnicity.

It is for this reason that, as Adolph Reed Jr. argues in his 2009 study on the limits of anti-racism, the race line, along with anti-racism as a race-line politics, has been itself a class line, "one that is entirely consistent with the neoliberal redefinition of equality and democracy." His point here is that the politics of a fair labor market mobilized by Korean or Asian American radical thinkers should be understood as principally premised on "the view that the market is a just, effective, or even acceptable system . . . and that, therefore, removal of 'artificial' impediments to its functioning like race and [ethnicity] will make it even more efficient and just."<sup>45</sup> And in this sense, it makes much more sense to think that

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<sup>45</sup> Reed ends up his essay by saying that "the 'left' antiracist line that we must fight both economic inequality and racial inequality . . . looks suspiciously like only another version of the evasive 'we'll come back for you' [after we do all the business-friendly stuff] politics that the Democrats have so successfully employed to avoid addressing economic injustice."

the anti-racist politics of a fair labor market has made less an effort to help organize and deploy a class politics than an effort to bring forth what Marx called an increasingly growing "industrial reserve army" whose main function is to provide cheap labor for capitalists; "this surplus population," Marx says in *Capital Vol. I*, "becomes . . . the lever of capitalist accumulation, . . . a condition for the existence of the capitalist mode of production" (784).<sup>46</sup> The creation of a relative—or perhaps more precisely, the greatest possible—mass of the industrial reserve army in proportion to the active labor army has been "the absolute general law" of the neoliberal capitalist accumulation.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Marx's point is that: "The greater the social wealth, the functioning capital, the extent and energy of its growth, and therefore also the greater the absolute mass of the proletariat and the productivity of its labour, the greater is the industrial reserve army. The same causes, which develop the expansive power of capital, also develop the labour-power at its disposal. The relative mass of the industrial reserve army thus increases with the potential energy of wealth. But the greater this reserve army in proportion to the active labour-army, the greater is the mass of a consolidated surplus population, whose misery is in inverse relation to the amount of torture it has to undergo in the form of labour. The more extensive, finally, the pauperized sections of the working class and the industrial reserve army, the greater is official pauperism. *This is the absolute general law of capitalist accumulation*" (798; emphasis original).

<sup>47</sup> On the creation of a large industrial reserve army in the U.S. since the 1970s made possible by the immigration of Koreans (or Asians) to the U.S., see chapter 2, "Wishing for a Home: Race,

Hence, it is completely a mistake to believe that the Korean American-type politics of anti-racism could mark a step toward organizing the working-class politics of anti-capitalism; rather, it could be more or less perfectly compatible with neoliberalism. Indeed, it would be far more accurate to believe that the Korean group's concern for inventing a new American identity, their concern for, to use Elaine Kim's terms, "defining [themselves] according to the truth instead of a racial fantasy" (1987 88), despite its original good intention to make an antagonistic reaction against the new right and the neoconservative backlash of the Reagan administration to the gains of the 1960s movements for racial justice and equality, has, in effect, ironically resulted in a severe deterioration of the class relations between capitalists and laborers (an economically polarized society) through a great betterment of the racial relations between whites and nonwhite Koreans (an ethnically/racially egalitarian society). Therefore, as earlier made clear, the only proper way to produce the whole working-class workers' class politics rather than the middle-class Korean group's sectional politics is, above all, to realize that "the new middle class" of small

business entrepreneurs like Korean Americans, as Richard Sobel convincingly argues in his 1989 study on the American working class, "is not a separate class, or in contradictory locations between classes, but part of the stratified working class" (5); in other words, it is to realize that the merging of middle-class Korean labor into the American working class can and will only generate greater political activity.

**V. Beyond Empathy: Neoliberal Unemployment and the  
Aesthetics of Utopian Collectivity in Ed Park's *Personal  
Days* and Ae-ran Kim's *Contrail***

Of America today "how serious a hardship is unemployment?" (52) asks Martha C. Nussbaum in her 2004 book, *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law*. Her answer is that "unemployment is stigmatized," and her idea here is not that the unemployed are denied their talents and wishes, but that they are deprived of the right to "live a life with human dignity." Accordingly, she claims that employment is the minimum necessary for an American person to take her or his place in society without shame, as a citizen whose worth is equal to that of others: "[The] provision of employment," she says, is a matter of "the greatest urgency for any society that wants to call itself a decent one" (286). One obvious way of understanding Nussbaum's argument is thus as a reaction to U.S. neoliberalism, a project, as David Harvey explains in his 2007 essay, "Neo-Liberalism as Creative Destruction," to restore class power to ruling elites not only in the U.S. but everywhere else in the advanced capitalist world. For the process of neoliberalism—what Harvey calls

*"accumulation by dispossession"*—entails "the deliberate creation of unemployment [in order] to produce a pool of low-wage surplus labor convenient for further accumulation" (38).

The "full and equal humanity" agenda that Nussbaum vigorously pursues to build "a 'facilitating environment' within which citizens of many different kinds [the unemployed as well as employed people] can live together with dignity and mutual respect" (341) could indeed be seen as an attempt to alleviate the inequalities produced by the neoliberal economic policy of enlarging unemployment and reducing employment (although it is a bit of an irony that her agenda is also grounded in a kind of political liberalism). And, as Nussbaum notes, central to that agenda is emotional empathy and sympathy, the ability to identify across social strata and thereby have pity or compassion for human suffering, which can especially be developed through the experience of appreciating literary, artistic, musical works, etc.:

A rightly focused fear and grief will be appropriate emotions for citizens who understand that human life is menaced by significant dangers

and that loss of the most valuable things is always possible. Such sentiments will motivate citizens to care about the secure and fair distribution of resources to all. By the same token, positive emotions of gratitude and love prove important to citizens who depend upon one another, and upon social institutions, for many of the goods they experience in life. (345)

For Nussbaum, empathetic and sympathetic emotions are not just salient aspects of human experience, but the things that political scientists must be made aware of and take an interest in. She claims that the capacities for empathy and sympathy can form the basis for political thought and action in the neoliberal era. Yet how can we make sense of her claim? Is it right to suggest that some range of emotions can contribute to organizing an anti-neoliberal politics? What role exactly can aesthetic empathy, with its capacity to elicit human warmth and sympathy for such social others as the unemployed, play in supplying an alternative to neoliberal unemployment?

This chapter stems from my attempts to comprehend and to respond to those questions. I wish to demonstrate how



important the empathic appeal to full and equal humanity is to a leading Marxist thinker Fredric Jameson's utopian project, in particular his radical demand (as opposed to Nussbaum's liberal one) for universal employment, and how Karl Marx's class project primarily relates to an aesthetics that sets itself against cultivating empathy. The class project, as opposed to the utopian one, declines to view the unemployed as social others and accepts them from the outset as an internal part of the working class. Using examples from novelists such as Ed Park and Ae-ran Kim and photographers such as Eric Kim and Woon-Gu Kang, I argue that if we are interested in participating in the Marxian class project rather than the Jamesonian utopian project, we will find that a commitment to aesthetic ontology—an anti-empathic practice—is much better for our purpose than a commitment to political immediacy—a pro-empathic practice.

In the following two sections I will try to show in detail how Jameson articulates a utopian project that seeks to address poverty, suffering and marginalization, and, after all, critically differentiates itself from Marxism; that is, the way it seeks to address these ills not through overcoming capitalist economic structures, but through the

development of new forms of collective identity. Whereas for Marx, it is necessary for members of the working class to have a heightened sense of their exploitation so as to deepen class conflict and thus mobilize revolutionary action, for Jameson, what is required is the constitution of collectives within which individuals can have a sense of solidarity and belonging, and which ideally takes place at the level of the nation. In the fourth section I will explore two novels *Personal Days* and *Contrail* that can be understood as doing the proper aesthetic, representative work to promote the Jamesonian project rather than serve the Marxist project. The idea here is twofold. First, I argue that to promote these two political projects, we require forms of representation that raise the consciousness of the reader/viewer so as to sensitize them to the particular problem that they need to be moved to tackle and act upon. Second, because those projects involve a different form of consciousness (empathy or recognition of exploitation), they will be served by different aesthetic, representative practices. In the concluding section I will try to show that certain forms of photographic practice better serve the Marxist project.

