Interracial Relationships

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Letter from the Editor

Yisei signifies “second generation” in the Korean language. The title of our magazine itself addresses the question of amalgamation of two different cultures. Being born of one ethnicity and living in another cultural environment, the second generation finds at least two different perspectives struggling within.

“Interracial relationships” became our feature topic when everyone seemed quite surprised at opposing opinions when they were brought up at the first staff meeting. For some, the issue might seem redundant and not worth reconsidering because the decision has already been made for you. Some might say, “Culture is what I am based on. I can’t lose such a big part of me for love because then I won’t be myself anymore.” Others may refute, “We are all the same. We need to learn to live together and stop the discrimination.” However, there is no simple, right answer to the question. As an individual composed of two very different cultures, I know that the two counter arguments can be supported equally well; in the end, the individual needs to make a conscious decision, rather than judge rationally. Personal values on different aspects of life come into play in this process and no argument can really affect the final decision. The Yisei staff tried to portray some perspectives that may trigger reevaluation of personal values on this topic. The choice that we make at this point will influence the third generation greatly—if it will ever be called with such a name. The question is by no means a light one, but one that deserves prudence and care.

Apart from the feature topic, this issue of Yisei also introduces our two sister magazines: Wurisedeh, which is a monthly student newsmagazine of Seoul National University, and Reflections, which is a literary magazine of Korean Americans at Stanford University. We hope to bring you more enlightening and interesting voices by extending our forum to more people from diverse backgrounds.

The Yisei staff would like to thank all of you for support. We always appreciate your suggestions and contributions.

-Yunsun Nam
Editor-in-Chief
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"And that was, and still remains, the core of my understanding. There's nothing in all this guff about dogs keeping you warm in winter and cool in the summer. Hardly anyone can be found who ever likes these more weird breeds of food. They all eat them to prove the axiom that the more disgusting it is, the more good it will do the libido. So Korean men tuck into dogs for the same reason the Cantonese eat snake and the Thais eat the brain of still-living monkeys and the Filipinos crunch up the entire embryos of ducks—they all labor under the apprehension that by so doing their sexual drive and ability will be immeasurably enhanced, their erections will last longer, their performances will be of a more virtuoso nature, and their children will be more numerous. Tired? Jaded? Listless? A little dog'll do ya."

—Simon Winchester, Korea: A Walk Through the Land of Miracles

"You mean there are two Koreans?"

—a U.S. Ambassador-designate to the Far East, after being asked his opinion during congressional hearings on the North Korea-South Korea conflict, as reported by government officials (from Workman Publishing's The 365 Stupidest Things Ever Said 1997 calendar)

"The Korean experience in democratic transition has reinforced my conviction that democracy is a universal value and its attainment part of the course of history."


**South Korea: A History**

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By David Fitsimmons, The Arizona Daily Star, 12/26/97
Poetry by

JAY MOK '99

La Plaza Smoking Mayor

I am like a god,
producing the clouds
of a miniature world,
through fire and smoke,
breathed from within,
sucking in virulent, sweet breath,
producing pollution.

Clouds floating above,
spewed from pursed lips
with the force of a light gale,
rolling in and out
of conglomerated form
fooling with the buzz
of my mind's recognition.

Pools of internal water,
solidifying together
like the consistency of mud,
spat out like the eruption
of the earth's tectonic collision.

I am a world within a world,
producing on earth,
with atmosphere,
winds, mud, water,
smoke and fire.
I am a god.

Sitting at a table with a book in my lap,
I cannot help but lift my head.
Mister clown is juggling balls,
stepping in the steps of passers-by,
resting his buttocks on thick air,
bowing to clapping hands and smiles.
With a jest, with a swivel,
he asks with a hat.
Sitting at a table with a book in my lap,
I cannot help but lift my head.
The sky is a long sheet of blue paper
pulled taut and straight,
draped over the plaza.
A breeze ruffles the afternoon backdrop.
Sitting at a table with a book in my lap,
I cannot help but lift my head.
The buildings box in the cobblestone floor
where goose-stepping soldiers
once screamed for the deaths of their brothers
who wore the uniform of revolutionaries.
Now, "Can I have a cola please and
an endless evening at your table?"
I cannot help but lift my head.
Lips-pursed music
echoes off the ceramic walls,
brushing off bare dead skin
like sandstone in running water,
tip-toeing its way through
the buzz and murmur of each private conversation.
I cannot help but lift my head.
A man with a beard grown wild
asking for money to eat.
I feel the weight of coins in my pocket
and hear their faint jingle.
But I say sorry anyway
partly out of habit and
partly 'cause I want another sip
of sweet, carbonated coca-cola.
Untitiled

