Sohyun Bae: Yisei Interviews a Korean American Artist

Seoul Searching: Harvard Students Explore Korea in the Summer

Also, Reports from Korean Organizations At Harvard
Letter from the Editor

I once read a passage, by a philosopher whose name I have since forgotten, which made a strong impression on me. He wrote that in life we strive to reach certain destinations and certain goals. Along the journeys we take to reach these goals we sometimes realize that the harder we strive and the closer we get to the goals, the further and further away they seem. At that point, explains the philosopher, we realize that the journey itself is the true goal, the true end of our striving.

For the past year all of Yisei’s editors, staff members, and I have ventured on a journey to create a magazine which serves as a forum for the discussion of issues affecting Koreans and Korean Americans. Yisei, through the tireless efforts of its members, was able to produce two thought-provoking, well-written issues during the past year. Looking back on all of the different aspects of putting the magazine together—the Monday evening meetings, discussions with writers about their topics, the seemingly endless layout sessions—I begin to understand more and more that the journey of putting each issue together is in itself one of the goals of Yisei. Through the process of discussing articles topics, editing them, and putting them together, the members of Yisei gain a fuller understanding of what it means to be a Korean and Korean American.

The Yisei staff would like to thank the Undergraduate Council, Harvard Foundation for Intercultural and Race Relations, and the International Relations Council for their financial support. Yisei would also like to thank Professor Vincent Brandt and our friends at the Korea Institute who have tirelessly supported this organization, its product, and its goals. We look forward to working with all of you in the coming year.

Finally, I would like to thank Yisei’s truly outstanding editorial board and staff for all of their hard work and undying dedication. Through their tireless efforts Yisei was able to overcome many obstacles and achieve new heights. Furthermore, I would like to congratulate the new editorial board and wish them the best in the year to come. I am constantly awed by the dedication, talent, and enthusiasm of the new board. All of these attributes plus their sincere love of what Yisei is and what it can become will enable them to achieve unbelievable accomplishments in the year to come. I wish you all of the best in the year to come.

Jong H. Yun ‘98
Editor-in-Chief

Yisei is a Korean American cultural and literary journal published semi-annually by Harvard University undergraduates. This publication is distributed free across the Harvard campus and to major universities in the United States. Yisei welcomes submissions of artwork, photography, poetry, fiction, and non-fiction. Send submissions and letters to: Yisei, Box 380805, Cambridge, MA 02238.

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# Yisei

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“Physiognomy,” Sang Park '98, 150 x 90 cm, 1996.
It was the dream that woke me. I’m sure, though I can’t remember for the life of me what it was all about. It woke me up at nine, spread-eagled and sweating a few feet from the bed. I must have rolled off the monster king-size while sleeping and tumbled around quite a bit even after that because my t-shirt was hiked up all the way to my breasts. There were literally pools of sweat on the floor. I felt exhausted but couldn’t remember why I should. Kenny hadn’t been around last night, and for the time being, no Kenny meant no sex. It must have been the dream, I thought, but what could I possibly have been doing in it? I lay around for half an hour trying to remember. I was on the brink of it a few times, but in the end, all I managed to remember was the talk I had with Big Mommy last night and what I had decided to do at the end of it. I pulled myself up with a groan. At thirty in the morning, the day was already as hot as hell; the heat would be unbearable by twelve and I knew that on days like this, all you should do is pull down the shades, start your fan, and suck on ice cubes with a wet towel over your face, but there was to be no ice for me today. I had to settle this Kenny thing once and for all and tell that twit of a girl who had the nerve to steal him from right under my nose to go and get herself squashed under a ten-ton truck.

Not a pleasant way to start the day. I must say, and now, I’m on my way to Jin-Ah’s house, sweating like a pig under the sun. Yesterday, Big Mommy told me that she saw Kenny coming out of Jin-Ah’s room at three in the morning. Big Mommy was visiting Mrs. Oh, who has the room next to Jin-Ah’s in the red slate-roof house next to where Club Amaging used to be before the fire. Mrs. Oh, Jin-Ah and four other girls have a room each in this house, and they all share the bathroom slash outhouse, and a bit of yard for airing your underthings. Mrs. Oh isn’t married, of course—no one is in this hole—but everyone calls her Mrs. Oh anyway because she is too old not to be a Mrs. to somebody. She doesn’t work in a club now, but sometimes she walks the streets at night and if you’ve ever seen her decked out in her wig, false eyelashes and makeup, you’ll know what I mean when I say, what a horror! The guys she works are usually so drunk or high on drugs anyway that it makes no difference to them what she looks like, but all the same, I get the creeps just thinking about it. Imagine waking up with a terrible hangover and a lady in your bed who looks like she can be your grandma and then some. When I think about that, I almost feel sorry for the poor American suckers. Almost. All I have to do is remember the stories I’ve heard of Mrs. Oh and her bag of bed-tricks to know that the poor suckers probably get more than their money’s worth, especially since they pay Mrs. Oh only half of what we club girls charge, and sometimes not even that. Oh, well.

Big Mommy doesn’t work at clubs either. She doesn’t work, period. She’s been here the longest, and she’s so old she can speak fluent Japanese. Some girls say that she must have been a hooker for Japanese soldiers before the Americans came, but I don’t care too much about that. There’s no way of knowing anyhow because Big Mommy never talks about the life she had before she came here, and as I always tell Mija who thinks that Big Mommy’s past is a bigger mystery than the UFOs, what does it matter? I mean, try naming one girl in our town who doesn’t have a thing or two to hide. Anyway, Big Mommy doesn’t talk much, so you learn to listen when she does. You can bet I was listening when she told me that she would talk to Jin-Ah for me, if I wanted.

“It’s not right. You know it, she knows it, everybody knows it. We don’t live like that here, back stabbing each other when all we got is each other. Somebody ought to teach that girl a lesson. If you want me to, I can shove my fist up her you-know-what, but only if you want me to, because, you know it’s your call,” she said.

Big Mommy is the closest thing we have to a mayor. She speaks pretty good English even though she can’t read or write a thing, and she has enough guts to stand up to the Americans. I respect her for that. Fifteen years ago, one of the girls got hit by a GI who promised her seven and only gave her five. He slapped her so hard across the face that the eardrum popped in her left ear. The problem was, the girl was new and didn’t speak much of English. She didn’t say anything to anybody for a whole week, and the story only came out because the mommy at her club noticed that she had toilet paper stuffed in her ear. She tried to pull it out but couldn’t because it was stuck to the girl’s skin with clumps of dried blood. Big Mommy got
a wind of this, and she went to speak to the sergeant in the American army. The sergeants are the ones who can take care of this kind of thing; you don’t need to go any higher than that. Anyway, she screamed bloody murder and threw a tantrum all on her own, and managed to get two hundred dollars for the girl’s loss of hearing in one ear, in addition to medical costs. Two hundred dollars was a lot of money back then, considering what Koreans were to Americans in those days, let alone Korean whores like us. That girl was me, and with the two hundred dollars, I paid off my club mommy, bought myself a couple of nice things and still had some money to put away. I was glad I did that, because a year later, my father died, and I was proud to do for his funeral more than what any normal daughter would have been expected to do. I didn’t go to the funeral, of course, but I got all new chun-won bills from the bank—no wrinkles, no smudges, no anything!—and I gave them to my brother the day before the funeral. My brother had tears in his eyes when he took the bills from me. I wouldn’t exchange how I felt then for the world.

Ever since that bit of trouble, Big Mommy’s been looking out for me especially. The day she took me to the army base for my payment, she told me the best piece of advice anyone’s ever given me. She put her hand over my bad ear so that the words will not trickle out and whispered into my good ear, “You don’t let anyone so much as lick your fingertips without paying you first.” But she’s been sick lately and doesn’t carry the kind of stick that she used to. She’s got diabetes. Most of her teeth have fallen out. She had to have her false teeth refitted last week and hasn’t been eating well at all because of that—she lost ten pounds in two weeks. Her face looks like a skull now, only with a perm, but she still smokes a pack and half a day and gets really mad at you if you tell her to take it easy. I gave up trying. The way I see it, she probably doesn’t have that much time left here anyway; she doesn’t need people telling her to start doing things differently now, after all these years. I don’t think she’ll last through this winter and I think she knows this too because last week, she told me that she’s going to hand Happy over to me after this year’s out.

“‘I’m just sick of feeding that stupid dog,’” she said. Now, I know that that’s not true. Everybody in the town knows that Big Mommy feeds Happy first before feeding herself, even when there’s enough food only for one. Happy is the spoilest mutt in the world and I suspect that Big Mommy’s secretly proud of this fact. ‘I’ll miss Big Mommy when she leaves. Besides, I just hate dogs. Way back in response to her offer in this Jin-Ah business, I told Big Mommy, no. Some things you are just not thrilled to have other people take care of, even when you don’t really want to take care of them yourself. Asking the mayor to get your boyfriend back for you from a girl who was still drinking her mother’s milk when you were old enough to produce some of your own is one of them. Talk about embarrassment! Big Mommy just blew puffs of smoke at me and didn’t say anything else. Bless her soul, she understood me completely.

The truth of the matter is, I’ve known, before Big Mommy told me anything, that Kenny’s been screwing Jin-Ah. The mayor’s slow getting information these days: the whole town has known it for a good week at least because secrets in this town are like bean curd in summertime—they just don’t keep well. Jin-Ah lives with four other girls and Mrs. Oh in that house, and there isn’t a grunt or moan in this world that those
thin walls will keep in, especially against whore ears. Besides, a woman doesn’t need somebody else to tell her that her man’s been plugging a different hole—at least the good ones don’t—and I’m not being vain or anything, but I’m a darn good woman if ever there was one.

I first got that feeling about Kenny two weeks ago when he called to tell me that he’ll be on the graveyard shift for a couple of days. “Emergency,” he said. Now, that’s a word he knows I understand. Practically all the girls, even the greenest ones, learn that English word quickly, because this is that kind of town and ours that kind of trade. Right away, though, I didn’t believe him. Not that it wasn’t a believable excuse, but sometimes you just can tell when someone is lying to you, even over the phone. At the time actually, I had enough sense to be amused. I almost laughed out loud and gave him my blessings. “You go, you go, wish you best luck, G.I., sonuvabitch.” It was amazing to me, even hilarious, that this sorry excuse of a soldier Kenny, balding at thirty, mediocre in bed, married and with a child in America, low in ranks and with no ambition for getting to the top, this Kenny, my Kenny, whom I took pity on one night at the club and let into my room, would be trying to hoodwink me. “What fart-head of a girl would be giving him the time of day,” I was thinking.

It’s not difficult to find out a little information in this town, if you put your mind to it. Even if the girls don’t talk for one reason or other, you still have a number of sources you can turn to, like the shopkeepers. From Mrs. Kang, I found out that Jin-Ah just bought herself lots of deluxe skin care. This is extremely fishy, because the younger girls don’t usually buy the deluxe kind. They still have youth and tautness of skin on their side, and when they have extra money, they spend it on things that make an immediate difference like lipstick and eye shadow. Only the over-the-hillers start worrying about defying time. I know, because I didn’t go deluxe until I hit thirty myself. Besides, the girls do talk, and my one good ear is well trained to listen.