### **V.1. The Utopian Demand for Full Employment**

In his 2004 essay on the politics of utopia, Fredric Jameson suggests—even more strongly than Nussbaum in the same year when she articulated anti-unemployment agenda—that unemployment is the root of all evil, causing all the substantial hardships in our current society, such as poverty, starvation, squalor, violence, and death (accompanied by crime, war, sexism, racism, and so on): “all can be diagnosed as so many results of a society unable to accommodate the productiveness of all its citizens” (38). From this perspective, he proposes that the most radical utopian demand to make on neoliberal society would be “the demand for full employment” (37). Yet in this essay, Jameson’s interest is scarcely in delineating how best we can establish full employment in our society; rather, it is in affirming that full employment is incompatible with neoliberal capitalism, which structurally requires a reserve army of the unemployed to function and to avoid inflation. Jameson’s whole point in raising the utopian idea of a fully employed society is so that it can “play a diagnostic and a critical-substantive role,” to serve as “a critique of tendencies at work in capitalism today” (38).

This is not to say that Jameson understands his utopian idea of full employment only as a critical and diagnostic instrument rather than a political vision and program. In the essay, he indicates the possibility of an alternative system in which full employment can be established, which would first and foremost involve overcoming "the disintegration of the social" (35). And in his recent 2016 book on the universal army as a new form of collective social life, Jameson fully elaborates on how we could fulfill our desire for a system of "universal labor," what he sees as equivalent to a socialist utopia. His controversial but profoundly practical proposal is that "the army" is a likely candidate for the generation of a new socioeconomic structure to provide full employment. The conscription of everyone in society into a military organization, he argues, is a powerful—actually, the only—way to transgress the boundaries between social strata, e.g. the employed and the unemployed, and thus to guarantee a universal and stable distribution of employment (say, to "virtually the entire adult population"). In other words, the strength of the army scheme is that it is a useful mechanism for including all members of the society, or, to

put it in Jameson's own terms, for "securing a certain collective unification and leveling" (69).

Consequently, Jameson asserts a universal army, based on the draft, would produce "the [new] nation" itself, because the army's principally social-collective, rather than military-combat, mission will become a vehicle and platform for the "fraternization" of a variety of organic—local and provincial—groups (ethnicities, class types, etc.),<sup>48</sup> which is exactly the main point of what he calls "cultural revolution." For this reason, Jameson's insistence on the advantage of the army form is primarily related to imagining and constructing a national or nationalist, that is, a particularly "American," utopia. His idea, as Agon Hamza notes, is "to inscribe the whole of the American people in the American army complex" (165) for their cooperative and harmonious intermingling under the name and authority of the nation, America. In short, the basic premise of his utopia is that ensuring that everyone in society is allocated a job or a task relies on achieving

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<sup>48</sup> In the same way, Jameson declares that Mafia narratives such as *The Godfather* perform a utopian function: "the tightly knit bonds of the Mafia family, the protective security of the (god-)father with his omnipresent authority, offers a contemporary pretext for a Utopian fantasy which can no longer express itself through such outmoded paradigms and stereotypes as the image of the now extinct American small town" ("Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture," *Social Text* 1 [1979]: 147).

social unification and leveling on a fully national scale. We might then say that Jameson's universal army is an effort to come up with a specific measure within the U.S. national context to realize full and equal humanity agenda called for by Nussbaum.

In his book's epilogue, for example, Jameson describes the situation of universal labor in the following way: "Old [work] clothes in the morning. . . . Perhaps the vision of everyone trudging to work in the morning . . . is a new way of handling and aestheticizing necessity—nothing wrong with it. The consensus is that no one likes work. . . . [But] if everyone has to work, then you don't feel quite so resentful. . . . ([T]he everyone, at whatever level, should be paid . . . a guaranteed minimum annual wage)" (307). Linking this universal employment with the reduction of work time to the minimum necessary, he continues: "[T]he real crime . . . is starvation. This is what utopia, and everything else, is all about. It is what socialism is all about, and I feel it may not have been clear enough in the original proposal that *work, production, the base, is what the universal army is also all about*—your three or four hours in the morning. After that, change your clothes and . . . do what you like" (308; my emphasis).

Of course, it is important to see that Jameson's utopian society, despite its apparent claim to be an American one, is essentially posited as "the multitude" which is difficult, indeed impossible, for "reason" to "think, let alone to name" (31). By rehabilitating the idea of nationalization or a nationwide draft, Jameson emphasizes the nation's valid role in absorbing the "otherness" of society, what he calls the entire "population as such" (32), thereby bringing into being a genuine mass democratic system. The people he would include in America's universal army are not merely the nation's existing populace but, in Deleuze's words, "Un peuple à venir [a people to come]," "implying that any name, by suggesting that such a thing already existed, [is] an oppression and a normative or repressive ideology" (31). In this respect, Jameson's utopian collectivity and his utopianism in general should be thought of as marked by a sense of openness towards Others; in an essay on globalization and political strategy, he follows Partha Chatterjee in arguing, "A nationalist impulse must always be part of a larger politics that transcends nationalism," and "the very goal of national liberation has demonstrated its own failure in its realization" (65).

For Jameson, literary empathy and its capacity to elicit the reader's human warmth and sympathy for Others—namely, its ability “to show you that you are not alone”—is pivotal to fostering a sense of utopian solidarity itself and of utopian agency. In his 2000 essay on Philip K. Dick's empathy-test and collective project, he states that “[t]he crucial point about ‘empathy’ . . . is that . . . it is enacted in the form of ‘fusion’ with the other,” and he goes on to maintain that it is “impossible to imagine any identification with the other short of a merging together of the two subjectivities” (367). His reading of Dick's novels underscore how the science fiction writer's protagonists are immersed in “a human and collective,” which prevents them from remaining in “subjectivism and radical isolation.” Jameson focuses on Dick's attack on solipsism: Dick's novels bring one's individual consciousness into contact with otherness and external reality. This is just to say that their function of inspiring empathy with Others for the purpose of recognizing their equal humanity is a way to perform precisely what Jameson calls the “fusion of humanity as a whole” (219), effacing the distinction between individual



and collective; it is a utopian gesture or action. In his 1982 essay memorializing Dick's death, Jameson writes:

Dick's work. . . . It is a literature in which the collective makes a fitful and disturbing reappearance. . . . It is, finally, a literature of the so-called "death of the subject," of an end to individualism so absolute as to call into question the last glimmers of the ego, as when, in one of Dick's most chilling stories, an executive in an android-producing firm makes the shattering discovery that he is himself an android. "We didn't want you to know," his fellow employees console him gently, "we didn't want to tell you." (347)

## **V.2. Social Line versus Class Line**

In his early 1976 essay on the relationship of Marxism to utopian thought, Jameson argues that Marx's and Engels's strictures on utopian socialisms, e.g., those of Saint-Simon, Fourier, Owen and others, may be considered as exposing and denouncing "the absence of any mechanism for implementing their vision" (52). In Marx and Engels, he

claims, the utopian comes to signify the impractical and unrealizable in the sense that it does not necessarily, and indeed rarely does, specify the concrete historical agent—the proletariat—required to effectuate a systemic transition from capitalism to socialism: in (vulgar) utopianism, “the will to change society is deflected into wishful thinking about gradual reforms and revisions” (54). Yet Jameson concludes that Marx and Engels ultimately argue in defense of utopian socialism; they look upon it as something that is “subject to more urgent and vigilant correction than other more obviously antagonistic forms of thought” (53), namely they question its practical capacity to evolve into an active-practical political program but not its ultimate ethical or political significance.

Contrary to Jameson’s understanding, however, the chief point of the Marxist critique of utopian socialism is to reveal its fundamental reactionary and unrevolutionary character. In their 1848 *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels allege that insofar as utopian socialism is committed, on the ground of certain fantastic/utopian pictures of a future society, to an “attack [on] every principle of existing society” and “a general reconstruction of society,” it works, in effect, as a bad

historicism whose end result is "the disappearance of class antagonisms" (74). By making an "appeal to society at large, without distinction of class," as well as by seeking "to improve the condition of every member of society, even that of the most favoured" (73), Marx and Engels declare that the utopian socialists "endeavour, and that consistently, to deaden the class struggle and to reconcile the class antagonisms" (74). Therefore, Marx's and Engels's ultimate contention is that "all political action on the part of the working class," what they call a proletarian revolution, "can only result from blind unbelief in the new gospel," that of utopian socialism (75). What matters to them is less the utopian project's lack of historical agents than its ignorance of class relations.