Did God intend fish to marry birds?
Can a fish not even look at a bird,
And marvel at its grace as it flies
Through the thin air?
How could a fish give up a bird
If it somehow won its heart?
Is it enough that the fish and the bird can
meet only on the shores
Where the fish can swim up in the shallow
water;
And the bird can stand on the sand.

If the fish and bird try to fly together
through the air and water;
The fish could stay right at the surface
The bird can fly low to the water,
And they will soar together.

But at the surface, the current is rough and
shifting,
The waves lap up into the air.
The going would be dangerous and hard for
both.
When the fish and the bird soar together,
They have no one else-none of their own
kind.
The rest of the birds fly higher.
The rest of the fish swim deeper.
But among their own kind neither can find a
better fit or match.
It is not the scales or fins that make the
match.
It is not even the air or the water.
When two spirits find each other and inter-
twine as bodies never could-
Then a match is made.
The two bodies which once looked so
different
Become only shells over what truly attracts.
John Chung had been no ordinary student. The mayor of Friendlyville had written glowing letters to Ivy
decked college admission offices vouching, “Young men with John’s incredible potential are few and far between. I myself have never met another student of his caliber in the fifty years I’ve been living here…” A Westinghouse finalist and concertmaster of the Friendlyville Orchestra, he was also the driving force behind a new compost center, a massive complex of pipes and stacks which dwarfed the tall steel-trussed electric cable towers in his one-movie-theater country town. Not even the cows in his backyard grunted in surprise when he announced one cold December day, “I’ve been admitted to Harvard.” His parents held a dinner party in his honor, to which all of his classmates were invited. His well-intentioned mother hoped this would let John know how proud she was of his accomplishments. John felt that her idea was vainglorious, and he participated with extreme reluctance. He and everyone else knew that he was the most talented boy in his school, but there were 1600 other similarly talented students in his class at Harvard. Would he still be the best there? Should this even be important to him? He kept these private and bothersome worries to himself.

John came to college planning to be a doctor. But in only a few days, the dreams which he had nurtured his entire life began to crumble, as John discovered the Harvard paradox. In comparison to the student body as a whole, which was composed mainly of extraordinary overachievers, John felt (to his disgust) very ordinary. Twenty other Westinghouse finalists were in his chemistry class - another fifteen were in his entryway. His roommate had single-handedly toppled a dictator regime in Latin America, and his next door neigh-
bor had inadvertently started a land war in Asia while vacationing. And fifteen hundred other students had brought a compost center to their neighborhoods.

The prospect of becoming a doctor quickly lost its appeal. There were too many pre-meds! The idea of being one tiny speck within a sea of pre-meds repulsed John, who’d quietly hoped that he was somewhat exceptional. He yearned to find his special niche, some pursuit to which he could tirelessly devote his exceptional energies, his exceptional skills, a means by which he could show the entire world that he was, ultimately, exceptional. He wanted to be unforgettably great.

He called his mother to tell her he didn’t want to be a doctor anymore. “Wonderful,” she said. “You can go into business or become a lawyer!”

“But I want to do something unusual, something exceptional. Don’t you think I’m exceptional?”

“Cham-uh,” she said. “You will lead a very normal and happy life as a doctor. Maybe you will not be exceptionally happy, but you will be happy enough.” His mother didn’t understand his wish to be great. How could she? She’d grown up in a time when to do okay was to do very well. Raised in the impoverished post-war villages of Korea, she’d grown up believing that a comfortable life was the impossible dream. And when this impossible dream eluded one’s grasp, one accepted failure quietly, meekly, and without protest — it was fate, after all. Cham-uh, his mother had told him when he was dumped by his first love.