I should have known that Jin-Ah’s the little fart-head who doesn’t know what’s good for her. I mean, who else would be stupid enough to like Kenny, and even if you did, why in the world would you take him, knowing that he’s somebody else’s and that somebody else is not going to be a sitting duck about having another tramp walk all over her front yard? When Jin-Ah first blew into town and showed up at the clinic on our weekly Wednesday, she was wearing one of those tacky t-shirts they sell the GIs in 1-tac-won, the kind that has stick figures doing it doggie-style. What poor taste, I mean, even for a hooker! She looked young, at most twenty-one or two, and pretty if you go for the sharp look—skinny, slanty eyes, but full lips and a nice tight rear end. She had the snottiest look that made you want to go up to her and slap her a couple of times on each side of the face to jog some sense into her head. There were five of us in the clinic that day waiting our turn for the weekly check-up; everybody was checking her out but the girl didn’t even seem to notice.

“So, I guess you girls all work here, huh?” she said, sitting down in plastic fold-up chair. I couldn’t believe my ears. Imagine that, I said with my eyes to Mija who was sitting next to me and who wasn’t a day younger than thirty-six, she called us girls.

“I mean, why else would you be getting check-up, you know?” she said. Why indeed, I said and laughed. But it only got worse and worse.

“I don’t mean to offend or anything, but how could you stand it here? It’s so small and so shabby,
you know? Whoever heard of slate-roof houses on a club street? In Yong-san and Tong-du-chun, there were times when I was making hundred bucks a night and I didn’t even have to suck GI dicks! Anyways in Yong-san, the neon lights blind your eyes and you feel like you’re in Las Vegas.” Give me a break, I said. I can’t stand it when girls pretend that they know so much about America when they don’t know jack. The closest Jin-Ah ever got to Las Vegas was probably a Viewmaster slide of the Great American Nightscapes; I’ve seen all the toys.

The day was hot and muggy then too, and what was worse, the standing fan was not working in the clinic. I grew tired of fanning myself with “STD—Prevention and Cure” tract and got Mija to do it for me. I locked my arms behind my head to let the breeze fan the sweat off my armpits. Sweat in my hair is one thing that I just can’t stand. I never could. Jin-Ah just kept on shooting her mouth.

“It’s like I’m back in the seventies or something. Club Mustang. C’Mon-A, I mean even the names are so tacky. Now, back in Tong-du-chun, I used to work at a place called Rendezvous, you know?”

Perhaps it was because Wednesdays always put me in a foul mood. Or maybe the temperature was just too high in the clinic that day. I don’t usually lose my cool and I always try to be kind to the new girls, especially the young ones, but this one was some piece of work.

“Why don’t bitches like you go back to where you came from? If you don’t shut your mouth, you might just find out that all you are is a stick figure on your t-shirt, and believe me, you’re not gonna like what I put up your ass,” I said, in my “business” voice.

There was silence as the girls looked at me and then at her to see what she would do. She smiled a nasty one at me, baring all her sharp teeth, and introduced herself, in English! I couldn’t believe the nerve of this girl.

“Fuck you. My name is Gina,” she said.

If it hadn’t been for the nurse calling me in, I would have clawed her eyes out.

Looking back, I think this Kenny thing must have started back there inside the waiting room. She probably began to hate me then, and I suppose a part of it is my fault because I didn’t have to be so mean. Still, it didn’t mean anything to me and I certainly meant no permanent harm. I even felt sorry for Jin-Ah when I found out that the very club she was calling tacky was her own. Club C’Mon-A’s not a nice place to work by any standards, even GI town standards. It does good business, to be sure, but the crowd’s always rough and I know several girls who ran into trouble there once or other. Getting beat up, cheap pettings, a lot of trash talk that doesn’t roll off your back so easily, that kind of thing. The mommy there lives with a man we call “Major,” and he lets things go out of hand. Major’s a big and hairy American, who’s really not a major anymore—he got out of the army years back for reasons no one knows for sure—but he stayed, and now he’s kind of taken over the club. C’Mon-A mommy is a sweet person really and she’s also tough as nails, but somehow she let Major get the upper hand in the early goings of the relationship, and once things are settled like that, it’s almost impossible to reverse how they go. Anyway, whatever Major does, he does it hard. More than a few times already, Major’s taken some of his own girls aside for extra action. Whenever that happens, C’Mon-A mommy has to get them to go elsewhere by canceling their club debts. It’s painful for her—if I were her, I wouldn’t stand it at all—but life is sometimes so freaky: the whole turn-over thing has the effect of keeping the girls relatively new, which is good for business. She and Major have a child together. The boy’s name is Junior and he looks like a troll, with a grown-up face on a three-year-old frame and a mop of curly brown hair that falls over slanty eyes.

During my years here, I’ve known a lot of girls who talk trash and go around with major attitude problems, but still, most of them are good girls at heart who will have a ramen and share it with you when you are too proud to ask. Shortie Kim was like that. She had the loudest mouth in the world and she never wore anything that showed less than half her tits, but she visited Mrs. Oh almost every night after work and cried on the days when Mrs. Oh walked the streets. She worked harder than any other girl—one, she lived with three different guys at the same time—and she put her younger brother through college. But this brother was smarter than the sister. He married a nice pharmacist girl after graduating and told his wife’s side of the family that he had no siblings. It sucks, but I can’t say that I don’t understand why he did what he did. Shortie Kim was loud, I mean, loud, and she couldn’t have passed herself off as anything but a GI whore, even in a three-piece suit. Still, I do blame him for not coming to see her now and then. He could have told his wife some-
thing about a business meeting running late or a call from a high-school buddy; men do this all the time. He didn’t come to see her after getting married, not even once. But maybe it turned out for the better that he never came to visit. If he hadn’t cut his ties off so completely, she would never have left for America, because that’s how much she loved her baby brother: he could have given her shit to eat and she would have eaten it, with a smile. Well, in the end, Shortie Kim got lucky; the GI she married had the blackest skin you ever saw, but he was a good person. He never hit her or anything like that, and he gave her respect; he loved her enough to be patient with her, and that’s really rare in this town. Shortie Kim left in eighty-five, so it’s been four years now, and whenever I think of her, I can’t help but wonder whether her brother thinks of her now and then too. I mean, how do you go about forgetting how many GI cocks your sister sucked just so that you could go out drinking with your college friends and meet nice college girls with cherries that haven’t been popped? How does your heart forget to beat?

I thought that Jin-Ah might be like that, I mean, like Shortie Kim. Now, even aside from the deal with her brother, Shortie Kim had some life story, and after hearing it, you understood her loudness, her stupidity, her nasty mouth. Everybody in this town’s got a sob story, of course, but some are a little worse than others. Jin-Ah might have a story like that, I thought. Jin-Ah, the daddy’s little girl, I said. Daddy had a habit of sitting you on his lap, and he did that right up until you ran away from home at fifteen; he liked to rock you back and forth, but he never asked you to do anything more than just sitting, because at heart he was a decent sort. But then came along your older brother, cousin, family friend or whatever, a high school student in Seoul who came to visit, and you were so in love with his shiny black uniform that you let him get under your skirt in the barn. Of course, you didn’t like it at first but later you enjoyed it just fine and at least he taught you a thing or two. You were so poor and you thought your poverty smelled as bad as outhouses in August. You thought you’d do anything to get away, and then there were guys who followed you home and sometimes you cried please don’t under the willow tree with the wind howling, but it didn’t matter much afterwards anyway because you knew and they knew that it wasn’t your first time or anything. So you thought what the hell, in for a quarter, in for a buck, and there were people who gave you things that made you feel as bright and warm inside as if you had swallowed the sun whole and there was the alcohol, and you thought GIs were more gentlemen than Koreans. Some club mommies were good to you but some were really bad, and some even made you wash their underwear, so here you are, twenty-one years old, selling the only thing you know how to sell for as much as you can. You’ve lived through all of a lifetime already and more, and there isn’t anything you haven’t seen or kissed, so you are bored, you are cocksure, you are bitchy, or whatever, I understand.

I was almost willing to say, what a poor girl, you let me be the sister you never had. I understand everything, of course I do, and after all these years, I still have a heart that breaks for you when I think of your daddy rocking you back and forth, back and forth like that. I’ll do for you what Big Mommy did for me—God only knows where I’ll be without her. You can come and hide in my room when there’s a mad GI after you, you can borrow a quick buck from me and I won’t ever ask you to pay it back, because you know, everybody deserves a little kindness in this world and I’m going to give it to you. Girl, you just sit back and let me.

But that was before Jin-Ah started doing this Kenny thing. Now, all I can say for her is that she’s a hard-assed bitch through and through who hasn’t the foggiest idea what respect is. To think! I am a full fifteen years older than she is.

And so, I’m walking in the sun. I can feel the heat rising from the pavement through the rubber soles of my slippers. I walk past the Diamond, the New Arirang. C’Mon-A... Jin-Ah was right; the neon signs are just shabby in the sun. It’s too early for the shutters to be up, but inside C’Mon-A, I know Major’s lounging in front of the television, bored as hell watching his hard-core, and Junior’s somewhere inside too riding his tricycle with that droll face of his turned up to the dimmed light. The heat is too oppressive now; I can feel the drops of sweat at the roots of my hair, rolling down my nape into my dress. Soon, I’ll pass the video store and then the corner grocery where you can run up a tab that your momma will settle for you when it gets too large. Just like your real momma, sometimes, but then again, you find that you’re that much short when you get your pay.

In the alley behind Mustang, I run into Mrs. Oh. It’s not even noon yet, and she is already wearing her wig; I can recognize that wig anywhere, long straight mane like the one she must have had when she was a girl, but too bluish black now to look real. I call out her name, she turns around, and for a moment there, I have the biggest shock of my life, because it’s not Mrs. Oh’s face but mine that stares back at me, my wig, my clownish make-up, my eyelids too limp to hold up the plastic lashes. Then I remember what I had forgotten: it was my voice that whispered, “C’Mon, C’mon, short-time, half-price” in the half-dark of the alley, my fingers that pawed golden hair, black skin, boys far
away from home and too young to know better. It was I who cried out, “Kenny, where are you?” but my voice kept on whispering “C'Mon, c'mon,” and then my mouth was too full of the taste of a tongue soaked in kamikaze—Club Mustang style, always too strong—and everywhere my hair filled with sweat, filled of sweaty hands. Hot, burning. I saw the willow trees that made our village famous; old folks rested on mats under the shade of these trees and talked stories of long-ago and girls tied a swing around it and climbed, letting their skirts fill with the wind. I had forgotten the stories but I saw the willow trees in a swoon, the sun bright on their backs and sometimes the rain. Sadness, like a wave of heat, washed over me; I opened my eyes and arose from the dream.

Outside Jin-Ah’s house, I pause to wipe the sweat off my face. My dress is soaked through. I feel weak in the knees. I lean against the cement wall for support and try to rehearse what I am going to tell Jin-Ah. My voice murmurs though I cannot remember what I had planned to say. Something like I want to tell you a story. Jin-Ah. I want to tell you a story of the little things that are important in life, so much more important than the big things. I want to tell you of kindness, of loyalty, the bit of ice in your mouth when you are too thirsty to drink. Old melodies your heart sings, out of the blue. The kids that smile at you for no reason, young girls watching the dying of day—we were young girls once, remember? Big Mommy’s little maid Happy, my brother’s crying face, the nice GIs that tell you, ‘Baby, I’ll take care of you,’ and mean it. I had a GI like that a long time ago. There are a thousand things in my head, a thousand faces. Let me tell you about them, because I would rather do that than say what I came here to say. I don’t want to say; leave Kenny alone, you are still young and pretty, and there are others who will take you to America, better ones than Kenny. Not that America’s so great, you know, Shortie Kim writes me all the time that she’s homesick—I miss you, Shortie Kim!—but I’ve been here fifteen years, fifteen years, and I’m not getting any younger. It’s too hot. There’s a ringing in my head and I feel almost feverish. I wish I could step inside, away from the blazing sun, and let my head be soothed by cool mommy fingers. I lash my arms out and fend against the heat—Don’t touch me!