In fact, the reason why Jameson cares about the Marxist critique of utopianism is that he seems to know and even admit himself that his utopian project, exemplified, for instance, by the universal army, does not absolutely aim at mobilizing a class politics to eliminate the relation of production between capital and labor, i.e., the exploitation of labor by capital. In his book on American utopia, Jameson explains that the utopian society the army organizes is a society of "classlessness," and the point

being made here is that such a production of classlessness is in effect one of building not "some genuinely classless or communist utopia" but "a national or nationalist one" (71). The army as a utopian form, he stresses, "does not abolish social classes altogether by way of some new social structure," but rather "suspends it" by means of the "forced intermingling of the social classes" within the "nation" (71). Indeed, what he means by classlessness is the social-harmonious or peaceful—"promiscuity" between classes; it is not so much the termination of class distinction and class struggle. Jameson ends his book by remarking that he honestly prefers the word socialism to communism, implying that in the utopian situation, "'class struggle' now applies more to the construction of socialism as such rather than to the defeat of the class enemy" (315).

In other words, Jameson tends to see the problem with the capitalist class structure not as labor's *exploitation* by capital but rather as the individual's *isolation* from the collective (this is why he insists, "capitalism is not a form of collectivity!" [312]). For that reason, a utopian politics, instead of a class politics, is his alternative to capitalist class struggle. Jameson makes this clear, for

example, when addressing the dialectic of utopia and ideology in the final chapter of his seminal 1981 book *The Political Unconscious*: there he argues that all class consciousness, whether of the ruling-class type or of the working-class type, is utopian, as long as it articulates the unity of a collectivity. The indicator of all class consciousness, Jameson says, can be found in "the dawning sense of solidarity with other members of a particular group or class" rather than "the latter's [economic] 'contents' or ideological motifs" (290). To him, the social properties of a class are more important than the economic properties of a class (which is why he focuses primarily on class "consciousness").<sup>49</sup> Consequently, when analyzing ruling-class culture and ideology, he has more interest in its "affirmation of collective solidarity," that is, its social-utopian function, than its "instrumental function to secure and perpetuate class privilege and power" (291). The goal of his discussion of class is to turn class into a

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<sup>49</sup> "In order for genuine class consciousness to be possible," Jameson says, "we have to begin to sense the abstract truth of class through the tangible medium of daily life in vivid and experiential ways;" in other words, we must enter "the domain of culture and no longer that of abstract sociology or economic analysis" ("Class and Allegory in Contemporary Mass Culture: *Dog Day Afternoon* as a Political Film," *College English* 38, no. 8 [1977]: 845).

group identity; it has little to do with trying to find a way to remove the conditions that produce class.

Just to be clear, it is worth noting that the aim of Jameson's famous political-aesthetic model, "cognitive mapping"—which undertakes "a representation of the social totality [that] now must take the (impossible) form of a coexistence of those [individual subjects'] sealed subjective worlds" (350)—is also to detect and establish "a cohesive form of human society" or "collective" (355); it is not really, to use Marx and Engels's terms, a "formation of the proletariat into a class" nor an "overthrow of the bourgeois supremacy" on a global scale (*Communist Manifesto* 51). In this context, as he grasps the task of offering "a vision of the future that grips the masses" as one of the most urgent ones that confront Marxism in the era of late capitalism (or neoliberalism), Jameson asserts, "That vision will not be purely economic." He goes on, "It is, as well, supremely social and cultural, involving the task of trying to imagine how . . . a society of [all] free people . . . can possibly cohere" ("Cognitive Mapping" 355). It might be said that his project of cognitive mapping, as Cornel West astutely points out, inevitably lead to

"substituting a total class/party politics for the politics of new social [utopian] movements" (360).<sup>50</sup>

Indeed, this social totality or human collective is integral to Jameson's understanding of Ernst Bloch's hermeneutics of hope, designed to survey the "utopian impulse" found in the mirror of ordinary life, from games to patent medicines, from architecture to technology, from jokes to tourism and so forth. Following Wayne Hudson, a scholar of Bloch's contributions to Marxism, Jameson argues that "identity" serves as a foundation for Bloch's construction of a world adequate to the various outlines of a better life—a (future) identity of "individual" ("body") and "community" ("collective") appearing beforehand in the intensive experiences of the individual, thereby manifesting a symbolic intent to realize such an identity in the world (*Archaeologies* 2). The goal of Bloch's hermeneutic is to provide a glimpse into the way unleashing and investing in the utopian impulse lead towards a final form which is the figure of the collectivity, best exemplified by Olaf Stapledon's "minded swarm of sentient

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<sup>50</sup> Thus West says that "Jameson's bad utopianism is but a symptom of the major political shortcoming of his work: his texts have little or no political consequences. . . . [H]is sophisticated Utopianism seems to be part and parcel of the American penchant for unquenchable faith in History and irresistible hope for romantic triumph" ("Fredric Jameson's Marxist Hermeneutics," *boundary 2* 11, no. 1 [1982]: 197–200).

beings," in which "though there [is] only a single, communal 'I,' there [is] also, so to speak, a manifold and variegated 'us,' an observed company of vary diverse personalities" (8).

What is crucial here for our purposes is to see that Jameson's recent close reading of *Capital* Volume I, which significantly revises Marx's notion of the reserve army of labor—an army, that is, of the unemployed—also appears to endeavor to replace a Marxian class politics with his own utopian one. To elucidate what he calls the "general law" of capitalist accumulation, Jameson explores and underlines Marx's idea of a total oneness of capitalist production and unemployment: "The greater the social wealth, the functioning capital, the extent and energy of its growth, and, therefore, also the greater the absolute mass of the proletariat and the productivity of its labour, the greater is the industrial reserve army" (707). Jameson comprehends this idea in terms of the subject-other relation: the law of the capitalist system in full expansion is a sustained enlargement of an army of the unemployed, as the system's "Others," as much as—or indeed, far greater than—a mass of the proletariat, as the system's "subjects" (*Representing Capital* 126). Marx's *Capital* as a spatial form, he says,



consists in "the search for this ultimate reality of the unrepresentable," the "hunger itself" of those unemployed "Others" (126), of "those massive [surplus] populations around the world who have, as it were, 'dropped out of history,' who have been deliberately excluded from the modernizing projects of First World capitalism" (149).

But Jameson's comprehension may be the reverse of what Marx intends, which is that the army of the unemployed must be understood as included in, rather than excluded from, the system, insofar as it functions to diminish the proletariat's bargaining power in wage negotiations and thus makes possible capital's accumulation of surplus value. Due to the relatively large rate of unemployment, the proletariat is forced to sell its labor power for capital in a relatively cheaper price. This is what Marx means when he says that "relative surplus population is . . . the pivot upon which the law of supply and demand of labour works" (*Capital*, Vol. 1 639), and when he says that "the greater this reserve army in proportion to the active labour army, the greater is the mass of a consolidated surplus population, *whose misery is in inverse ratio to its torment of labour*" (707; my emphasis). Thus, Marx's "general law" is meant to foreground the line of class

division between capital and labor—especially by unifying the active army and the reserve army into a singular class group. Jameson's revisionist understanding of the law, by contrast, highlights the line of social division between the inner-active army and the outer-reserve army, i.e., between the representable employed group and the unrepresentable unemployed group. If Marx's class line is involved in creating a politics of anti-exploitation, one that aims to redistribute wealth and power between capital and labor, Jameson's social line is related to generating a utopian politics of anti-exclusion, one that aims to recognize economic Others and their equal humanity, thereby accepting them as members of society.