Cham-uh, his laid-off father had advised when the NIH had refused to fund his research on synthesizing more intelligent humans because of “ethical considerations.” (For his Westinghouse project, he had constructed a mouse genome one base pair at a time to make a mouse intelligent enough to write good poetry. He didn’t win first prize because his mouse only wrote haiku: the winner’s mouse wrote in iambic pentameter.) It was a refrain that his parents would sing without pleasure nor malice, but which seems inexorably bent on crushing his own fragile dreams, his right to seek his own happiness.

Davis, a Korean senior who’d already weathered six high-pressure semesters, discovered John looking “pensive” at a KSA meeting one night and felt a surge of pity and magnanimity. He introduced himself and said, “Some guys and I are going out drinking tonight. Wanna come?”

John needed a break. He’d never met Davis before, but a Korean face always looked trustworthy. That’s what he’d been taught. “We Koreans have to stick together,” his father had told him when introducing him to the only other Korean family in Friendlyville.

“Let’s go,” John replied.

John desperately sought the spiritual counsel of an older student. How could he be exceptional? He needed an answer, and he hoped to learn it from others far wiser and more experienced than he. As he passed through the screen door leading to one of the private chambers of the local Ko-
rean restaurant, he hoped that one of the six faces seated around the table could provide some answers, some encouragement. Lacking faith in himself, he gave it freely to others.

"These are the guys," said Davis. "Sorry I'm late—I brought a new first-year. This is John Chung. John, meet..."

"Hey. Nice to meet you," a chorus of voices rang out.

"Have a beer." Davis handed John a bottle. "We like to welcome our new dong-seng by sharing a few drinks," he smiled.

John took the bottle and looked at it. A brown bottle, it was nothing terribly exciting to look at. But he stared, pausing for a moment, before he uncapped it and took a swig. (It was made of recycled glass—sinless.) The men were joking about an upcoming KASA dance at Wellesley. He tried to follow the conversation, but it didn’t make sense to him. No one seemed to be talking about what concerned him the most.

Davis offered him another drink. He took it gladly. Then, he stood up and addressed the gathering:

"Dear sirs. I come here tonight seeking advice."

He looked at the other men. They were clearly amused, delighted. A little drunk, perhaps. "Come, ask us," they cheered. "What’s up," they jeered.

"Perhaps you’ve heard the Harvard Paradox. I came here hoping to stand out, to be exceptional, and I found that I blend in at least—well with everyone else. How can I distinguish myself? This is a very serious question, and I’m looking for a serious answer."

Jung smiled and said, "I’m one of three people concentrating in Mongolian literature. I am writing a thesis about the growth of Mongolian literature during the early 14th century. I know far more about 14th-century Mongolian literature than anyone else in the country. That is why I am exceptional."

Everyone smiled. Davis said, "Let’s drink to that," and another round was taken down by all present.

Joseph chimed in, "I’m a math major, specializing in Galois representations. No one here knows Galois theory better than I. And I can derive all the principles of Riemannian geometry using nothing more than a compass and a hyperbolic straightedge."

"Let’s hear it for Joseph!" yelled Davis. Another round of drinks flew into their dreams.

Thus the night continued, each describing in turn what made them unique. Last came poor Francis, who was the black sheep of the herd. He said, "I’m a pre-med, and I will become a doctor. I am no different from all the other pre-meds at Harvard. I like chickwixes and vanilla fro-yo, and I eat one sesame seed bagel with cream cheese every morning."

Poor Francis was not distinctive in any way. "C’mon, Francis," cried Davis, who by this point was very drunk. "You must be special in some way."

함들로부터 배우고 싶었다. 근처 한국식당 안의 조용한 방으로 들어가며 그는 테이블 앞에 앉아있 는 6명중 단 한명이라도 자신에게 해를 주고 격려를 해 줄수 있는 누군가가 있기를 바랐다. "농어 서 미안. 새로운 인물이 있어, 존 청이라고..." 데이 비스가 말했다. "어서 와, 만나서 반갑다."