My weight drops to the ground, and crouched like that, the hot pavement on my shins and under my dress, I know it’s not sweat on my cheeks anymore but surprised tears. My heart is swelling with the absurdity of king-size beds in houses that still have slate roofs. I can feel a wall beginning to form at the bottom of my heart; it rises out of me with a body of its own. That body, that wall has a name—Kenny, my Kenny.
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HOME, HOME on the Range

by Young S. In '98

ESSAY

I am a Texan. I am a Korean American. And—I am definitely not militant. When strangers ask me for a self-description, I always begin with my home, Texas. For some unexpected reason, I think of Texas first. I am Texan before I am Korean. “Oh,” I explain carelessly, “I used to have an accent. When I came to college here on the East coast, I lost it.” “Oh,” I comment with surprise, “that’s not the way we do it in Texas.” We? I was born in Korea and spent three years in Seoul before crossing the Pacific Ocean with my younger brother. For the first three years of my American life, I did not even live in Texas. I lived in Laurel, Maryland, only moving to Texas in 1981. Then, what connection do I have to Texas? What do I have in common with the stereotypical Texan who wears cowboy boots, drinks whiskey, and croons country songs?

I suppose we both call Texas “home.” My first year away from home, I flew five hours to Texas and five hours back to Boston eight times. For Thanksgiving, I flew five hours, arrived home in time to eat turkey, rested Friday and Saturday, and flew back to Harvard early Sunday morning. $569 for two-and-a-half days in Texas, but it was worth it. I missed the flat, open, spaces, the mild weather, and my own car (Well... I admit driving your own car is not uniquely Texan).

I also missed my mother’s Korean cooking, a second thing not uniquely Texan. I am a Texan, and I am a Korean American, two incongruous identities. When people comment on my accent, they are referring to my Texas twang. “An Asian with a Southern accent!” they exclaim. Oddly, Texas and Korea have usually mixed well together. My Korean pal, Judy, also had a slow drawl. My younger sister listens to country music. My brother played varsity football in high school. We played, studied, and grew up with little thought to the jarring image of Asian football stars and Korean country singers.

I’m not saying I failed to realize that I was Korean. My parents’ zeal removed that possibility. They only speak Korean in the home. I remember learning to read Korean, even without true understanding, at a very young age. In fact, I even recall one summer my father promised me $50 if I spoke only Korean in the house. I never did see any of the money, but it was fun, and my Korean improved.

To keep their children as “Korean” as possible, my parents tried to arrange frequent visits to our family in Korea. After years of absence, I traveled to Korea alone this past summer. Everyone was very kind to me, not only because the rules of Korean hospitality demand it, but also because I was the prodigal son come home. In the eyes of my aunts and uncles, I was a Korean returning to my homeland. Only one exception marred the otherwise cordial treatment I received from everybody whom I met. The patriarch of my host family introduced himself to me after the lunch hour on my first day of work. He asked me a few questions and seemed relieved that my Korean was passable. He then began to talk. He talked about his home. He asked about my parents. He talked about the changes in Korea. My mind began to wander, only jerking back to the present when I heard, “…you, you Korean Americans (gyeop) have it tough.” I snapped back to attention. Me? I have it tough? I lived in a house twice as large as his. I went to Harvard, drove my own car. Why did I have it tough? “You don’t belong anywhere,” he continued, oblivious to my surprise and growing annoyance. “Because you’re yellow, you’re not accepted in the United States. Because you’re ignorant of our culture, you don’t fit in here.” I was stunned. I had never heard my life described in such bleak terms.

I am sure he meant it kindly, which comforts me only a little. I pushed his conclusions out of my mind because the idea of not belonging anywhere disturbed me. According to him, I had no home, neither in Korea nor in Texas. Furthermore, I could never make a home unless Americans accepted my “yellow” skin or
I mastered a lifetime’s worth of Korean culture. I would have disagreed with my host, except his words are true.

In Texas, I was watching the movie School Ties with my friend one Saturday night. Caught up in the story, I rested my head against the back of the seat. Next to my head, in the crack between the theater seats, was a smelly, dirty gray sock. Phew! The odor was awful. I turned around and addressed the owner of the foot, a scruffy-looking teenager. “Excuse me, could you please move your foot?” He obeyed after a moment.

I turned around to continue watching the movie. Brandon Frasier, the only Jewish boy in his posh boarding school, was listening to one of his friends tell a joke. I do not remember what the question was but the answer is unforgettable: “A-chew!” in place of “Achoo!” Then I heard someone sneeze behind me, repeatedly. And I finally understood what he was saying, “A-chink! A-chink!”

I burned inside. But I stayed silent in my seat, watching the rest of the movie, ignoring the boys behind me. Because they were teenagers, what good would action do? A carefully crafted and logical argument would have little effect on their attitudes. Besides, two ignorant teenagers in a movie theater—it seemed such a trivial thing. After all, the situation did not call for drastic measures; it seemed not to warrant a ringing defense of justice. So, I just sat there.

In fact, such was my reaction to most instances of prejudice or racism and this is why I am not militant. My philosophy has been to save my energy for the battles I can win. I have chosen to excel and to show that I, as a Korean, an Asian, and a woman, can do anything anyone else can do... and better. I remember saying rather arrogantly to my friend during a debate about affirmative action that Korean faces would soon begin to appear in politics, in the media, and in positions of power. It was only a matter of time. Once the Korean American presence was a little older and stronger and Korean immigrants had learned English, Korean voices and opinions would fill the gaps—which shows my ignorance about Korean Americans.


“The Korean Episcopal Church in Honolulu is founded.” May 14. “The Korean Evangelical Society is organized in San Francisco.” 1907. October 22. “The United Federation publishes its newspaper, United Korean News.” 1908. May 23. “The Korean Women’s Association is established in San Francisco.” Date after date caught my attention. The Korean National Association. The Korean community. The Korean Youth Corps. The Korean Corps for the Advancement of Individuals. I was defeated. If there had been enough Koreans to form organizations and federations in 1908, there had been a Korean presence in the United States for nearly a century. Yet in the 1980s people were still asking me, “You’re not Chinese. You’re not Japanese. Where is Koh-ree-a?” And for days after the 1992 LA riots, the Korean-American community in Los Angeles had no voice and no leader to represent them and tell their side of the story. They had no defenders in the wake of the backlash against Koreans.

I had always wondered why I had never met a Korean activist. Koreans, it seems, prefer to work for respect within the system. By becoming doctors or lawyers or business leaders, Koreans will attain rights. Most Korean Americans feel as I used to: revenge is a dish best served cold and fighting winnable battles offers the most reasonable path. Two teenagers in a movie theater; the situation seems so trivial, but it’s not. Why else do I still remember the incident so clearly? Why do I so fervently wish that I had done something—a speech, an insult, a slap? By pretending to ignore them, I agreed with them. My silence was approval.

My life is not one incident; it is a string of incidents, each of which has shaped me. I am not militant. Not everyone I meet is a racist. For the most part, people are kind and tolerant. Yet there are also people who make me uncomfortable, relentlessly reminding me that I have no home.

My home stay host was right. When I visited this past summer, I did not feel at home in Korea. Seoul was strange, the language foreign. I am not accepted in the United States. I am different and alien; where does this leave me?

The answer to that question eludes me, but I do know this. I will no longer wait for a Korean-American presence to be felt. From now on, whether it is in Korea or in the United States, I refuse to wait patiently until attitudes change or the time becomes ripe. I will reach out and take what I want. With or without permission, I will make my own home.

It's said that long ago
a pair of lovers were transformed into stars,
banished to distant constellations, and can only
meet one day a year, joined by the milky way.

On this gravid July night,
the night sky mirrored by the ocean,
horizons blur, the clouds become waves,
silver-threaded, the tall grasses extend
towards the moon. She still believes
in the seventh day of the seventh month,
even as the moving water fails to dull
the ripped edges. Waiting, she sinks
into the cool pitch ocean and slips
into the cradle of the moon's reflection.

A small boat caught in reeds as it makes for shore,
I vainly seek to wait upon my love.

What she begins to see is the creep of day,
the brilliant gold leaf of sun that reveals the grass
to be grass, and the waves to be purely water.
She is just waking from another fitful night,
edged in light from the sun which is nothing
more than a star.

**The Pioneer** by Mina K. Park '98

In one old house, a husband and a wife await, just on the cusp of contentment, the brink of what they imagined their lives would be. Swarms of anticipating murmurs fill the halls and wend up the oak staircases, alight on the skin, enclosing, buzzing.

Daily, he shaves, combs gel through his salt ing hair with almost-chief of staff confidence and yet, with a warm bedside manner. She, amidst teetering stacks of clipped photos of the perfect shade of damask curtains, the right corner table for the foyer, reads another book or paints, delighting in the contemplation of a beautiful home—oak floors and twenty-foot ceilings—that was never hers,

that after twenty years, she will walk out of carrying only a sack of clothes and her paintings, leaving behind the drawer of red nightgowns and myriad perfumes he bought her and shaking out the sadness in the creases of her face.
My job was to make money. My mother’s job was to see what all the hype was about. Both of us set off to see the country of our blood, the place that was wondered at, criticized, slandered, and loved by the pictures and stories of my mother’s daily gossip with relatives and friends. That summer break in Seoul, though, did not happen to be just another learning experience. It was a genuine shock. It was a shock to me even though only five years had passed since my last visit. The blow was of even greater proportion for my mother, who had left the country twenty years ago because it offered little but promises of a prosperous future that seemed too distant for ambitious young Koreans like my parents.

A generation later, exploiting a Harvard admissions certificate and bilingual capabilities, I made considerable cash during my two-month stint as an English tutor-for-hire. The almost effortless recruitment of tutees (or actually their parents) and the outrageous fees that I was able to charge were the first shocks. I specifically targeted the wealthy and trendy neighborhoods, where I had heard English tutors were treated and paid like gods.

The stories of daughters offered to Harvard men like myself by brown-nosing Korean mothers and lavish dinners given by students’ extended families were to a great extent true. I was always approached with good food, cute Korean girls, and strange, expensive gifts. It was a strange world that was supposed to be so modernized and equivalent to America in every aspect, but it was still so incredibly immature with its plentiful nouveau-riche striving to out-materialize one another.

This scene was what my mother so abhorred about the new Korea. She remembered a country of poor people, run-down but still hip coffee shops, and an easy commute between downtown Seoul and the countryside. She remembered a Third World innocence that she had to leave, but still loved. After twenty years, however, Korea had become a farcical copy of the country she had adopted during that long time. “America is so settled, comfortable. Korea is filled with well-dressed fools who think they know what it is to be comfortable,” she remarked as we ate our wallet-emptying Häagen-Dazs ice cream cones. A waif clad in all-black Dolce & Gabbana accompanied by a moussed-out Every-hipster in Armani passed by, visibly smirking at my sandals, shorts, and sweat-spotted T-shirt. “Like those two,” my mom added as she sneered at their smirks.