Put in these terms, we could say that Jameson's utopian call for full employment (let alone Nussbaum's) may not actually be about fighting to end class exploitation. Of course, it seems plausible at this point to raise a question: Isn't it true that, although it does not work toward eliminating class division as such, Jameson's project can at least play a role in eliminating unemployment and poverty? It is probably true. Even so, it leads to another—more important—question: Isn't it wrong to fail or to refuse to take employed workers as victims of

the capitalist system, instead regarding unemployed people as the only principal victims? Indeed, the defining goal of Jameson's project is employment, to give people proper jobs; in his paradigm, the employed workers are imagined as beneficiaries rather than victims of the system. How can workers, not just employers (capitalists), possibly be economic recipients? As Marx clearly puts it in his *Capital* Volume I, the "employment of a large number of wage-labourers . . . forms the starting-point of capitalist production. This starting-point coincides with the birth of capital itself" (367). The truth is that *both* the employed and the unemployed parts of the working class should be seen as victims. For Jameson, after all, the problem is unemployment, not exploitation, and the solution is employment, not communism; it does not really matter to him that employment is the very start of labor exploitation. In other words, Jameson overlooks the fact that when the unemployed obtain employment, they do not solve their problem but rather begin to suffer the real problem.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> As Phillip E. Wegner's informative essay, "Horizons, Figures, and Machines: The Dialectic of Utopia in the Work of Fredric Jameson," *Utopian Studies* 9, no. 2 (1998): 58-77, makes clear, the primary concern which has been central for Jameson's utopian thought is to construct an ontologically new society, what Wegner describes as "an allegorical or indirect pre-figuration of an as-of-yet unrealized future," of "a radically other form of existence," rather than just building an economically equal

### V.3. The Feeling of Being Unemployed, The Sense of Being Collective

I turn now to the production of empathy in two recent works of fiction: Ed Park's *Personal Days* (2008) and Ae-ran Kim's *Contrail: Stories* (2012). Both of these works deal with unemployment in the contemporary neoliberal economy: it is perhaps no coincidence that they came out in the U.S. and South Korea, two advanced capitalist societies, at a time when both nations have the highest unemployment rate since the late-1970s.<sup>52</sup> We will see that these two novels have formal and aesthetic similarities, as well as similarities of content: they both use specific techniques (broadly speaking, "realistic" ones, which seek to collapse the distance between reader and fictional character) in order to create empathy on the part of the reader with the

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society (whether the two things are related to each other or not). This becomes clear when Jameson takes an interest in "the deeper historical currents of a society:" "History is," he says, "like Heideggerian Being. . . . [I]t emerges and disappears; one has to seize it at the moment of emergence" ("Antinomies of the Realism-Modernism Debate," *Modern Language Quarterly* 73, no. 3 [2012]: 479-80).

<sup>52</sup> This does not mean that globalization outside the US is simply identical to neoliberalism within it. The point is that the developments of neoliberalism both within and outside the US are characterized by the creation of unemployment for the production of a pool of surplus labor convenient for capital accumulation. For an account of the neoliberal development in Korea, see Bae-Gyoon Park, Richard Child Hill, and Asato Saito, eds. *Locating Neoliberalism in East Asia: Neoliberalizing Spaces in Developmental States* (Maiden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

plight of unemployment (and its concomitant situation both of economic impoverishment and of social exclusion and shame). In doing so, we will associate this aesthetic strategy with the utopian universalism of Martha Nussbaum and Fredric Jameson.

Through the voices of their main characters, *Personal Days* and *Contrail* declare themselves stories of "layoff" and "job-seeking." As faithful reflections of the ever-increasing unemployment rates among young people since the financial crises in the U.S. (2007-2008) and South Korea (1997-1998), they tell of a young set of office workers' struggle to cope with restructuring in their company and of, to take one story among many, a young college-graduate's attempt to find a job, which ends in tragedy. But the point of the two novels is not that they—their narratives or plots—thematize the fear and pain of being unemployed or barred from good work. Rather, it is that, as critics like Min Hyoung Song and Chan-je Wu acutely point out, they develop and utilize a "form," an innovative and experimental one, which can "literalize" the fear and pain of unemployed youths, and so give readers a powerful way to "empathize" with them. How exactly, then, do Park and Kim's novel-forms do it? Strangely, Song and Wu do not elaborate

on that. In the following discussion, we grapple with that question.

*Personal Days* and *Contrail* have one obvious formal feature in common: both take the epistolary format in their last sections. In *Personal Days*, Jonah, the only employee who survived the corporate catastrophe is now trapped in an elevator; he sends an email to Pru, a co-worker who has just been fired—an email expressing his true nature and his affection for Pru while explaining all he knows about the office situation or politics. And in *Contrail*, Su-in, a college-graduate who, after a failed attempt to get a decent job, joined an illegal multi-level marketing (MLM) company and drove her institute pupil Hae-mi to commit suicide, writes a letter to Seong-hwa, an old friend who just passed the teacher certification examination after eight years' preparation; this letter confesses her love for Hae-mi and her deep regret about what she has done to her.

In these sections, readers experience reading Jonah's email and Su-in's letter, written in the "I" voice, along with Pru and Seong-hwa. No narrators' or third parties' voices intervene between us and Jonah and Su-in. We are really invited to identify with them. In both these cases,

therefore, the epistolary format is used, as Lynn Hunt notes in her 2007 research on the history of literary empathy and human rights, to “make possible a heightened sense of identification, as if the character were real, not fictional” (42).<sup>53</sup> We are moved by these sections not because of their plots, even though they are heartfelt and genuine, but because their forms encourage our (psychological and imaginative) identification with the characters, Jonah and Su-in. The epistolary novel can offer truly unbroken presentations of the characters’ emotions and thereby enable its readers to empathize with the characters. Hunt says, “You feel the same feelings that the characters are feeling” (55).

This empathetic identification of a reader with a fictional character, enabled by a literary technique such as the epistolary format, is more thoroughly illuminated in Peter Goldie’s *The Emotions: A Philosophical Exploration* (2000). Goldie defines empathy as “a process or procedure by which a person centrally imagines the narrative (the thought, feelings, and emotions) of another person” (195). As much as possible you imagine yourself being the other

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<sup>53</sup> For discussion of empathy and literary form, see Suzanne Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007) and Meghan Marie Hammond and Sue J. Kim, ed. *Rethinking Empathy through Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

person. You thus need a "substantial characterization" of the other person, including all the psychological and other properties that might affect how the person reacts to things, as well as a grasp of "the narrative" that one is imaginatively enacting, with the other person as narrator. "Empathizing with another person," Goldie says, "involves imagining the enactment of a narrative from that other person's point of view," namely, "'imagining being X,' where 'X' stands for the narrator with whom [one] empathize[s]" (397).

The key to empathizing with a character in the novel is, as Goldie explains with reference to Richard Wollheim's experience of reading Gibbon's history of the Roman Empire, especially his narrative of "the entry of the Sultan Mahomet II into Constantinople in 1453," "I [the reader] might visualize the event from a point of view of one of the characters involved in the event," and thereby "imagine the event centrally" or, more specifically, "centrally imagine what the Sultan [the character-narrator] says and does and feels, or [] imagine him from the inside" (411). A crucial point of Goldie's account is that the reader's empathetic access to the character's emotional experience regarding the event in the novel takes place wholly through



acts of imagination (or mimesis); it does not take place through some actual, direct experiences of the event as such. That is why Goldie insists that characterization and narrative, rather than the event as a source of emotional experience, are (independently) necessary for empathy.

Here, what is essential to note about *Personal Days* and *Contrail* is that they do more than just use the epistolary format to invite the reader to centrally imagine the character's narrative (thoughts, feelings, or emotions). Their formal interest is not really in reviving and re-expanding the epistolary novel, a conventional genre dating, as Hunt notes, to late-eighteenth-century England and France (for example and most prominently, Richardson's *Pamela* and *Clarissa*, and Rousseau's *Julie*). Instead, they are interested in inventing and experimenting with a new (more contemporary) literary technique that can foster and strongly reinforce the reader's empathetic identification with the fictional character.

In *Personal Days*, what causes Jonah and other co-workers to feel anxious and scared about their dismissals is the letter "J" on a post-it memo stuck on the desk of their boss Sprout, which they regard as implying that those whose names begin with this letter are the ones who will be

fired. In *Contrail*, the cause of Su-in's feelings of pain and sorrow regarding her job-finding activities is her institute pupil Hae-mi's cell-phone text messages, asking for help and indicating that she plans to take her own life. In both instances, the novels encourage their readers to feel what the characters feel by providing some vivid or accurate account of the characters' emotions: how Jonah and other co-workers feel when they see the memo and how Su-in feels when she sees the messages, are well-described from the characters' own perspectives, while Jonah's and Su-in's feelings are shown in their epistolary writings. In addition, however, these two novels make their readers centrally imagine themselves having the same emotions that the characters are having—precisely by inserting, in *Personal Days*' case, the memo (see fig. 1), and, in *Contrail*'s case, the messages onto the pages. Along with the characters, the readers can actually see the signs arousing the characters' emotions with their own eyes.

I flashed back to that mysterious, anxiety-stirring Post-it that Laars saw on the Sprout desk, the famous note that ran *JASON DJ, FM/AM?* and was signed—J. (211)

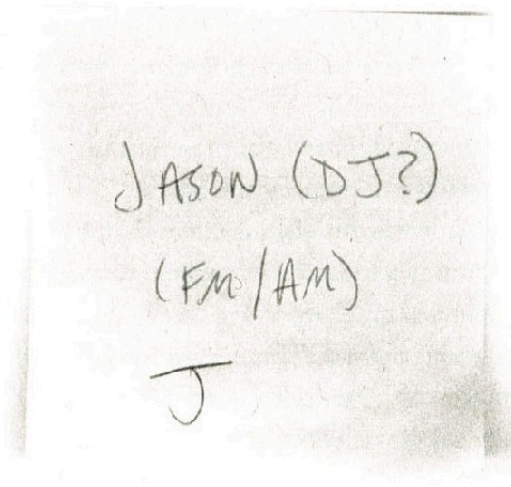


Figure 1.