"마주 마셔." 데이비스가 존에게 병을 건넸다. 존은 그 병을 한참동안 응시했다. 갑술 병, 보기엔 좀 미소울 게 하나 없었다. 하지만 병을 마기 전에 완전한 명사회 있었다. 다른 사람들들은 존 웰스러 에서 열릴 KASA 댄스파티에 관한 농담을 주고받 고 있었다. 존은 처음에는 대화에 들어들려고 해 왔지만, 별로 관심이 없었다. 아무도 현재 그의 문 제에 대해서는 말을 할 것 같지 않았다.

데이비스가 또 한잔 권했다. 존은 혼히 받아들 고는 일어서서 말했다. "에이, 저는 오늘 중고 를 받아야 것 같아요."


"전배!" 존은 웃으며 의미했다. "난 동글 문학을 전공하는 천재 3명 중 하나야. 논제목은 '14세기 초 동글문학의 발전'이고, 이 나라의 내 또래 어느 누구보다도 동글문학에 대해서는 많이 알고 있다 고 자신할 수 있지만, 크게 내가 특별한 이유가."

"모두들 미소를 지었다. 데이비스가 말했다. "전 배!" 손간이 돌아갔다. 조서프가 말을 시작했다. "난 수학을 전공해, 여기에 아무도 나를 잘 모르고 이론에 대해 알고 있는 사람은 없어. 리만 기하학의 원리를 퀘프와 직선자만 알고 증명할 수도 있지만."

"조서프를 위해 전배!" 또 한 번 손간이 돌아갔 다.

그리게 그냥 받아들이고 있었던, 각자 자신이 특별한 이유를 설명하며... 마지막 순서는 프란시스 였다. "난 의사가 될 거야, 하바드의 다른 프레데드 들과 다를 바가 없어. 치간 선도위치량 프로간 요 거리를 좋아하고 매일 아침 책상 베이글에 크림치즈를 발라먹어." 프란시스는 불안하게도 특별한 면
Francis blubbered, "I think love should forgive ev-erything. If you break up with your girlfriend and you can’t stay friends, then your relationship didn’t mean anything to begin with. Eeyore is my favorite cartoon character.” Francis searched and searched, but he couldn’t find anything within himself which wasn’t generic. He curled up in a ball in the corner and cried softly. John, who hadn’t built a tolerance like Davis, grew sicker and redder as the night dragged on. When Francis started to cry, John thought it was all very amusing, and he proceeded to laugh and vomit simultane-ously.

As the weeks went by, John shared many more drinks with Davis, Jung, Joseph, and the others. He was very sad to see them go when they eventually graduated. There came a time, too, when he played the role of Davis to a new generation of freshmen. He took them drinking, and having built up a ludicrously high tolerance to alcohol himself, all of the freshmen ended up very very sick. Yet the freshmen were grateful to John. It was part of growing up, after all, and they needed to build up a tolerance so that when they went out with friends from Seoul, they would not embarrass themselves.

John decided to major in 18th century Rumanian philosophy, and by the time of his senior thesis, he knew far more about the influence of the Ottoman Empire on early Rumanian thought than the average John Chung. John was an avid reader and very curious, and he read everything that all the experts had written on Rumanian thought, starting from the 12th century to the 19th (just to be safe). When his faculty adviser - Professor Cogito, a world-renowned expert on 19th century Rumanian philosophy - received John’s senior thesis, he sat at his aged oaken desk in a dim lit office and read it cover to cover with obvious agitation and excitement. When he had finished, he took John aside and confided, “Son, now you know far more than anyone else in the world about 19th century Rumanian philosophy.” Professor Cogito promptly resigned from the faculty and built a cabin in Montana.

Poor Francis graduated with high honors, entered Cornell Medical School, and started his own practice back home in Kansas. He married his high school sweetheart, took his children to soccer practice in a minivan, and died a very content man. His memory lived on only in the hearts of his children and grandchildren, until they had grown old and died themselves.