Overall, the neighborhood in which I stayed had the money and the taste of Beverly Hills or Park Avenue at its most toned down level. I also had an opportunity, however, to see a less developed aspect of the Korean Ritz: education. I was a tutor to six kids, ranging from a first-year middle school student to third-year high school students. They were all rich, filthy rich. They owned the trendiest clothes, the best stereo systems, and had their eyes set on the fanciest cars. A
few of them did well in school.

One of my students was a high school sophomore, or more appropriately, a second-year student (high school runs three years in Korea). She was born in Seoul, lived in Los Angeles and Detroit for three years, and returned to Korea when she was seven years old. She knew more English than the others and did reasonably well in school. She also hated it with a passion. Now, she is going to high school in Los Angeles and living with a host family.

Her situation and her feelings towards schooling in Korea were best reflected by her older brother’s situation. He was in the middle of studying for college entrance exams, the notoriously excruciating tests that pit Korean high school students against each other for the most coveted spots in the nation’s top universities. His schedule reflects the nature of the exams and the preparation required for them. He woke up at 7 a.m., ate breakfast, and went to school for five hours. After a short lunch, he would take classes at a math/science learning institute for three hours. A short dinner and nap were followed by another institute for English, literature, and history. Then, it was on to study hall at his high school, where he would stay until 2 a.m. Then, he went to sleep only to wake up and do the whole thing over again. Oh yes, this was during summer break. Meanwhile, his parents were pouring God-knocks-how-much money into the various learning institutes, tutors, and “extras” that were vital to success, only because every other student was doing the same. He hated his life, but he knew he had no way out.

At first, I thought I was lucky to go to school in America, but then I realized it was not so much my luck in America, but his misfortune under such a nasty system in Korea. The educational system stressed rote memorization and almost immeasurable time commitment. At first, a few of my students’ parents thought I was wasting their time and robbing them of their money (strange to think any Korean could think that of any good-goodie Harvard-boy). They were expecting me to speak English to their kids, give them lists of vocabulary to memorize, and read along with them.

“Why do you play jazz music during the lesson? Why do you have them write essays on what kind of girl they would like to marry?” My older students would often ask me for the correct answer when I asked them to interpret translations of poems by Korean authors.

“You know the answer,” I would reply to their baffled faces. I thought I had good teaching ideas, some perhaps a bit outlandish, but still effective. They eased the student-teacher relationship, provided some everyday conversation practice, and introduced some “American ways” to them. Only after the kids started speaking English to their folks well did the parents realize that I was doing something differently and effectively.

I also had the opportunity to talk at length with a number of Korean college students about education. One in particular, a French literature major attending the Korean educational system’s place of worship, Seoul National University, stands out in my mind. I was introduced to him by one of my mother’s friends, who said he spoke English quite well. I was looking forward to good conversation about French literature.

It turned out that he spoke French well, but knew jack about French literature. He didn’t know who Balzac or Flaubert were; the only major work he had studied in his first semester at Seoul National was The Stranger. He admitted to me that he didn’t do especially well during high school, and that he was actually known more as a playboy than a student by his peers and teachers. He had chosen French literature because he knew that he could get into Seoul National more easily by proposing such a major. He said that he did surprisingly well on his college entrance exams, but nowhere near the achievements of the Seoul National law or medical prospects. Now, he is stuck with something he knows virtually nothing about, apparently carries no interest for, and in which he finds no real future. He was only after the name of Seoul National.

“Screw the education. Korean college kids party anyway and no one seems to care. And after school and military service, I will carry the name with me and make good money no matter what I do.” I was disappointed, but I understood his take on it. Kids suffer so much through high school, memorizing every math problem, memorizing “correct” interpretations of literature, and spending hours on end in school and learning institute classrooms. College is just a party before going into military service. In the end, though, I had to hand one thing to Korean college students: they could take a lot of booze. Korean college kids drink alcohol like we eat Pizza Ring.

This mindset formed part of the educational system in Korea. It was strange to see such a system and attitude towards education within a society and country that wanted the best of every world. The hotels are world-class; the fashions are always up-to-date. Young people know all the latest American slang; the streets are always brimming with “progress” or “modernity.” Speaking from a perspective within the American system, however, Korean education is a remnant of the nation’s past. Whether Korea thinks the system needs to be altered or “progress” is a question that few seem willing to address. Meanwhile, the college entrance exam help centers are sucking in cash and bars are getting paid good rent from college students.
To the Calm Morning

walking straight with his eyes closed
in vain I fear
off in one errant direction
in pain he veers
past the paved road
pointing towards the last tree
there in the shadows
his heart hides in the lee
protected from the hand of Zephyr
only to be gurgled in the mouth of Zeus
his white flag waves in surrender
but the tears will not truce
so do not tease him with freedom
you can not shroud his shame
with untied shoes he travels
with no one to blame
to a garden and a dream
he seems to walk alone
he staggers and collapses
it is too far a walk home
he makes no attempt to stop
the blood from his nose
he lays down his head
his eyes are closed

old men never lie
still as they wait around
until they die
knowing the end is near
they pull down the window shade
hoping the sunset will not appear

old men always lie
in bed staring at the ceiling
sometimes
reminiscing of the days of old
though they cannot remember the names and faces
they never forget the stories untold

old men always hide
their tears as they ask
why
must old men always die
yet a false lie may be the truest truth
and the simple truth may be the greatest lie

POETRY & PHOTOGRAPHY
by Richard Lee '96-'98
I’m not a rooted person. It’s a fact that saddens me a little just because there was a time when I thought that having roots was the most precious thing you could have. I thought I had legitimate claims to roots. After all, I lived in Whitehaven, Mississippi, most of my life, before I went to college. But, I come to find out that just because you’re born and you live somewhere for cons and cons doesn’t mean you have ‘em.

I don’t have bitter memories about the place. I liked playing golf at Putt-Putt’s and practicing at the batting cage with my dad. Or sometimes me and my friends would ride up to Memphis, get into a gentleman’s club for a good hard-on, and then make it back the next morning just in time for church on Sundays. And I like fishing — here I am now, fishing on the banks of the Chatapatwa stream, close to my dad’s Bait and Gas shop. It’s not exactly a Kodak moment to be fishing in this April shower. But I have nothing to lose in this weather because I’m not doing it for the fish. I like going through the motions of casting your line, letting it drift downstream peacefully without some goddamn garfish coiling up your line, and then reeling it back in, all in one piece. The Mississippi rain is warm and clean — it has the enhancing effect of scattering my thoughts into the oblivion.

Well, I didn’t come back to Whitehaven to pick up any sentimental treasures or memories. Someone’s got to close down the shop. I think my dad would have been happy about that. He never wanted me to remain in Mississippi. He filled me up with ambition and wanted me to look down on my “white trash” friends and neighbors. He said, “Chung Hyup, you go to good university, not one of those cheap community colleges. You got to make something out of yourself, boy. Friendship mean nothing to these white trash, they have no roots, no identity, no nothing.” But honestly, I don’t think I would have stayed here anyways. Ever since I was a kid, my mind tended to wander. I used to annoy the hell out of my creationist Sunday school teacher because I’d draw dinosaurs instead of the assigned repertoire of Adam and Eve, Abraham, and Jesus Christ. To be sure, I was preparing myself for the next elevated level of existence. I just didn’t want to mold myself into anything permanent, not just yet. Not here in Whitehaven, not here in Mississippi, not here in the South.

I had supreme confidence that you could mold yourself into anything you wanted to be. At the core, a human is just an amorphous being, so you just need to push yourself to be what you want to be and eventually you get there. In high school, I thought that one could wear various personalities like articles of clothing for different occasions. I didn’t know what movies I liked, what clothes I should wear, what books I should read. My taste in music was diverse because I didn’t have taste; I listened to jazz, blues, country music, rap, rock ‘n roll, and heavy metal, and they all sounded cool to me. I didn’t think there was any harm in this. I didn’t think I was being untrue to myself or to others either. How can you, if you don’t know what you are and you may not like it anyways? You got to change because when you stop dreaming it’s time to die.

When I got into UCLA, I wanted to clean up my act and start anew. I didn’t want to stick out like a sore thumb, so at first, I wore some khakis and a plain white T-shirt. Students there were excited about everything as well as about nothing. I wanted to be part of the mindless enthusiasm. T-shirts with mottoes and slogans everywhere: Das Kapital, Down with the Nelson Mandela regime, Veritas Up my Ass, Have you hugged a Sherpa recently?, etc. I joined an activist group called KASA (Korean Americans for Social Action). My Korean was fairly fluent, strangely enough for a kid from the deep South where there aren’t that many Koreans. Perhaps I knew it’d come in handy in the future. It endeared me to my sunbae’s who thought that retaining the culture was important.

In KASA, you got to think a lot about other people’s miseries without really feeling sorry for them. We were too busy getting pissed off at the system. Garment sweatshop labor, affirmative action violations, and immigration bashing were hot topics. There was always a janitorial strike or a Bus Riders Union march on Western Avenue that you could lend a hand to. I had to do a lot of studying about the black movement, the women’s movement, labor movement, minority
movement, and revolutionary movements going on abroad. But some things I just couldn’t understand. I was having a hard time reconciling myself with the fact that I was the son of a petty bourgeoise, yet Sir/Comrade Lenin himself was a fourth ranking hereditary noble. I felt that excluding Jews from Ethnic Studies was really anti-Semitic. Maybe it’s true that Jews aren’t the most economically oppressed group and they oppress Palestinians (but didn’t they own half of Germany before the Holocaust?). One time I was drinking a slurpie by Seven Eleven, and some Latinos ask me “You think this is Hong Kong or somethin’?” and beat the fuckin’ shit out of me. I was confused. Was I supposed to be mad? I don’t know. I wished they were white so I could hate them. No, I wished they were the LAPD. No, I wished they were the very white police officers from the Rodney King trials. Then I could become a martyr and a hero. Or maybe they should have been Bill Clinton. But I can’t help laughing when I imagine this Phil Hartman look-alike saying “I feel your pain.”

One night, me and my KASA sundae’s went to sing at noraebang and after hollering ourselves hoarse, we went for beer at a nearby Korean bar. We were talking about the Korean student movement against the oppressive Kim Young Sam government and American imperialism in South Korea. I was getting unusually drunk that night. I downed seven large mugs of beer, maybe ten but I lost count. I guess I wanted to forget about callousness and inhumanity. Then one person blurs out, “You know, in the Korean War, the North Koreans weren’t that bad. They didn’t try to kill any peasants or workers, they were just trying kill the aristocrats.” I began to laugh. I laughed hysterically. I laughed with a deep guttural laugh and then let out a big fart. Eddie Murphy would have been proud. I didn’t know what came over me. But I was overcome with rage. I began denouncing all my socialist heroes, you name it — Lenin, Fidel Castro, Mao Tsetung, Guevara, Ho Chi Minh, Kim Ilsung. Everyone became dead silent. Except Cho Il hyung, who whispered eerily into my ears, “Chung Hyup, I know you’re not drunk. I said I know you’re not drunk, so cut the bullshit!” I banged my head into his forehead, squeeze his biceps hard, and let out another fart. When they tried to take me back home by car, I kept giving wrong directions. I told them to keep going left because left is always right. That didn’t go very well with them so they ditched me.
right in the middle of downtown LA.