Seong-Hwa, a series of messages Hae-mi sent to me are stored in my old phone. "Su-in, this place sucks. Is this how things are. Su-in, I'm hungry. Buy me a meal. Su-in, why don't you answer my texts. Su-in, give me a call. Su-in, where are you. Su-in, call me please. Su-in, get me out of this place . . ." (263-64)

In both cases, of course, simply placing the memo and the messages on the pages would not ensure that the readers have the optical experience of seeing them by suspending their act of reading them. It is because, insofar as the memo and the messages originally consist of symbolic texts,

not iconic images, whether the readers take them as actual visual objects or as purely textual units is undeterminable. *Personal Days* and *Contrail* thus similarly employ a unique formal technique for evoking and activating their readers' sensation of sight. Just before the memo and the messages appear, they highlight their characters' acts of detecting and observing the letters or words written in the margins of a paper; Jonah writes, "I noticed . . . the first five letters along the bottom were *J, A, S, O, N*" (210)' and Su-in writes, "You wrote these on the edge of the postcard. 'Time goes by, but the past remains here'" (263). This technique serves as a crucial guide for the readers' act of seeing the memo and the messages, and so as the key to provoking them into centrally imagining themselves in the characters' narratives of misfortune.

In this sense, the effect that Park and Kim's novel-forms seek to produce on their readers can be understood as what Marie-Laure Ryan calls "immersion" in her 2003 research on narrative and virtual reality; immersion "creates within the mind of the reader an entire world that resonates with the reader's own real emotions" (89). When the reader's body is imaginatively projected or absorbed into the textual world where the events are virtually

taking place, the reader's emotions become quasi-real ones. According to Ryan's conception of the fictional text as a "game of make-believe" (106), in immersive novels such as *Personal Days* and *Contrail* text units stop signifying absent actual objects, but instead they are seen as present actual objects; every time the readers see the memo and the messages, they gain an experience that counts in make-believe as an encounter with the memo-object and the message-object that exists in its own right, which allows them to acquire the very feelings that the characters are acquiring when the latter see the memo and the messages.

Hence, reading *Personal Days* and *Contrail* prompts us to step into other people's places, to put ourselves in the situations of today's unemployed youths (like Pru and Hae-mi), and to bring home to ourselves all the pain and fear that they endure; it is, as Park and Kim put it in their interviews, to forge a "bond of affinity" between us and the sufferers. If this is the case, then the two novels can be said to construct what Nussbaum calls "judicious spectatorship" in her 1995 study of literary emotion and public justice, by which she means that the spectator comes—with his sympathy and compassion—to acknowledge the sufferer's equal humanity and deem her a fully human being

with stories of her own to tell, only when he vividly feels what it is like to be in the same (unhappy and poor) situation she is in. Nussbaum says, "It is this . . . emotion of the judicious spectator that literary works construct in their readers, who learn what it is to have emotion, not for a faceless undifferentiated mass, but for the uniquely individual human being" (78).

In *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (1992), Nussbaum fully pursues the question as to what the moral significance of the spectatorial feeling is. Following Adam Smith's theory of moral sentiments, she argues that morality basically involves "thinking of oneself as one person among others, bound by ties of friendship and sympathy to those others"; she then goes on to point out that these ties involve two further things: "First, they require us to look around us, taking thought, so to speak, for all that we can see. And they involve, too, general social conversation, the giving and receiving of justifications and reasons" (345). Therefore, Nussbaum proclaims that the spectatorial feeling is constitutive of humanity—of our procedures and practices for "express[ing] our concern for fellow beings and bind[ing] them to us in a network of mutual concern" (345). Her point is that reading

novels brings us into the morally good viewpoint quite naturally, from which we can "look at all the scene before [us] with fond and sympathetic attention, caring for all the people, and caring, too, for the bonds of discourse that hold them all together" (346).

Putting the point in this way is to suggest that reading novels like *Personal Days* and *Contrail* will ultimately lead us to the ethical decision that we need to protest the unequal or inhumane treatment of those suffering unemployment and enable them to make a decent living as human beings. Indeed, the novels raise a fundamental political question: if the unemployed are human beings just like the employed, why do they have to live in subhuman circumstances without any true social care and concern, suffering from unequal disadvantages? The moment when, as a sympathetic participant in *Personal Days* and *Contrails*, one feels the suffering of the unemployed is, in effect, also the moment when one must ask from a moral, ethical standpoint whether they deserve to suffer like that. Hence, Nussbaum contends that "the novel-reading stance calls out for political and social equality as the necessary condition of full humanity for citizens on both sides of the line" (97)—that is, between the employed, a

privileged, dominant group, and the unemployed, a marginalized, oppressed group.

In *Empathy and the Novel* (2007), Suzanne Keen also emphatically states that empathy, "a vicarious, spontaneous sharing of affect, [which] can be provoked by witnessing another's emotional state, by hearing about another's condition, or even by reading," is thought to be "a precursor to its semantic close relative, sympathy," and thus to be absolutely associated with "prosocial or altruistic action" (4). Her idea here is that novels can contribute to awakening and extending readers' sense of the humanity of members of out-groups such as the unemployed, since empathetic reading experiences set off a chain reaction engendering mature sympathy and unselfish behavior. "The affective transaction across boundaries of time, culture, and location," Keen says, "may indeed be one of the intrinsic powers of fiction and the novel a remarkably effective device for reminding readers of their own and others' humanity" (xxv).

In fact, to recognize and support the full and equal humanity of the unemployed is the fundamental purpose of Jonah's and Su-in's mails. Jonah, the employed, writes in his email to Pru, the unemployed, "*I'm sorry*," in order to



express his "regret" and "sympathy" for him (220). And Su-In, the unemployed, writes in her letter to Seong-Hwa, the employed, "*Thank you*," in order to express her gratitude to her for "remembering" and "acknowledging" her (264). The core message Jonah and Su-in want to convey to their addressees is that although we, the employed and the unemployed, now seem to be divided into two different social stratas, in truth we are members of the same human community (it is no accident that Jonah views Pru as his "ally" and Su-in regards Seong-Hwa as her "sister"). Jonah and Su-in might say, therefore, that as human beings of equal worth, unemployed people too have a right to live and enjoy a decent level of income or property.

From this point of view, we can begin to understand that novels like *Personal Days* and *Contrail* can operate as a form of imagining and structuring a Jamesonian collective life. The novels' function of inspiring empathy with the unemployed for the purpose of recognizing their equal humanity amounts to what Jameson calls an effort to establish the unity of a collectivity. Just like Dick's work, *Personal Days* and *Contrail* can be said to be a literary version of a utopian project, one that permits the individual subject to fold back into the sphere of the

collective. The problem, however, is that, as we've seen, having a sympathetic pity or compassion for the unemployed is utterly different from having a clear comprehension of the structural conditions that give rise to unemployment. Emotions such as pity and compassion might be precisely what one does not want if one wishes to develop in the reader a rational recognition of the structural underpinnings of economic injustice. The point is that empathizing with the suffering of the unemployed does not in itself lead to a critique of the structural conditions of neo-liberalism or political action. Rather, as Sujatha Fernandes correctly claims, it can push in the opposite direction insofar as it works to "individualize[] the nature and meanings of [such] suffering," "by presenting victims as individuals rather than collective political subjects, by leaving out the systemic dimensions of abuse such as [unemployment]" (20).