One sad day, John’s pet mouse was trying to push a heavy monograph from John’s library when it fell and hit John in the head. The monograph was a thick treatise John had composed as a graduate student entitled, The notion of happiness as a social construct in 1851 Bucharest. The pages were many, the cover solid and heavy, and John received a mortal blow as a result of his mouse’s clumsiness (intelligence and agility don’t always go hand-in-hand.) You could say – John died from too much happiness.
"Self-Portrait," by Jason Cho '01
Happily Ever After

By David Kim ’01

Fifteen, twenty, twenty-five, thirty? How many years has it been since our parents first stepped foot on American soil? What was that first day like? As they stepped off that ominous plane of dreams, was it sunny and hopeful? Or was it dreary and doleful? Our parents came to a new and alien country, many of them not knowing what sort of future they would have, except that it would hopefully be a better future for their children. They left a land that was across an ocean, leaving behind all that they called home, and they came knowing only one fundamental fact—America was the land of opportunity. Many of our parents have succeeded in numerous respects since coming here, yet the recipients of their labor—the yisei—must now deal with problems and issues unforeseen by their parents. We, unlike our parents, have no real home or history to which we belong. We may study the language, history, and culture of Korea, and we can lay a claim to these elements, but we cannot say that we live in that world. Yet, we do not belong to the world called America either. We are distinctly different from the typical “American” kid. The cultures and values that we have grown up with are a hybrid of those that our parents grew up with and those of the Western world. Sometimes we come across contradictions between the beliefs of our parents and those beliefs that are prevalent and accepted here in the United States. One major contradiction that we have to face is the issue of dating and marriage.

As you walk down a one-way street, you look to the left and see an Asian man walking hand in hand with an Asian woman. What is your reaction to this couple? As you walk down the same street, you look to the right and see an Asian man walking with a white woman, and in front of you, there is a white man with an Asian woman as well as a black man with an Asian woman. What is your reaction to these couples?

The vast majority of our parents would like us to marry within our own race; yet, we do not always live up to this expectation. The first thing that many of our parents ask us when we tell them that we are dating someone is whether or not this person is Korean. If yes, then all is well. His or her age, job, upbringing, and even the wedding date are all of secondary concern. Many of our parents even try to matchmake us with other Koreans in the hopes that we may marry one of these prospects and thereby keep our Korean heritage intact. Sadly, some parents even go to the extreme of disowning their children who marry outside of the Korean race. We may say that it is selfish and closed-minded for our parents to think and act in such a manner, but we, as their children, must also understand that they are only looking out for our best interests. Our parents understand many of the difficulties of interracial relationships and, as a result, would like to make our lives more comfortable by trying to prevent potential obstacles from occurring. For our parents to understand the foreign world of Americans—and therefore, to understand a daughter- or son-in-law that comes from this world—is very difficult. However, factors other than our parents are involved in our choices regarding issues such as dating and, later on, love and marriage. It may be argued that each person should be seeking his or her soulmate, even if this soulmate’s racial and cultural heritage is different. Our parents’ advice is still reasonable, though. For many people, it is easier and more comfortable to enter into a relationship with one who has similar basic
"It may be argued that each person should be seeking his or her soulmate, even if this soulmate’s racial and cultural heritage is different."

interests and qualities than to be with someone from a different background.

There is a common understanding between yisei regarding racial identity and relationships. We, as yisei, have grown up with similar experiences and have felt similar frustrations of being neither purely American nor purely Korean, but rather, Korean-American. What factors have shaped our views regarding interracial relationships, and what exactly are these views? Objectively, some of us argue that interracial relationships are perfectly capable of producing positive experiences, but on a superficial level, many people are still not willing to accept interracial relationships in their own lives or in the lives of those with whom they are close. Most, if not all, people harbor prejudices—however minor—and it is still the case that many people of all races have an initial, adverse reaction to the sight of an interracial couple. If we have such strong gut reactions to interracial relationships, then why do many people still continue to enter interracial relationships in full knowledge that the odds may be against them? Statistics show that only one in ten interracial relationships survives.