I was scared. But more than that I felt betrayed. I thought that these socialist fuckheads preached compassion and kindness to all of humanity, and yet they can’t even handle one piss-drunk kid with an attitude. I began to cry. I was puking all over myself. I ripped up my Das Kapital shirt, threw it into the garbage dump, and mumbled some curses in Korean. I felt like jacking off in the corner. I felt like a prophet screams into the wilderness, but I figured I’d keep screaming whether the audience liked what I had to say or whether they thought I was a clown. Just then someone came walking toward me.

"Hey Chung, what’s up?" I wasn’t sure who he was. He looked like a homeless bum.

"Do you know who I am? I’m Urun. Urun Amal. I’m an exchange student, I’m in your social studies class." I vaguely remember now. I never saw him at any of the student functions or events. "Man you look like shit. I’m on my way to get some cigs. Want to join me?"

I became good friends with Urun. People didn’t like him because he was from Harvard. They thought he had a very arrogant air about him. But I think it’s more the cosmopolitan character that he got from growing up in Calcutta and New York City. He really wasn’t the preppy type. He was a scruffy looking Bengali with long unkempt hair and a goatee that accentuated his frown that told people to “fuck off.” I think he grew up pretty poor, because he had a cheap side too. He ate only one meal a day. He was good at dealing and haggling with merchants over prices and got his stereo equipment for a total of fifty dollars. He went to Software Etc’s to get his games and programs, copied them, and then returned everything cash back. I really had to admire his ingenuity and practicality, uninhibited by anal, suburbanite morals. Once me and Urun were shivering in the rain and I mumbled about my hair getting all wet. Urun led me to the lost and found, pulled out a pair of gloves for himself and then casually tossed me a University of San Francisco cap.

Urun was quite interested in the history of jazz and wanted to do some research in the South. He got quite curious about Mississippi. He was attracted by the cheap cost of living. He especially lit up to the fact that cigarettes only went for a dollar fifty a pack. I wanted him to stay over at my dad’s place. I wanted dad to get his first look at a Harvard kid. Before Urun got there, he wrecked his uninsured car in Tupelo, so my dad had to go pick him up. Urun broke every expectation of my father’s idyllic hopes of what a Harvard student should have been. I would guess that he was expecting a clean shaved face, collared shirt, blazer, preppy sweater, and a Cuban cigar. Instead arrived this dark-skinned South Asian kid with unkempt hair and goatee, torn-up jeans, smoking GPC’s because he couldn’t afford camels at the time, and wearing his Metallica shirt with the remains of a snake on the back that said "Don’t tread on me."

"Oh man, Mr. Shin, I almost died in that crash ... the car flipped twelve times and my head was spinning like I was OD’ed ... Oh, are those Winstons by any chance? Could I smoke one with you?"

In my dad’s racial scale of affection, I think South Asians probably came somewhere lower than Chinese, but maybe a bit higher than blacks. But as a result of this first impression, Urun single-handedly embarrassed his race in the eyes of my father, bringing it down to the pits of the racial ladder.

My dad got to like Urun, however. Maybe because they were both smoke addicts. But Urun also had a knack for listening to other people’s problems and giving off the impression that he had an answer. He wasn’t doing this deliberately. He just had an air of self-control. He was a guru through and through. I can’t remember my father being so intimate about his personal problems with anyone. He’d beat the shit out of me if I ever asked about mom or anything else too nosy. Dad was so sensitive on that topic. But then Urun liked to get to the core of things and give his straightforward opinion on the matter. He unhesitatingly asked, “Where’s Mrs. Shin?” My dad took Urun to the porch, lit up a cigarette as Urun joined in, and began sobbing like a child. I couldn’t make out exactly what those two were saying. The funny thing was my father spoke half the time in Korean and cried the other half in English so I’m pretty sure Urun didn’t really get too much out of the conversation. Nonethe-
less, Urun suggested that Mr. Shin stop feeling angry and guilty for whatever sins of his youth. One makes mistakes, but there shouldn't be any regrets so leave the past behind. "Why don't you just get married again? You'll be all right."

Within the year, my dad passed away. But he died a content man. I wish I knew what dad was telling Urun. I'm sure they had more of those intimate on-the-porch chats, while I was back studying at UCLA. My dad was very concerned with his image and never put his guard down, especially with family. He was always hiding himself from me. I figure that's why mom left him. But dad couldn't pull that one off on Urun. Urun didn't put up with pretension. It wasn't his style.

I came back to close the store. Urun figured that it was time for him to leave Mississippi. His research was telling him to go to Kansas City. Whitehaven was cheap living, but the jazz scene wasn't really happening here. He had his Ford Taurus running with the stereo on.

"So how was your vacation, Urun?" I asked. Urun took a moment before answering.

"The quiet did me a lot of good, but I find America so depressing. Stretches of open space. A sprawling McDonald's culture. I think if there was a nuclear holocaust that annihilated all the places of high culture like New York, Chicago, New Orleans, and L.A. ... and a-minute, scratch L.A. ... then it'd be so depressing. It'd be like the downfall of the Roman Empire, when the Vandals destroyed all those Roman cities like Rome and Pompeii. It'd be like rural monasteries all over again. We'd probably have to take a vow of celibacy, just to flip hamburgers, you know. Could you pass me my sleeping bag?" I filled up his tank, and helped him pack his stuff. Urun wanted to get an early start, so the sunrise was barely tweaking.

"What band you playing?"

"Oh, Blind Melon. You like? They're actually from Mississippi. I think of you when I hear this song." He began singing along in a mock-Southern grit accent that he picked up:

"All I can say is that my life is pretty plain,
I like watching the puddles gather rain.
All I can do is just pour some tea for two,
then speak my point of view, I know it's not sane,
It's not sanaaaaaaaane."

He had added ridicule at the end. "Well, Chung. Good luck to you. Here, you can have the tape. I think they sound like shit anyways. I need Coltrane and Led Zeppelin for my survival on the road."
"Ode to the Women"
SoHyun Bae

of Josun Dynasty"

Each, 9" x 12", vine charcoal on paper, 1997.
This past spring Sohyun Bae had several exhibitions at Harvard including "Ode to the Women of the Josun Dynasty" at the Harvard-Yenching Institute and "Painting as Prayer" at the Center for the Study of World Religions. Yisei had the opportunity to talk with Ms. Bae about her works and her influences.

Yisei: Could you tell us about the major influences in your work? In particular, tell us what led up to the series depicting women in Hanbok—the So-Nyu series.

Bae: Prior to the So-Nyu series, I had no specifically Asian, specifically Korean influence in my work. The transition occurred when I spent a year in Rome. There was a temple outside of Rome which contained a painting of Pierro della Francescoco called Madonna del Parto. The setting was very intimate because it was a temple where women who had difficulties with childbearing came to pray. And, apparently, their prayers were answered...there were than you letters posted all over. What struck me was the circular space of the temple repeated in the painting; within that particular painting by Pierro, there is a kind of parting of the curtains by two angels with matching wings and matching socks. It's really quite wonderful, it exposes a circular space and in this space, the Madonna dwells. In another painting entitled Madonna della Misericordia, patrons of the painting enter that sacred space and kneel before the Madonna. I became very interested in that circular sacred space. Then it occurred to me that the Korean Hanbok, the Korean traditional dress, has a unique bulge. And the interior space created by this bulge seemed to me to be that exact circular space. I began to wonder and ponder, "With what could I possibly fill that space?" I began to fill that space, I filled one with dead leaves rustling about, and the other with earth, a kind of bloody, moist substance.

Yisei: Are you still working on the series?

Bae: I am in a sense. There is a lot of shifting of interior and exterior spaces in my work. And you haven't seen my early works which led to the So-Nyu series, so you're not really aware, visually, of what I'm talking about. But there is a constant back and forth of interior and exterior space. So, it is developing except that now it's as if the whole thing has turned inside out. I really shouldn't talk about it too much, because I'm working on it right now. But yes, I am still thinking about that.

Yisei: And what about the inspiration for the faces of the Women of the Josun Dynasty or the other series, Wings of Infant Green.

Bae: Out of the So-Nyu series, branched out both of those series. The Ode to the Women of the Josun Dynasty—the heads—are in a sense what comes out of that interior space. But, the Wings of Infant Green is that space turned inside out, which I'm developing further. They're all interrelated.

Yisei: When did you come to the US?

Bae: We first moved to LA in 1976—my first visit to Disneyland, my first experience with fat people—I had never seen them before in my life. Then we settled in Ohio—my parents still live in Ohio.

Yisei: What do your parents do?

Bae: Right now they own a store—it's the typical immigrant story. My mother was a Professor of En-
lish Literature at Yiwha University and my father was in mass media—he was the director of Dong-Ah Bangsong ... but they both own a store now.

Yisei: Why did they come to America, do you think?
Bae: It was for a very specific reason. Back in 1975, there was an internal riot caused by Park Chung Hee. Because Dong-Ah Bangsong was the only one that he couldn't censor—they reported the news as it was, and he wasn't pleased—he went to a great extent to make them go out of business. He went to the advertisers, the life source of the newspaper, in order to cut the life-line which resulted in an internal riot. My father was badly injured.

Yisei: So there was actually a riot within the company itself?
Bae: Yes, and my father was caught in the middle. There was a brick thrown, and it hit him right above the temple. He could have died instantly had it been a few millimeters down. I remember he was in the hospital, and I went to visit him. I was only six or seven at the time. People brought all kinds of yummy chocolate, canned fruits, bananas, and other goodies which I loved. While munching, I said, "Appa, I'm so glad that you're in the hospital." I didn't know any better. I didn't know any of this until I went back to Korea ten years ago when his colleagues told me what had actually happened.

Yisei: How did you find growing up in America?
Bae: I was shocked—because back in Korea, there was corporal punishment and I got hit practically every other day. They said I talked too much for a girl. They used a whip. It was a stick covered with leather and they hit my hands with it. There were all kinds of punishments. One day I had to hold out my arms for 45 minutes—then I came to the states and the students were sitting like this [she sits upright] ... in Korea I literally had to sit up straight, with my hands folded and look up at the teacher like this. I could never make eye contact and I could never speak to the teacher unless I was spoken to. This was why I got hit all the time, because I didn't fit the mold. And then here, in the states, everyone was so lax, chatting, chewing gum in class ... Yisei: Do you have any desire to return to Korea?
Bae: To live there? No, especially not at this point in my life, because I am still considered a young woman, and as a young woman, I don't have a voice. Either I have to get my sex changed, or just grow very old ... the years will give me a voice.

Yisei: Even as an artist?
Bae: Even as an artist it's hard.

Yisei: How so?
Bae: Here in the US I present my work to a group of people, and there are intense dialogues, criticisms, suggestions, and whatnot back and forth. The criticism can be very vicious at times, but they can also be constructive, and they may challenge me to direct my energies to certain paths that I otherwise may not have taken. However, in Korea, I understand that the 'teacher' comes in, takes a look at the work, and decides whether it's good or bad. There is no questioning whatsoever.

Yisei: So you plan to continue your career as an artist in the US?
Bae: Being an artist is not about pursuing a career. It's like a calling—this is what I tell my students: You don't choose to be a painter, it chooses you. And even if you suppress it, someday it will surface, because it is you, and you have to accept it. You can fight it all you want, but it's just a waste of your time, and your energies—just go with who you are.
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Congressman Jay Kim, a Republican Representative from California's 41st Congressional District since 1992, is the only Korean American ever elected to Congress. Often looked upon by supporters as the embodiment of the American Dream, Congressman Kim has also received much criticism, especially from the younger generation of Korean Americans. Yisei recently had an opportunity to talk with Congressman Kim.