#### **V.4. Conclusion: Toward an Aesthetic of the Working Class**

If we can consider novels like *Personal Days* and *Contrail* as aesthetic practices for the Jamesonian utopian project in that they provide a means to empathize with unemployed Others, then how can we imagine and shape an

aesthetic practice that will support and develop, by contrast, the Marxian class project? An aesthetics that refuses to deem the unemployed as Others and accepts them from the outset as an essential—a structural—part of the working class, is one that will set itself against cultivating empathy. Notably, this antagonism between (pro-empathy) utopian aesthetics and (anti-empathy) class aesthetics tends to be staged much more dramatically in photography than in literature today. For, as Susie Linfield says in her 2011 study on photography and violence, “[P]hotographs bring home to us the reality of physical suffering with a literalness and irrefutability that neither literature nor painting can claim. . . . Photographs excel, more than any other form of either art or journalism, in offering an immediate, viscerally emotional connection to the world” (39). The point is that the photograph is more effective at provoking empathy than the literary text, since, as Roland Barthes stresses, the former is fundamentally “a message *without a code*” (199), a platform better suited to register a “perfect analogon” of reality than the latter, which can at best give only a representation of reality. (We ought to remember that it is precisely at the moment when they convert symbolic signs

into photographic images that *Personal Days* and *Contrail* achieve the intended effect of creating empathy.) With this in mind, we can explore the dynamic interplay between Jamesonian utopian aesthetics and Marxian class aesthetics in photography. We will compare two contemporary photographers, Eric Kim and Woon-Gu Kang, and contrast the former's aesthetic of universal empathy to the latter's aesthetics of distancing.

The Korean American street photographer Eric Kim's 2012 series *Dark Skies Over Tokyo* documents the urban working poor, a group that, though its members have work, actually should be classified as unemployed, considering their inability to find full-time jobs (see fig. 2): "I see people in Tokyo," Kim says, "squished into these subway cars, working 80 hour weeks, just in order to make a living, and not 'lose face' in society." Controversially, Kim claims that the core purpose of the series is less to make "photos" than to make "connections": "What matters the most," he insists, "whether I can empathize with a subject in a photograph" rather than, say, whether I can put a photographic frame around a subject. His goal in documenting the working poor, therefore, is to give the viewer a chance, by "feel[ing] their suffering or their

happiness [mostly, of course, suffering],” to “connect with” them and appreciate their “humanity.” Kim’s unique way of putting this is to say that street photography is an “‘applied’ sociology:” “I tend to be a bit of a social critic. . . . I have a great love of humanity, yet I see so many individuals oppressed by society”—that’s why he shoots street photography.



Figure 2.

This sociological intention explains why Kim tries to infuse his photographs with a set of human emotions particularly based on his subject’s “facial expression” (see fig. 3): “The most important thing is to capture a meaningful, interesting, or emotional moment—and to share

that moment with others," he proclaims; "A photograph without emotion is dead." The facial expression of a subject can act as a powerful call to the viewer's empathy. Hence, in terms of how to arrange a frame, the key thing in his composition is "timing" or "when to hit the shutter" to catch what the pioneering street photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson famously describes as a "decisive moment." Indeed, in Cartier-Bresson, "the expression on a human face" is conceived of as one of the most decisive ("fugitive" and "transitory") moments to be seized (37). According to him, facial expressions somehow bear "factual testimony" to "the personality." Kim's composition, in short, is intended to furnish the viewer with a sense of the pure intensity of something personal, that is, something emphatic and affective, while inviting her or him to directly witness the emotion being pictured. It is no accident that Kim urges, "Photograph only what you think is going to be personal to you, rather than what others will think is a 'good' photo." It could therefore be said that Kim's street photography aims at creating the effect of Barthes's *punctum*. For it denotes a "detail" within a photograph that personally "pricks," "wounds," or "bruises"

a particular viewer's subjectivity (27),<sup>54</sup> thereby making sure that the viewer-subject establishes an intimate relationship with the subject of the photograph and has an encounter with intersubjectivity or humanity.

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<sup>54</sup> For a good account of the literalism of Barthes's *punctum*, see Walter Benn Michaels's "Photographs and Fossils," in *Photography Theory*, edited by James Elkins (New York: Routledge, 2007), 431-50.

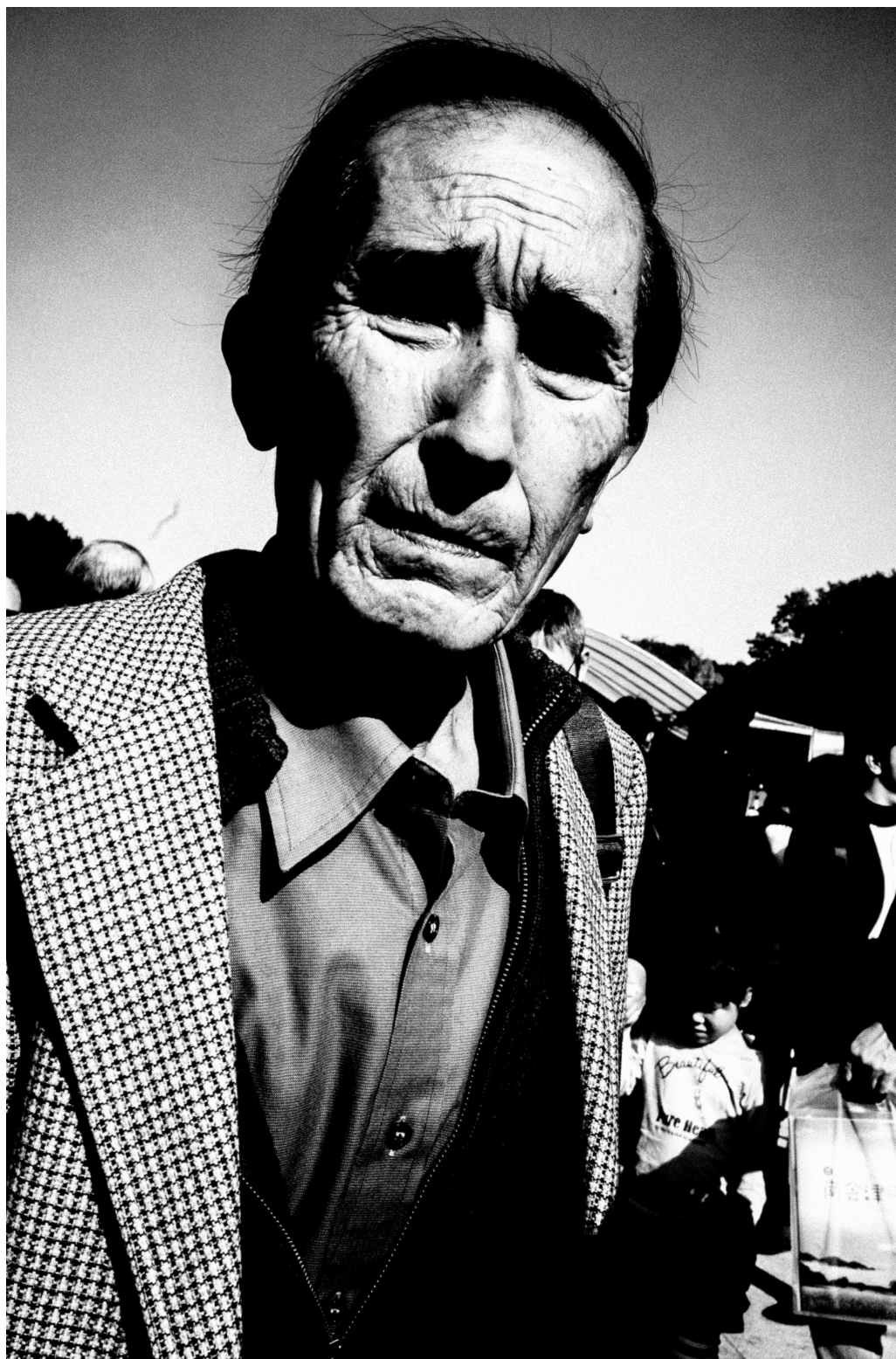


Figure 3.



Similar to Kim, the subject matter of the South Korean documentary photographer Woon-Gu Kang's 2008 series *Embracing Evening*, especially the first section entitled "Soil and Land," is the working poor, or more precisely, modern tenant farmers in a rural area. They exist in a hopeless state, with zero chance of being hired by any decent or even small local companies; they exemplify what Kang calls "the grim faces of hunger and poverty" in "rural Korea" (364). Unlike Kim, however, Kang's photographs of rural hunger and poverty do not have any actual hungry and poor people in them; instead they show their (deep) footprints on the ground (see fig. 4): "I thought," he says, "it would be better to carry the traces of farmers' work in an indirect and subtle way by registering their footprints, rather than directly show their faces." Thus, as a result, these footprint photographs deprive the viewer of her or his opportunity to feel empathy toward the rural poor, their pain and hardship. There is no one to empathize with. And Kang's idea of a complete absence of any wretched rural people in his pictures leads to a refusal, to use Kim's terms, to connect with human subjects and appreciate their humanity. He has no interest in being a social

critic: "I take pictures of rural areas," he says, "not to help out" but "to record" the rural areas (364).