Some of the impetus for people’s willingness to marry outside of their respective races lies in their experiences in the United States. As yisei, many of us have struggled to find our identity or niche in American society. We have struggled to find acceptance, and some of us have discovered that acceptance into the American world is limited. Marriage into this world, however, is one way in which we may assimilate into “American culture.” By marrying into a typical “American” family, we may hope that we will then become more American ourselves. Along with interracial relationships, however, comes criticism. Those people who are involved in relationships with someone of a different race are often labeled as sellouts or traitors, and in particular, Asians who date non-Asians are referred to as “white-washed,” “twinkie,” and “banana” (Asians that date whites) or “fig newtons” (Asians that date blacks). These labels are unfair and unwarranted, as choices regarding dating and marriage are personal decisions; besides, some of these couples do manage to overcome the social problems of interracial relationships, and these couples should be lauded for beating the odds, not criticized.

An interesting discrepancy exists regarding the role of gender in interracial relationships involving Asians. It is often more socially acceptable for an Asian woman to enter into an interracial relationship with a non-Asian (particularly white) man than it is for an Asian man to date a non-Asian woman. Perhaps our perceptions about gender and race come from the historical role of white men as a dominant force in American society. One may recall that during the era of slavery in the United States, white slave masters often took in black female slaves as their mistresses; this practice was accepted rather than condoned. On the other hand, if a black man dated—or even ventured to talk to—a white woman, he would most likely end up hanging from a tree. In the present day, we do not react as violently to such encounters, but many people still have strong negative feelings toward interracial relationships. For example, questions showing common stereotypes of Asian males are often asked of a white woman who announces that she is dating an Asian male: Is he nerdy? Is he rich? Is he short? These questions are requests for superficial information rather than details about the personality of the individual. Stereotypical questions also surround Asian women in interracial relationships: Is he dating her because she is meek and subservient? Does he have an “Asian fetish” (implying that a non-Asian man is interested in Asian women
because of physical features that may be considered sexually appealing? These stereotypes perpetuate the already-existing negative reactions that many people have to interracial relationships.

The racial demographic breakdown of the United States is also partially responsible for some Koreans’ tendencies toward interracial relationships. Many Korean Americans who grew up in white suburban neighborhoods did not have much exposure to other Koreans throughout their childhoods; the only world that they know is mainly composed of white people, and just about all of their childhood friends were American. As a result, they prefer to date those with whom they most identify, and because they grew up around non-Koreans, they identify with non-Koreans, ultimately choosing to date them. It is also important to remember that while childhood experiences, stereotypes regarding Asians, and a desire to break away from one’s racial heritage in order to blend in with general American culture may all be factors that influence Asians to date non-Asians, some interracial relationships are purely the products of two people who are mutually interested in each other and who happen to be of different races; in these instances, race is a secondary factor and is not considered to be of great consequence by either party.

While some Asians prefer to date outside of the Asian race, others date Asians exclusively. Some of these people believe that there are fundamental differences between races or between cultures that simply cannot be overcome. This belief hearkens back to the shared experience of the yisei. We yisei were generally raised with similar values and grew up with similar issues and challenges that we must face. Morals and standards such as respect for elders and for our parents are very important in our culture. Family and the notion of a shared community are vital to our lives in the United States. When our parents first came to America, it was that network of the Korean community that enabled them to overcome some of the challenges of immigration. Without this unity and solidarity, the struggles of our parents to succeed in a strange, new country would have been much harsher. An understanding of the importance of the Korean community and of the difficulties that our parents faced is hard for many non-Koreans—particularly non-Asians—to comprehend. The common experience of being a racial minority is a factor that causes many Asians to seek out other

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**The Question**

by Aziel Rivers '99

Uh, oh. They’re getting that look on their face. Here we go again... “So... what made you decide to major in East Asian Studies?” I have been asked this question so many times that I have seriously considered walking around with my answer on tape so that I could just hand it to the inquirer and say, “Here you go. Press play and knock yourself out.” There really is no valid reason for me to implement such a harsh response seeing as how it is pretty strange for a Black/Puerto-Rican from the Bronx to want to study cultures that are so vastly different from his own. However, being asked to virtually explain your life every time you meet someone new is neither an easy nor enjoyable task. My usual response is to point out the fast growing economies of Asia and my future plans in international business. Confused expressions gradually soften as people bestow validity to my previously impractical interests. While my economically motivated answer holds true, it is by no means the real answer to “The Question.” It is simply the fastest way to appease the inquirer’s curiosity (and parents who are paying a great deal of money for college).