Yisei: Do you still see discrimination and bias against Asian Americans in your dealings with businessmen and government officials? If so, in what ways and how have you dealt with such discrimination?

Kim: Despite the significant progress I have seen towards eliminating discrimination and racial bias in our country since I immigrated to the United States in 1961, sadly there remain problems in race relations. Certain forms of discrimination continue against Asian-Americans, most notably in the higher education system where outstanding Asian-Americans have been denied admission because it is claimed that too many of "us" are already in the university. Similar attitudes have limited Asian-American promotions to senior leadership positions in corporations. I am disappointed that President Clinton—despite his promises—has yet to nominate any Asian-American to any cabinet or agency head-level positions. Too few Asian-Americans have been nominated to ambassadorial or other Senate-confirmed positions, including federal judgeships. In government, we've actually slid backwards over the past four years.

When I see discrimination, I try to point it out and get it corrected. It often is addressed satisfactorily by business. With regard to government, I have repeatedly shared my concern about the passing over of qualified Asian-Americans for top federal positions with the White House and other Democratic leaders. Unfortunately, my concerns have fallen on deaf ears—perhaps because I am a Republican. However, I'm not pushing Republican Asian-Americans on the administration (I'm well aware they're obviously only going to appoint Democrats), I'm supporting qualified candidates that fit the Clinton Administration's political mold.

As a Member of Congress, I believe the best way to improve race relations is to promote a color-blind America. As Korean-Americans, we should emphasize the "American" side of the hyphen while still appreciating our Korean heritage.

Yisei: What single biggest problem do you see in the Korean-American community in the next century? How would you address these problems?

Kim: Political apathy. It's time to translate the economic success we have achieved as Korean-Americans into political clout. Here's how:

- Register to vote
- Support political causes and candidates that reflect your view through volunteer work and financial contributions.
As Korean-Americans, we should emphasize the “American” side of the hyphen while still appreciating our Korean heritage.

In the name of affirmative action, quotas have been used in some California state schools to limit the number of Asian-American student admissions, despite the overwhelmingly superior qualifications of many Asian-American applicants. This is blatant discrimination.

I suspect many other companies have made the same mistakes as these Korean-owned companies affecting many other federal campaigns. Yet, no one else—not even the Democratic National Committee (DNC) which appears to be in the center of a very serious and far-reaching political fundraising scandal—has received, comparatively speaking, the kind of legal and media attention as my campaign and these Korean-affiliated U.S. corporations have. And, even in the case of the DNC, the negative reporting seems to be focused on the Asian-American factor, not the apparent violations of law by the

DNC. I believe that the media’s coverage has been unfair towards Asian-Americans.
Asian-American students. However, I must be clear that in accordance with the Congressional Accountability Act, neither race, ethnicity, religion nor gender is a factor in my hiring.

Yisei: Do you support affirmative action in its current
(CONTINUES NEXT PAGE)

Jay Kim, My Congressman...

a commentary by Daniel D. Chung ’00

Jay Kim is a wonderful example of the American Dream. He has fulfilled the two major goals of the Korean immigrant: academic success and occupational prosperity. He has gone beyond the wildest dreams of any Korean immigrant by being elected to city council, then to mayor of the city, and finally to becoming the first Korean American in Congress. Looking back, he was the pride of the Korean American community in the big hurrah of having “one of our own” in Washington. But how do his once-hopeful constituents look at Kim now?

My hometown is Diamond Bar, California, where Jay Kim was a prominent engineer, city council member, and mayor until he was elected to Congress. A substantial Korean American community resides in Diamond Bar. When Jay Kim was elected to the Diamond City Council, Koreans were stunned. Those Korean Americans registered definitely had voted, but never expected their fellow immigrant to actually win. His mayoral victory was even more shocking. His Congressional victory dropped jaws. The big question among Diamond Bar and 41st district Korean Americans was, “Do we have as much power as we seem to have?” Most answered an emphatic “Yes” and celebrated a great opportunity to present and fight for Korean and Asian-American interests on the Capitol.

Congressman Kim, as you have read, essentially dismisses Korean American and Asian-American voting support as a contribution to his Election Day victories. He has made this known before, confusing many. Why does this man put his fellow Koreans on the back burner?

Perhaps the demands of Republican conservatism are unduly influencing him. Or it may be that he is still getting accustomed to Congress. Many members of the 41st District Korean American community believe Jay Kim simply does not care. He claims his “concern” regarding Asian-American political success and acceptance into government has been heard. This “concern,” however, has not translated into much action. African-American “concerns” cause action. Hispanic-American “concerns” motivate action. Native American “concerns” inspire action. But major Korean American and Asian American interests are rarely brought to the forefront of discussion and fail to be given active consideration.

Diamond Bar Korean Americans believed Jay Kim was the person to represent them in America’s capital. His record, his attitudes, and his claims, however, have disappointed them. The community recognizes that he is “a Republican Congressman who happens to be of Korean origin,” but he went into public service facing certain expectations from the Korean American community. There is much ambiguity on the critics’ side, however, as to what exactly these expectations are. Congressman Kim is correct in claiming that Korean American interests are wide and varied, that they are difficult to bring into cohesive discussion without strong definition. Perhaps Korean Americans are looking for a general presence in high office. The Los Angeles riots, the still lingering effects of the recession, and continued racial tensions have both physically impaired and blighted the image of the Korean American community, and justice is being sought for the various misconceptions that block their progress. Yet, many Korean Americans complain that a single strong voice, if found, could sufficiently carry out this justice.

Many of Congressman Kim’s Korean American critics believe it is high time for him to do this job. He is attacked for being too much the politician rather than the Korean American. In the minds of many Korean Americans, getting into Congress was only the beginning of Kim’s duty. The same individuals claim that Kim’s example is only part of the process for greater Korean American political participation and empowerment. Someone is needed to open the door to the inside for other Korean Americans. Many Korean Americans believe Congressman Kim is one of the few who has the ability and the obligation to do this.
form? If not, how would you change the system? Would you abolish it completely?

Kim: The citizens of California decided to abolish the state’s affirmative action program in passing Proposition 208 on November 5, 1996. At this time, Congress had no scheduled consideration of any affirmative action related legislation. I personally believe that affirmative action programs have played a very important role in breaking the primary barriers of discrimination. However, I believe we have now progressed to the point where we should seriously re-evaluate affirmative action programs in a responsible manner that does not reverse the civil rights gains we have achieved.

I strongly oppose the use of racial “quota” systems. In the name of affirmative action, quotas have been used in some California state schools to limit the number of Asian-American student admissions, despite the overwhelmingly superior qualifications of many Asian-American applicants. This is blatant discrimination.

While I continue to support small business set asides (due to the inherent economic inabilities of small business to compete against large corporations), I believe other set aside programs should be thoroughly re-evaluated. There is too much unfairness and fraud associated with many current set-aside contracts as best exemplified by the recent WEDTECH scandal. The objective should be to ensure equal access to and opportunity in the competitive marketplace—not guarantee results.

Visci: What advice do you have for Korean-American students here at Harvard and at other campuses across the country who are interested in serving the government?

Kim: Government can only be as good as those who participate in it. Public service is an honorable profession and I encourage Harvard and other university students to serve in government—at all levels.

Should you have any further questions or need assistance, please do not hesitate to let me know:

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Pictures of Our Past
by David Bahk '00

Essay

BOOM! The ground shook violently as the smoldering mortar crashed down on the earth. Broken shrapnel and clumps of earth showered the nearby foliage, covering the trees with a coat of dirt and metal. Hidden safely underneath these trees stood my father, only seven at the time, with his family. As North Korean citizens, they were sick and tired of their worsening living standards and were fleeing to the more prosperous south. The only thing that stood in their way were miles of dangerous terrain and the constant fear of falling bombs. BOOM!

Gazing into the bright sun my father hugged the pack around his back. Severely aged and weather beaten, this old leather bag never left his back. He carried it with the hope that one day, he could open it and enjoy its treasures on new soil. Firmly clenching the strap, he moved out of the jungle and into the open field.

The bombing had stopped momentarily, so my family decided to press forward. The air was cool, and the sun seemed to shine with the promise of good fortune. Suddenly, a strange, shrieking whistle heralded a shower of incoming bombs. BOOM! The ground moved under their feet. BOOM! Many shells followed, falling like melon-sized drops of rain. Without fear, my father grasped the bag and held it close to his side.

My family started to run toward the sheltering valley below them. Night was falling, and their visibility was getting worse. Suddenly, they found themselves knee deep in the wet marshes of a rice field. BOOM! With a loud splash and an angry snarl, a shell landed twenty meters away from my father. Blown completely off of his feet, his hands slipped off of the leather bag. As he hit the water, he felt the bag leave his hands and enter the darkness around him.

Disoriented, my father awoke to the shouts of my grandfather telling him to wake up. BOOM! As more shells fell, he finally realized what had happened, and stood on his feet. BOOM! The intensity of the falling shells was increasing. My father began to scream in frustration as he and my grandfather frantically searched for the precious bag. My grandfather, realizing the imminent danger, sadly scooped up my father and began to run. Somewhere deep within the muddy waters of the rice fields, the bag slowly disappeared into the surrounding darkness.

As my father later told me, the leather bag contained priceless family artifacts that had been with my family for generations upon generations. Among these artifacts were a family tree that spanned centuries, ancient family heirlooms, important documents, old paintings, hand drawn sketches of ancestors, and most importantly, pictures. My family used pictures to cap-
ture every moment in their lives. As a result, they owned many pictures of relatives, friends, events, children, homes, and even pets. As in my father's family, pictures have become incorporated into many aspects of society in general. One can see their significance in the vast array and common presence of pictures everywhere. They have essentially transformed into everyday objects. By looking into anyone's wallet, one will most likely find a picture or two of loved ones. These wallet-sized photos allow people to keep their friends and family with them at all times. Contrasting with small photos, large photos are also present throughout society. Gigantic picture advertisements known as billboards adorn the sides of many highways. Households often have large family portraits hung in their walls at home. Disposable cameras, camcorders, digital recording cameras, Polaroids, films, movies, and videocassette recorders further exemplify this omnipresence.

Seeing how pictures are everyday objects, what makes them so significant? Why are they important for society, as well as for my father? With an air of nostalgia, my father says that if he could have anything in the entire world, he would want that bag back. To him, the pictures in the leather bag are important because they offer him a gateway into a past that can never be visited again. Thinking about those lost pictures, he told me about how he couldn't remember what his childhood friends looked like, and how he wished he had the pictures to see them again. He told me about the dog that he had to leave behind, and how he longed for that photograph as well. My father explained that if he could relive these experiences, he'd be the happiest man alive. However, the only way that he can relive them is by remembering them and by looking at the photos taken of them.

My father is not the only person who thinks this way. As his son, I myself wish that I could see his photos. I want to visualize how my father lived back then and finally put a palpable illustration to his stories. On a more personal note, I cherish my own photos, and have come to realize their powerful significance. However, this recognition did not come until after I had left for college. In my planner, I carry around pictures of friends, family, and memorable events. These pictures are tactile representations of memories that I have. For instance, I have a photograph of my now eleven year old sister. In this picture, she smiles with an air of happiness that reminds me of the many hours we spent together trying to kill Bowser in Super Mario Brothers, how we spent late hours reading together during the summer before I left for college, and how she cried when I finally left.