Figure 4.

What Kang means to say by insisting on photography's recording ability, a conviction that "it is the essence of photography to record and validate physical reality," is not so much that photographic recording can be "absolutely objective"; he implies rather that there is no photographic work in which the photographer's "subjective uniqueness" does not actually exist. "A *crash* or *tension* between the photographer's subjective uniqueness and the object's reality," he claims, "defines the photograph as art" (93). Therefore, Kang insists on the irrelevance of Cartier-Bresson's "decisive moment" to the compositional principle of his work. Noting the art-ontological problem in Cartier-Bresson's commitment to achieving an objectivity ("the decisive moment caught by the photographer will not always be objective"), he announces that he wants to obtain a "decisive scene" rather than a decisive moment; what he means by "decisive scene" is the assertion of the "frame" (and, of course, of the photographer who arranges it), which is to say, the total "simultaneity" of "capturing the object [its 'cold objectivity']" and of "placing a ['unique subjective'] frame around it" (94). It is not a coincidence that in one of the footprint photographs, Kang includes a

seedbed full of rice seedlings, which allegorizes a frame containing physical reality (see fig. 5). Kang expresses this by claiming that "just as the boiled rice is the most vital and essential dish we can make out of rice," so "the most vital and essential photograph we can make out of an object is the one that records its objectivity" (293). In other words, we the art photographers should be devoted to efforts to "improve the artistic qualities of our photographs, while at the same time preserving their recording components."

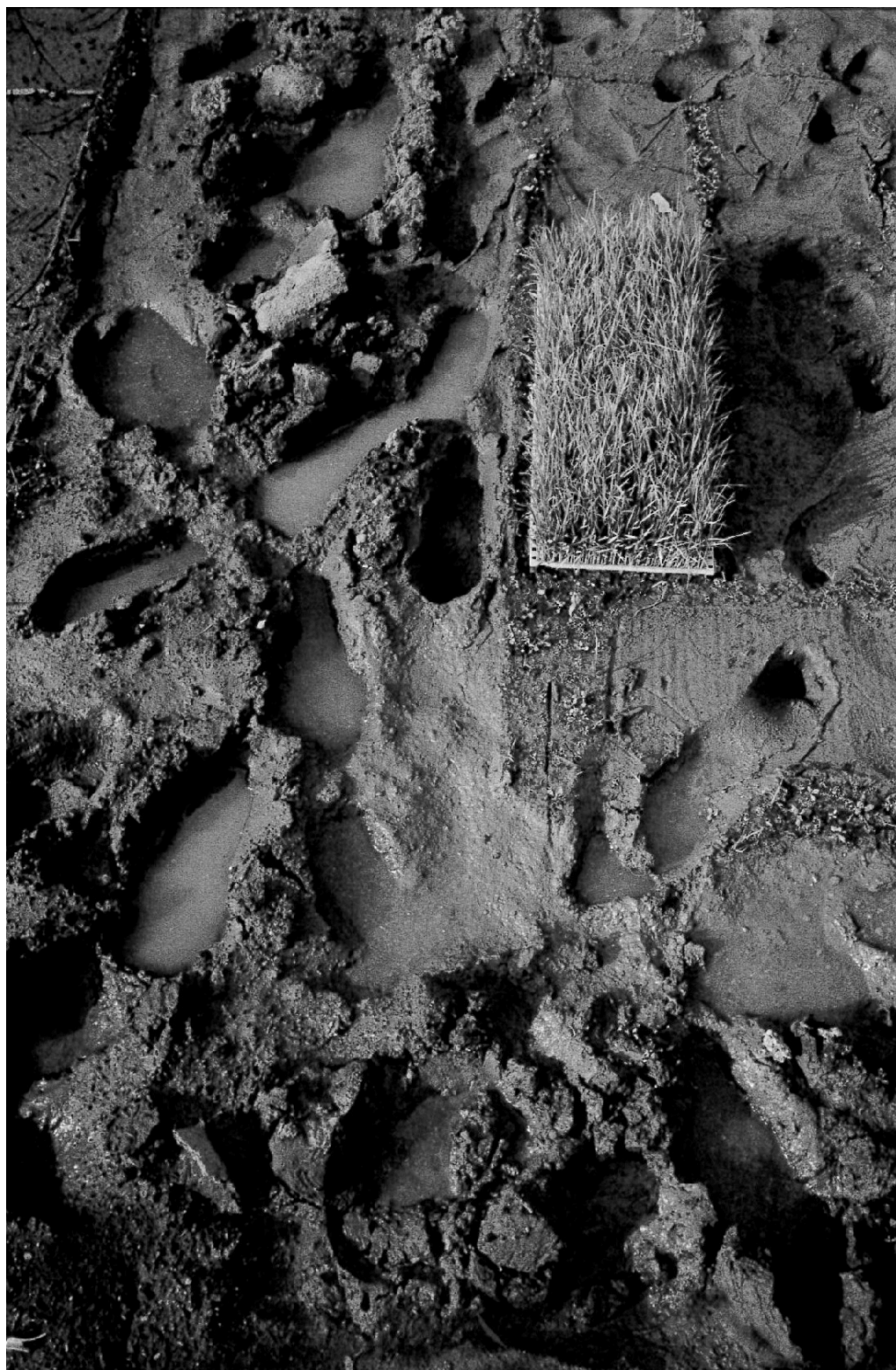


Figure 5.

We can now conclude that Kim's *Dark Skies Over Tokyo* series is pro-empathy, in that it serves to make the viewer empathize with the working poor in the photographs and recognize their humanity, while Kang's *Embracing Evening* series is anti-empathy because it attempts to make the viewer perceive the presence of the frames of the photographs rather than empathize with the working poor. Thus, the validity and usefulness of Kang's documentary photography with regard to organizing the Marxian class project stem from its ability to help us change our viewpoint on the unemployed poor from seeing them as social Others to seeing them as an integral part of the working class (on the other hand, like *Personal Days* and *Contrail*, Kim's street photography is evidently helpful for mobilizing the Jamesonian utopian project). But it would be a mistake to think that Kang must be reckoned as a Marxist critic in more or less the same way that Kim is regarded as a social critic. Kang's photography actually promotes and supports the Marxian class project, counterintuitively, through its fundamental indifference to politics and its clear commitment to aesthetics, i.e., the ontology of art photography. One way to account for this is to say that

Kang's—political—success in precluding the viewer from empathizing with a subject in a photograph is in effect wholly attributed to his—aesthetic—commitment to acknowledging what Michael Fried calls “to-be-seenness,” an extraordinary in-between moment of the viewer's acknowledgement “both of the scene of representation and of the act of presentation” (65); or, putting it in the Israeli art historian Vered Maimon's terms, “the beholder is aware that things are ‘staged’ in a specific manner for him, yet is still able to experience the photograph as displaying a separate ‘world’” (390). It is Kang's insistence on the primacy of aesthetic ontology, that is, the irreducibility of the frame, that constitutes his photography's effectiveness in creating a class politics. Kang's main concern is how to make his photo-work transcends its status as object, whereas Kim's strives to produce his photo-work exactly as the object it is.

In short, we can say that Kim's pro-empathic photography effaces the difference between a photo-work's aesthetics and politics, whereas Kang's anti-empathic photography affirms the distinction between a photo-work's aesthetics and politics. In other words, Kim is committed to the idea that a work can be artistically good only when



it can be socio-politically good, while Kang is committed to the idea that a work's being good in a socio-political sense has nothing whatsoever to do with its being good in an artistic sense. Understood in this way, then, we can begin to see that if we are interested in participating in the Marxian class project (instead of the Jamesonian utopian project), we will find that a commitment to aesthetic ontology (like Kang's) is much better for our purpose than a commitment to political immediacy (like Kim's). The only—perhaps, the best—way for us to stop seeing the unemployed poor as if they are social Others so as to see them as a structural part of the working class is quite paradoxically to try to produce a work of art from them, rather than trying to produce a politics for them.

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B.A. in English Language and Literature (Magna Cum Laude),  
Pusan National University, South Korea, 2006

## PUBLICATIONS

### Works In Progress:

"Richards and Williams: *Spring and All* and the Invention of Modernist Form," *Philosophy and Literature* 42.1 (forthcoming, 2018).

"'Without Hope and Without Despair': Narrative Representation, Anti-Sentimentalism, and the Question of Finance Capitalism in Raymond Carver's *Cathedral*," *International Journal of Literary Humanities* 15.4 (forthcoming, 2018).