So what should I say this time? Should I explain my choice of major by saying that I loved watching Bruce Lee movies when I was a child, or should I inform the curious of the fact that I attended a 40% Asian high school? Note: I used to watch Korean soap operas without subtitles even though I did not understand any of the language then. Does this help any in legitimizing my concentration selection? No matter what I say, my motives will never receive the same level of respect or credibility as those of an economics or government major. It is the sad condition of our society that rather than being lauded for taking an interest in a foreign culture, one must fall prey to stereotypes. Irrespective of your response, most inquirers will simply typecast you as one of two things. You are accused of either “trying to be X” (where X is the culture of interest) or of having an X fetish. Well, thanks for asking.

At the very least, some of my curious acquaintances are honest about their suspicions. I have been succinctly asked, “What are you about?” Hmmm... how do I answer that? Is it not enough that I find beauty in something about which I am ignorant and want to learn more about? My motives are just a mixture of plain old interest and a certain “I don’t know why I am doing this, but it feels right” attitude. In a world filled with ulterior motives and talk show gossip, this genuine explanation is unfortunately not juicy
Asians, and the inability of many non-Asians to identify with these hardships makes many Asians skeptical about the success of interracial relationships. For example, while racial epithets such as "chink," "nigger," and "kike" may hurt many minorities and leave lasting impressions that are part of the experience of a minority in America, anti-white racial epithets such as "honky," "white boy," or "redneck" may be somewhat humorous, rather than offensive, to whites, since whites make up the majority of American society and have not been subject to the drastic measures of discrimination that has hit America’s minority groups throughout the history of the United States. Simply stated, there is an understanding of particular minority experiences in America common to members of each racial minority. If we marry within our own race, we will not have to bear the large social burden of a relationship with someone who may not share such important common experiences with us.

Even if one does decide to enter into an interracial marriage, what becomes of his or her children? Where in society do these children fit in? They may be even more lost than the yisei because the racial and cultural sphere that they may call their own is smaller and not rigidly defined. Some of these children try to choose one world or the other in an attempt to simplify their lives and their identities. Others attempt to straddle both of their races, identifying with both, but yet not fully belonging to both either. What racial category do these children belong to? Is a half-Korean, half-Caucasian child Korean or Caucasian? Or is he or she classified as the amorphous "other"? What does "other" mean?

How do interracial relationships fit into our roles in Harvard’s social life? Many of our parents would like us to find a fellow Asian Harvard student and live happily ever after. It is enough to be considered authentic. Do you now understand my immediate apprehension at continuously having to answer "The Question?" Now that I have stated my true motives, I will direct your interests by addressing the stereotypes associated with a person who majors in the study of a foreign culture.

Inherent in "The Question" is the underlying implication that he/she has an Asian fetish. Appropriately enough, let’s begin with the role of the Asian fetish in the East Asian Studies (EAS) department. There is probably a greater tendency for EAS people to date Asians by virtue of the fact that Asia holds some interest for them. Love usually blossoms between people who share common interests. Does it genuinely make a difference if these shared interests are cultural (EAS) as opposed to purely academic (physics)? A thing that bothers me is when people derisively comment on the fact that many of the non-Asian EAS professors have Asian spouses. Okay, some faculty may qualify as having an Asian fetish, but I’m sure that because they are studying Asian culture and are living within the context of that culture for quite sometime, most just happen to fall in love with a person of Asian descent. Is it wrong if they do? I think not. There is a distinction to be made between these people.
after. One of the first questions many of our parents asked us after our first few days at Harvard is, “Are there any Koreans that interest you?” However, the pressures from our parents are ultimately challenged by our individual experiences and the choices that we make, and we cannot simply choose one world over the other; instead, we must choose both. We live in this world called “America,” and we must live with the conditions of being a minority. We also come from another world, across an ocean, from which we have inherited many of our cultural values, and we must respect and remember this world. The choices that we make regarding our boyfriends, girlfriends, and eventually, our spouses, will be affected by our dual identities. At Harvard, through the opportunities that we are given in our student organizations, special events, and our classes, we are given numerous chances to explore all aspects of this identity through interaction and learning in order to become stronger, more confident individuals and find the best paths for ourselves.