This picture is the only tangible memory I have with me of my sister. Pictures are material representations or images of certain moments in time. Their paper and plastic nature makes them tactile, a sort of static representation on paper. Their palpability helps to illustrate a memory, and serves as a sort of hand held window in time. Pictures often illustrate memories that would have otherwise been seemingly forgotten, but can be refreshed by a mere glance of a photo. Back home, I occasionally flip through our photo albums and am reminded of experiences like vacations to Hawaii and California, how excited my face looked on Christmas morning, and how my brother starred in an elementary school musical dressed as a giant bug.

Like my family, many families own scrapbooks or photo albums that keep and store their pictures as a means of preservation. In these books, pictures are often protected by a plastic seal coat or lamination. Outside of photo albums, many pictures are also protected by being framed and cased in glass. Plastic lamination, glass coating, lithographing, and photocopying allow the picture to be kept and viewed for a long time. This shows that pictures have value, and that people wish to cherish this value by preserving them. By taking these steps, people want to preserve their pictures for as long as they can. Such measures show that people have a need to remember their past and protect their memories.

Realizing that such measures are taken to protect pictures, is it necessary to have physical images to help remember our past? Pictures do help add certain details to memories, but they do not make up the memory as a whole. They function more as an aid, not a necessity to our memories. Our memories are stored within ourselves, and are capable of being retrieved. They are brought up and triggered by the image on a picture, but they are not the pictures themselves. Memories can exist in the form of mental as well as physical pictures.

To this day, even though my father wishes that he could hold the bag with his hands once again, he knows that this is impossible. He regrets with sadness having ever let it slip and losing it in the deep marshes of the rice fields. However, although my father lost the leather bag in its physical state, he has found the bag within himself, existing in the form of his memories. In retelling his stories, he symbolically pulls out the lost pictures from his own memory, allowing himself to relive the experiences, and allowing me to create my own pictures of his past. Without these memories, a picture image would be worthless. Although my father believes that he needs this bag to revisit his past, he doesn’t realize that the past is already there, living and breathing inside of him.
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Undividing Korea:
A Report from the Symposium on
Peaceful Reunification of Korea

by Jae Sung Lee, translation by Yunsun Nam '99

SPECIAL FEATURE

April 1996, Korea Institute at University of California, Berkeley organized the Korea Peaceful Reunification Symposium (Theme: For Homogeneity of Korea) where students from Seoul National University (South Korea) and Kim Il Sung University (North Korea) met for the first time since their schools were founded fifty years ago. Jae Sung Lee, the author, was the representative of Seoul National University at the Symposium. He is currently a fourth year majoring in statistics at SNU, and the editor in chief of Our Generation, their school magazine which has made several exchanges with Yisei this year.

"Let's not show any tears at the airport tomorrow..."

"I know, I'm sure we'll be able to see each other again sometime..."

"Goodnight..."

"Yes, you too......"

These were the last words of that night when Mr. Kwon Ho-Woong from Kim Il Sung University and I talked until early hours of the morning. As it was the first official meeting of college students from South and North Korea, both of us had found it difficult to open up until the last night. Then I could feel that Mr. Kwon had talked to me with the utmost sincerity. The fact that he granted me such trust and also that we had kept our initial promise in the beginning of the event—"Let us find similarities rather than differences so that we can provide hope for our brethren at home."—made me too excited to fall asleep even when I returned to my room.

The issue that was the most difficult for me to bring up was: "How is the food situation in North Korea?" Mr. Kwon also seemed like he had predicted that question, and gave a relatively detailed reply. First, when the flood hit North Korea last year, "it was unimaginable by the people in the south." Many regions could not harvest very much. "We are not at the star-

"우리, 내일 공항에서 왼지 말자..." "그레 형, 다시 만날 수 있을 거야..."
"잘자..." "그레 형도..."
마지막 날 새벽, 김일성종합대학 관호봉 씨와 나누었던 대화다. 분단이래 남북 대학생이 공식적으로 처음 만나는 자리였던 만큼 우리는 마지막날 밤에 가서야, 내일 답변을 하여야 서로의 마음을 털어놓았다. 이야기가 끝났을 때 나는 관호봉씨가 정말 진솔한 이야기를 해주었다는 느낌을 받았다.

나가 아주 이렇게 말문을 열 것은 "북쪽의 식량 사정이 어려하냐"는 것이었다. 관호봉씨 역시 예상했던 바는 표정으로 비교적 자세히 이야기를 해주었다. 우선 작년 북한의 홍수피해에 대해 관호봉씨의 표현을 빌리면 "남에서의 상상을 못할 정도였다"고 한다. 많은 지역이 농사를 제대로 짓지 못했고 "فاد가 진장하다고" 했다. (북에서의 '진장하다'는 표현을 두루 쓰고 있다는 사실을 알게 됐다). "식량의 경우로 밀은 해역은 것은 아니겠느냐, 떡을 해먹을 수도 있고 슬도 빚을 수 있는데 현재 북은 땅의 밭에 없는 것을 못하고 있으며, 밭도 부족한 실정이라"는 얘기하는 관호봉씨의 얼굴에는 걱정 하는 빚이 머리를 엮었다.

그러면서 그는 84년 남쪽이 수해 피해를 입었을 때 북에서 식량을 지원했던 사례를 들며 "조건 없이
vation stage yet, but it will soon be worse since we are approaching the oat hump (the period of cold time between the fall harvest of rice and the spring harvest of oat when food is scarce),” he said with a look that spoke very well about his anxiety. He continued and referred to the year 1984 when North Korea offered help with food to South Korea when the situation was the reverse: “Shouldn’t South Korea support the North only from the reasons that a brother would have?”

Kwon argued that “South Korean support with rice for North Korea is becoming less pure in its intentions due to political reasons,” and showed an especially strong opinion towards President Kim Young Sam of South Korea. For example, President Kim’s actions in response to the death of the former President of North Korea, Kim Il Sung—the jomunpadang ("condolence crisis") and the emergency activation of national defense—angered the North Korean public a great deal. (At this point Kwon seemed quite entranced himself, but he did not forget to include the title “President.”)

As I was talking to Kwon about various topics I realized that North Korea was not as segregated and closed off as it is thought to be in South Korea. To my question, “I heard that they found a record from Russia that the Korean War was an invasion of the south. How do you feel about that?”, he said that he “always learned at school that the war was an invasion of the North by the South, and found out about such records recently but was not sure.” However, he also added that “we should not overlook how Seung-Man Rhee (President of South Korea at that time) supported northern expansion very strongly.”

Moreover, Kwon said that he knew that “South Korea is doing better, economically, than North Korea.” He was also curious whether the problems with corruption in the government and the gap between the poor and the wealthy that he had heard of were true. I still remember vividly how his last words saddened me so much: “At least we do not let foreigners take over the control over our national defense.” When I asked him about last month’s infiltration of the DMZ by the northern army, and especially about why such an incident had happened immediately before the fire line, he replied after a long perplexed moment that he did not know well enough about the subject. He said, however, that he knew that there had been several incidents of violation of DMZ agreement and added that many students had participated in a Gun tp dae lae won (petition against military entry) movement after the military minister’s statement on the subject. Because Kim Il Sung University students were the most active in this movement, Kwon was almost forbidden to participate in this Symposium.

Professor Doo Yul Song, known with ‘Is History
Over?" among us students, argues that the reason why our country cannot achieve reunification is not because of the absence of an official agreement. We already have frameworks of such agreement on how to analyze the division and move toward reunification, disregarding the feasibility: "Independence, Peace, Unity" from "July 4th South-North Declaration" and "South-North Basic Agreements" of December 1991 containing "Reconciliation and Collaboration." I always agreed with Professor Song in this respect, so at the symposium I emphasized that the problem with reunification of Korea is not because there are no constitutional agreements between the North and the South, but because those agreements are not being fulfilled.

The present situation shows us that for many people these agreements can only be vaguely recalled, and that confrontation of various kinds and sizes still occur today in the DMZ, the danger of which was clearly apparent in the crisis last month. However, people turn away from the problems by blaming politicians or the foreign forces, their concern turning into indifference. In my speech at the Symposium, I tried to emphasize that everyone of these people is still responsible for the problems with reunification.

The theme of the Symposium was "For Homogeneity of Korea," and my prepared speech was entitled "Beyond the Political System and Ideologies." When I was finalizing my preparation around April 5th, the situation at the DMZ had heightened to such a dangerous point that the entire South Korean National Defense line was on emergency alert and the news about North Korea was always on the front page of every newspaper. It reminded me of when I was serving in the army, when a similar emergency situation had occurred due to the death of Kim Il Sung and the escalated nuclear tension over the period of 1992-1994, two months before my fulfillment of service. I was serving near the border in the Kang Won Do region, in between Pyong-Gang Plateau of North Korea and Chul-Won Plain of South Korea. The shock of spotting a young man(probably not any older than me), aiming a gun at me through his binoculars led me to argue at the Symposium that young people from the North and the South aiming their guns at each other simply cannot be justified, and without less tension in the military situation, productive communication between North and South Korea is impossible.

Kwon's statement, "We, the young people of the new generation that would never compromise with the wrong and the false, are responsible for leading a new, reunited Korea...Let us, the youth, eliminate the institutional elements that are the main obstacles to our reunification," was in accordance with my argument, "Let us all come to a concept that transcends the insti-
tutional and ideological differences in order to improve
the well-being of the general public in both Koreas." When I had the chance to share my experiences of
anguish in the army with Kwon after the Symposium,
he talked about similar experiences that he had had.
His saying that we need to achieve reunification as soon
as possible in this context touched me as especially
poignant.

We often encounter arguments that hold that the
only true form of reunification is that of complete struc-
tural unity. However, the underlying logic of this con-
clusion assumes military confrontation: thinking of
reunification as a simple winner-take-all situation. This
should not be the way to think about real reunifica-
tion. That is why I feel that the Symposium was very
fruitful. Kwon and I could agree on the necessity to
respect each of the two parts of Korea in order to pre-
serve the positive aspects of both, resulting in improve-
ment for all involved. We also concluded that
overcoming the present popular idea of military com-
petition between the two Koreas would require a vari-
ety of unified measures. The most important would be
to have a common educational system which would
bring forth unity in political and economic systems.
The roles of Seoul National University and Kim Il Sung
University seemed very important since each of them
is the most prestigious university in each country. This
led to Kwon’s idea to pursue inviting SNU to KISU’s
50th anniversary event at a student workshop during the
Symposium (However, communication since the
conference, which occurred over a year ago, has not been
possible). In fact, both universities have very intimate
relationship in their origin with the division of Korea.
This year is the 50th anniversary for both of the schools,
and it should seem very natural that we should focus
and collaborate our efforts to work on the reunifica-
tion subject. Yet, it is a pity that there is no plan what-
soever to increase exchange opportunities between the
two.