### Journal Articles:

"Goethe's World Literature, Universal Particularism, and European Imperialism," *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 17.4 (December 2015).

"Wishing for a Home: Race, Class, and Global Capitalism in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictée* and Se-hui Cho's *A Little*

*Ball Launched by a Dwarf," MLN: Modern Language Notes*

129.5 (December 2014): 1097-116.

"Sense-Making Sound: Agamben, Longenbach, and the Question of Poetic Meaning (Critical Discussion)," *Philosophy and Literature* 38.1 (April 2014): 276-81.

"A Note on Bartleby's Place," *Jawum and Mowum* 5 (Fall 2009): 1094-1108 (co-authored), South Korea.

"Beyond Modern Visualism: On Pascale Casanova's *The World Republic of Letters*," *Korean Critical Review* 74 (Fall, 2009), 22-56, South Korea. Reprinted in Yong-Gyu Kim and Kyung-Yeon Kim, ed., *At the Edge of World Literature: What is World Literature?* (Seoul: Hyeonamsa, 2014), pp. 153-90, South Korea.

"World Literature and the Ideology of Universalism: About the Ontology of Comparative Literature," *The Journal of Criticism and Theory* 14.1 (Spring-Summer 2009): 185-214, South Korea.

**Review Essay:**

"The New Vanguardism," Review of Alex Houen, *Powers of Possibility: Experimental American Writing since the 1960s* (2012), *Pennsylvania Literary Journal* 5.3 (Fall 2013): 143-52.

**Translations (English into Korean):**

Nicholas Brown, *Utopian Generation: The Political Horizon of Twentieth-Century Literature* (*Yutopian geneoreishyeon: Ishipsegi munhakui jungchiyeok jipyeong*) (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2005). Trans. Yong-Gyu Kim and Dongho Cha. Seoul: Hyeonamsa, 2018 (forthcoming).

Walter Benn Michaels, *The Shape of the Signifier: 1967 to the End of History* (*Gipyoui hyeongtae: Cheongubaekyuksipchilnyeonbuteo yeoksau jongmal kkaji*) (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2004). Trans. Dongho Cha. Seoul: Aelpi(LP), 2017.

Fredric Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multicultural Capitalism" (from *Social Text* 15 [Fall 1986]). Trans. Yong-Gyu Kim and Dongho Cha. *At the Edge of*

*World Literature: What is World Literature?*, ed. Yong-Gyu Kim and Kyung-Yeon Kim. Seoul: Hyeonamsa, 2014. pp. 78-120.

Walter Benn Michaels, "The Shape of the Signifier" (from *Critical Inquiry* 27.2 [Winter 2001]). Trans. Hyeryung Hwang and Dongho Cha. *Korean Critical Review* 87 (Winter 2012): 252-277.

Alenka Zupančič, "Bartleby's Place" (From *Problemi* [2004]). Trans. Hyeryung Hwang and Dongho Cha. *Jawum and Mowum* 5 (Fall 2009)

Pascale Casanova, "Literature as A World" (From *New Left Review* 31 [Jan-Feb 2005]). Trans. Dongho Cha. *Korean Critical Review* 74 (Fall, 2009)

Jonathan Dollimore, "Different Desires: Subjectivity and Transgression in Wilde and Gide" (From *Textual Practice* 1.1 [1987]). Trans. Dongho Cha. *Hyowon Journal of English Language and Literature* 27 (2009).

Patrick Brantlinger, "*Heart of Darkness: Anti-Imperialism, Racism, or Impressionism?* (From *Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism: Heart of Darkness*, ed., Ross C. Murfin [New York: Bedford Books, 1996]). Trans. Dongho Cha. *Hyowon Journal of English Language and Literature* 26 (2008).

Homi K. Bhabha, "Culture's In-Between" (From *Artforum* 32.1 [1993]). Trans. Hyeryung Hwang and Dongho Cha. *Korean Critical Review* 63 (Winter 2006).

Barbara M. Kennedy, "Reconfiguring Love . . . A Deleuzian Travesty?: *Leon* and a Molecular Politics via the Girl and the Child" (From *Deleuze and Cinema* [Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2001]). Trans. Hyeryung Hwang and Dongho Cha. *Korean Critical Review* 62 (Fall 2006).

#### **CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS**

"Nature as Artifice and Artifice as Nature: Realism, Autonomy, and Capitalism in Gary Pak's *The Watcher of Waipuna* and Chang-dong Lee's *There's A Lot of Shit in Nokcheon*," The British Modernities Group 2016 Conference:

Feeling Real: Affect, Literature, and Reimagined

Realities, Urbana, Illinois, May 5-6, 2016.

"Korean Americans' In-Between Position in the United States: Black-White-and-Yellow Racial Triangulation, Middleman-Minority Entrepreneurship, Urban Class Warfare in Chang-rae Lee's *Native Speaker*," Society for Comparative Literature and the Arts, New Orleans, October 15-17, 2015.

"'Oriental Jews': Black-White-and-Yellow Racial Triangulation, Middleman-Minority Entrepreneurship, Urban Class Warfare in Chang-rae Lee's *Native Speaker*," Marxist Literary Group Institute on Culture and Society, Georgetown University, Washington, DC, June 21-26, 2015.

"Wishing for a Home: Race, Class, and Global Capitalism in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictée* and Se-Hŭi Cho's *A Little Ball Launched by a Dwarf*," Annual MELUS Conference, Athens, Georgia, April 9-12, 2015.

"Race, Class, and Global Capitalism in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictée* and Se-Hŭi Cho's *A Little Ball Launched by a Dwarf*," Geographies of Post-45: Territory, Boundary, Globe

at Locating Post-45, University of Pennsylvania,  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, March 19-20, 2015.

"The Neoliberal Fiction: The Global Network and the Logic  
of Post-Nationalism in David Mitchell's *Ghostwritten*,"  
American Literature Association, San Francisco, California,  
May 22-25, 2012.

"World Literature and the Ideology of Universalism: About  
the Ontology of Comparative Literature," American  
Comparative Literature Association, Vancouver, British  
Columbia, Canada, March 31-April 2, 2011.

"On Hanif Kureishi's Ambivalent Ethnicities," Graduate  
Students Conference, English Language and Literature  
Association of Korea, Seoul, South Korea, June 13, 2008.

"The Cultural Logic of Globalization and the Shortage of  
Political Strategies," Graduate Students Conference,  
American Studies Association of Korea, Seoul, South Korea,  
April 26, 2008.

#### **FELLOWSHIPS/GRANTS/AWARDS**



**University of Illinois at Chicago****Grants:**

Graduate Student Council Travel Award, Fall 2015.

Graduate College Student Presenter's Scholarship, Fall 2015.

Graduate College Student Presenter Travel Award, Spring 2011.

**Pusan National University****Honors:**

Magna Cum Laude, President's list, Pusan National University, South Korea, Feb. 2006.

**Fellowships:**

Research Assistant Fellowship, *Humanities Korea* Research Team for Translation Studies of Classics + Comparative Cultural Studies, Pusan National University, 2008.

Research Assistant Fellowship, *Brain Korea 21* research team for Professional Translation in the Film Industry, Pusan National University, South Korea, 2006.

The Dean's Prize (4-year full-tuition scholarship), 1999-2006.

## **TEACHING EXPERIENCE**

### **University of Illinois at Chicago**

ENGL 105: Introduction to English and American Fiction  
(Spring 2017)

ENGL/ASAM 123: Introduction to Asian American Literature  
(Fall 2014, Fall 2015)

ENGL 113: Introduction to Multiethnic Literatures of the United States (Spring 2013, Spring 2014)

ENGL 101: Understanding Literature (Spring 2012, Fall 2012)

ENGL 160: Academic Writing I: Writing for Inquiry and  
Research (Fall 2011, Fall 2012, Fall 2016)

ENGL 161: Academic Writing II: Writing for Inquiry and  
Research (Spring 2011–Fall 2015, Fall 2017)

#### **PROFESSIONAL SERVICE**

Co-organizer, "What is Revolution?," Marxist Literary Group  
Institute on Culture and Society, University of Illinois at  
Chicago, Chicago, Illinois, June 20–26, 2011.

Member, Critical Conversations, Department of English,  
University of Illinois at Chicago, 2013–2014.

Member, Graduate Student Committee, American Studies  
Association of Korea, Seoul, South Korea, 2008–2009.

#### **PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS**

Modern Language Association

American Comparative Literature Association

Society for Comparative Literature and the Arts

Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the  
United States

Marxist Literary Group

## REFERENCES

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