I admit that I was still in disbelief when I was in
San Francisco International Airport, asking “Did he
leave from North Korea?” to Kwon Jung Hyun (the
President of the Korea Institute at Berkeley, the spon-
sor of the symposium), who replied, “I confirmed that
he went through immigration at Beijing airport.” Nerv-
ous and impatient, those ninety minutes seemed so
long, especially because our flight had arrived early and
the plane from North Korea was delayed. Suddenly the
silent air in the waiting area stirred, and I knew right
away he was there. I offered my hand to the youngest
looking man of the three strangers, “I am Jay Sung
Lee from Seoul National University.” “I am from Kim
Il Sung University, and my name is Ho Woong Kwon.”
As those words rang in my ears and as I felt my hand

d’a는 대결논리로 극복하기 위해서는 정치·경제적 통합의
전제조건인 교육통합 측면에서의 접근이 무척 중요하다.
그런 점에서 권호응씨가 국가적인 차원에서 현재 준비위
원회가 꾸려져 있다는 김일성종합대학 교과 50주 행사에
서울대를 초청하는 문제를 돌아가서 토론해 보겠다는
말을 했다. 서울대와 집단소비 모두가 교과 50주를 맞이
한 올해 서울대와 김일성대가 "한반도 통일 문제에 적극적
으로 노력해 나가야 한다는 것은 너무나 당연한 것인
대 양조는 아직도 학교 차원에서 어떠한 교류 계획도 갖
고 있지 못한 실정이다.

센프란시스코 국제 공항에서 "북경 공항에서 수
속을 마친 것이 확인했어요"라는 권정현씨(이번 한반도평
화통일협조실을 주최한 버클리 대교과 15 세 한국학위
원 회 학생회장)의 말을 듣고 나서도, “정말 만나너라......”
하며 초조해 하던 기억이 아직도 생생히 난다. 고요하던
대화실이 갑자기 슬평이 자는 과감함으로 “Substring”는
생각이 들었고 앞에 와있는 놓친 세 사람 중 가장 나이
가 어려 보이는 사람을 찾아가 "서울대에서 온 이재성입
다"고 반갑게 인사를 건넸다. “김일성 종합대학에서 온
권호응입니다”는 말과 함께 내가 내인 손이 권호응씨의
손 안으로 빠져 들어갔다. “정말 만나났다”는 생각으로 가
습 백차 오르던 그 때의 기분을 무엇에 비유할 수 있을

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being sucked into his, the ineffable excitement that I actually was meeting him went through my body.

‘Ho Woong Kwon’ ‘Born in 1963’ ‘Publicity chair of the Kim Il Sung University Student Council’ This was the only information that I had when I was leaving for the United States. After spending six days, however, I found out much more about him. He lost his parents at the age of eighteen and entered the university after ten years of service in the army. As a student in his last year (5th) at Kim Il Sung University studying philosophy on full financial aid, Kwon wants to join the Kim Il Sung theme ideology research center upon graduation. He also has a four-year-old daughter. Although at present the situation does not allow us to even exchange a letter, or a phone call, I can feel that the name ‘Ho Woong Kwon’ will always remain in my heart, as a constant reminder to how I should live for the rest of my life.

Before the events at the Symposium started, we read over each other’s speech preparations and helped as much as we could. A student from South Korea and another from North Korea editing each other’s paper would probably seem incredible for many people. Throughout the event we constantly tried to stick to our motto—“Let us find similarities rather than differences so that we can provide hope for our brethren at home.”—and when it was over, we reminded each other that we shall always be faithful to our countrymen, no matter when we see each other again. When I returned to Seoul and to school, I was greeted by many questions from various friends and acquaintances. I never forgot to say that I returned with hope. Here “hope” signifies my realization that the key to reunification starts from our faith in each other.

On April 30th, I had the chance to attend a seminar entitled ‘Ethnic Unification and National Sovereignty’ by Jurgen Habermas who is a professor emeritus at the University of Frankfurt in Germany. In his lecture Habermas said that there have been many negative side effects to the reunification of Germany because there were no extensive debates and discussions on the topic beforehand and advised that we should choose the more gradual path rather than a shortcut in reaching reunification in reality. Now that I am back at school, I feel that in order to prepare for the right kind of reunification, where political unification and the enhancement of the general welfare in both parts of Korea are realized. I know that the crucial elements are education and research. Only through education and research will we be able to successfully proceed from the wish “We need to meet” to reality. “We have to live together,” the path which Germans might have taken too hastily.

가?

‘권호용’, ‘63년생’, ‘김일성중앙대 학생위원회 전 집위원장’은 미국으로 떠날 때 내가 갖고 있던 정보의 모든 것이었지만, 5막 6일간의 만남이 지난 지금 ‘18살에 부모님을 모두 떠난이었고, 군 생활을 10년이나 한 위에 대한해 돈이었으며, 현재 김일성이철학과 졸업반(5년)으로 학교 에서 무의무책(無義無托)교학금을 받고 있는 졸업 후 김 일성주체사회연구소에 들어가고 싶어하는 대학생 말야이의 아버지라는 사실부터 그에 대한 많은 이야기를 할 수 있게 되었다.

우리는 행사 전에 서로 발표원고를 외부에 조 인을 약하지 않았다. 아마 이런 장면은 갈상어가 암 것이다. 그리고 행사 당일 ‘아이公报보다는 공통점을 찾아 동료들에게 희망을 전하며주자는’는 약속을 지키기 위해 노력했다고 했는데 때때로 ‘비록 언제 다시 만날지 모르지만 항상 양심적이고 민족을 생각하며 살아가자’는 다짐을 하였다. 학교에 돌아와 여러 친구와 선. 후배로부터 많은 칭찬을 받았지만 나는 ‘희망을 안고 돌아와는’ 이야기를 빼놓지 않았다.

지난 4월 30일 독일 프랑크푸르트대 평화교수 하버마스는 ‘민족통일과 국민주권’이라는 강의에서 ‘독일의 통일은 평범한 토론과정이 없었기 때문에 부자조리 많다며 ‘독일이 현실의 문제로 다졌다 때는 빠른 길보다 느린 길을 밟아가 비판한다’라는 중요한 다짐을 했다. ‘우리는 만나 야 한다는 당위가 우리를 함께 살아야 한다는 현실로 이어지는 과정에서, 독일인들이 조금씩 친해졌던 그 깊 이의 mười여 년까지도 실현할 수 있는 제약을 우리는 하루하루 배워야 하고, 그것은 옛바른 동일에 대비할 수 있는 교육과 연구를 통해서만 한다.

* 「코리아평화통일포지럼」 1996년 4월 U.C. Berkeley 「한국학 위원회」가 ‘한민족 동질성을 위하여’라는 주제로 주최한, 이제성군은 당시 서울대 학생대표로 참석했으며, 서울대 계산과학과 4학년으로, 총학생회 정책실장, 대학계열위원회장을 겸하고 현재는 총학생회 사무차장 겸 서울대 종합사회과학 앞방 ‘우리제대’의 주필을 맡고 있 습니다. 이 글은 이제성군이 한 잡지에 기고했던 글을 약간 수정한 것입니다.

11년이 지난 현재까지 우리는 서로 아무런 연락도 하지 못하고 있다.
The name in Korean means “angel.” Chun-sa is the only Korean fan dance troupe at Harvard. Begun five years ago by Linda Kang and Eun Kim, the group seeks “to promote greater awareness and understanding of Korean culture in the Harvard community by performing traditional Korean dances.”

Fan dance is an old part of Korean culture, dating back to the Choson Dynasty (1392-1910 AD) and perhaps even to the Koryo Dynasty before that. Performed for festivals celebrating birthdays or the seasons, Korean fan dance is a nature dance; the dancers represent elements of nature. For example, the majority of the dancers are flowers, gracefully swaying and turning in the wind or softly breathing with the rhythms of life. Sometimes a butterfly hovers over the flowers, fluttering from one dancer to the next.

Both that description and the dance might seem silly but for the gorgeous costumes, which lend an air of fantasy to the dance. Bright green and orange hanbok and fluorescent hot pink and neon green fans combine to form bright splashes of color on stage. We try to keep our costumes as authentic as possible, using Korean socks for shoes, arranging elaborate buns in our hair, and donning Korean hats and hairpieces.

In fact, dressing for a five-minute performance usually takes an hour-and-a-half to two hours.

We usually perform for Cultural Rhythms and Arts First at Harvard and accept most requests for performances at culture festivals and celebrations, thereby trying to adhere to the original purpose of the dance.

We have performed for reunions, business conferences and culture days at local elementary schools.

The children “oohhed” when we opened our fans, before we had even begun the dance.

For the future, we would like to add a scarf/handkerchief dance to our fan dance. We would also like to expand, with more members and more opportunities to perform. Our current members are Kathy Jo ’00, Yun Lee ’00, Susan Chung ’99, Amy Kim ’99, Shiralee Acosta ’99, Marian Lee ’99, and Young In ’98, but we welcome anyone who is interested. Other than performances, we usually practice for an hour to an hour-and-a-half every week. We accept members of any “race, creed, color, sexual orientation or physical disability.”

If you are interested, please contact either Young (youngin@fas) or Marian (lee19@fas). There is always room for another “angel” flower.
Korean Americans for Culture and Community (KACC) is an undergraduate student organization dedicated to exploring issues relevant to Korean American identity and experiences. The organization consists of two distinct but mutually supportive groups: culture group and discussion group.

**Culture group** members engage in learning and performing traditional Korean music, mainly *p’oongmul* (Korean folk drum music), *t’alchum* (mask dance), and *minyo* (folk songs). Our *p’oongmul-pae* has performed in numerous Harvard campus events, including Arts First and Cultural Rhythms, and on many other college campuses as well. Each April, the culture and discussion groups collaborate to present our annual Spring Show, which was featured last year at KASCON X (1996), in Austin, Texas.

**Discussion group** members meet on a weekly basis to discuss issues relevant to Korean Americans and other minority communities. Discussions often include reading material, film showings, and visiting speakers. Past topics have incorporated Asian American immigration history and legislation, Korean-American women’s issues, Korean-American literature, and modern Korean history. Last semester’s discussions centered around the 1992 Los Angeles Riots: their effects on African-American and Korean-American communities and their implications for a multicultural citizenry.

KACC has also sponsored various events for the benefit of the Harvard community at large. In October, KACC sponsored a talk and book-signing session with Helie Lee, a young Korean American author whose first novel, *Still Life With Rice*, has received widespread acclaim. In November, KACC coordinated a visit and performance by New York artist Jamez Chang, whose music is a unique fusion of hip-hop and traditional Korean folk song. Jamez’s performance, entitled “If a Chink Fall Down Is It Gonna Make a Sound?” addressed issues facing Korean Americans and other minority communities, and brought together a diverse audience of Harvard students. KACC also organized the Boston premiere of the Korean National Royal Museum, a traditional dance and music company from Seoul, Korea.

This year, April 29 marks the fifth year since the Los Angeles Riots. This semester’s discussion groups have centered around the L.A. Riots and its implications for the “multicultural community.” KACC opened the spring semester with a showing of *Sa-i-Gu*, a documentary film presenting the perspectives of three Korean American women on the tumultuous days of the riots. KACC was pleased to see that the film drew a sizable and diverse audience from the Harvard community. KACC also organized a panel discussion, “The L.A. Riots, Five Years After,” held on April 14th. As part of the IOP’s Pizza and Politics series, the panelists include distinguished scholars and activists who represent the African American and Korean American communities and will be visiting from various regions of the country. Among them were Karen Bass, an African American community activist from the South L.A. Community Coalition, Michael Jones-Correa, Assistant Professor of Government at Harvard, Nathan Glazer, Professor of Education and Sociology, Emeritus, Harvard, Bong Hwam Kim, Korean-American community activist, L.A. Korea Youth Coalition and L.A. Korean-Black Alliance, and John Lie, Assistant Professor and Department Head of Sociology at University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, and co-author with Nancy Abelman of *Blue-Dreams: Korean Americans and the L.A. Riots*. It was followed by a Harvard Foundation reception and evening of discussion.
농장식품

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