and fetishists. Fetishists operate under the assumption of common stereotypes (Asian women’s submissiveness, Indian Kama Sutra-stuff, and Black male sexual prowess). However, as one studies a particular culture, it will be revealed that there is an infinite diversity among the people that define the culture. Eventually, all popular misconceptions held by the former fetishist are shattered by these new insights. By this knowledge, the former fetishist is transformed into a rational being who can now see clearly the previous object of his fetish for what they are and not as some prize to be won over.

Now that we have a reeducated former fetishist, we can all agree that it is okay for them to date a member of the category that was fetishized. Yet, has anything truly changed except the impetus for love? Does this impetus really matter? Love is just that—love. As a product of an interracial relationship, should I now begin to question which of my parents had a fetish? After all, judging by societal opinion, it seems impossible for two persons of different cultures to fall in love without involving some type of fetish. Does the lack of a shared heritage make the couple’s love any less valid? No, it only creates an opportunity for them to forge a new heritage through the synthesis of their own experiences. Love is a sacred, personal bond that none have the right to question. Rather than attacking the couples in love, we should address the underpinnings of a society that feels comfortable dictating group A’s pairing with group B by challenging our preconceived notions of what is “proper.”

The other faux pas of being a foreign culture studies major is the assumption that one wants to become a member of the culture of interest. Some may claim that people like myself are confused and misguided. They argue that knowledge of our own cultures should take priority over engaging in the exploration of foreign territory. Anything less is sneered at as selling out. My response to this is that I am engaging in a cultural exploration of my heritage... by means of another culture. In learning about foreign cultures, you receive a context by which to discover your own. Different people have different approaches to self-cultivation. Another possible explanation is that in studying other cultures, one is obviously comfortable enough with their own identity to the point that they are able to smoothly incorporate another cultural perspective into their own. Preserving cultural integrity is extremely important, but sometimes in doing so, we lose sight of the fact that a culture is nothing more than the combined practices of individuals. First and foremost, we are individuals with the freedom to choose. Culture is a dynamic process determined by its individual members, not vice versa.

As I showed my friends around the once unfamiliar streets of Seoul, I remember thinking to myself how strange it was that I ended up in such position. Had someone told me in high school that in two short years I would be picking up and dropping off friends at Incheon International airport, I would have asked them what they had recently been smoking. The realization that I was a Black/Puerto Rican Harvard Student from the Bronx who was living in Seoul and majoring in East Asian Studies shocked me a bit, and I, along with the Korean population, wondered just what the heck I was doing there. As strange as it sounds, I live for those types of moments when people will come to accept the possibility that not everyone is what they appear to be. Expect the unexpected and do not scoff at it once it confronts you. Utilizing this philosophy, I look forward to the day when someone upon hearing my response to “The Question” looks at me without judgment and sincerely exclaims, “Cool.”
Since Harvard prides itself on its diverse student population, I have been very surprised by all of the negative reactions Harvard students have had to my cultural identity. Racially, I am mainly Hungarian, Russian, and Polish— basically, Caucasian. Culturally, however, I identify myself as Asian and Asian American, and this incongruity between culture and race, personal identity and external features, is what disturbs so many students here.

Those of us who claim this identity—mostly East Asian concentrators—receive a lot of unfair and very hurtful criticism. I have been called an “egg”—white on the outside, yellow on the inside—countless numbers of times. Initially funny, this analogy soon lost its humor when aimed at me in a derogatory way by people who saw my cultural identity as a joke or a fetish of some sort. Its effect is similar to that of calling someone an “Oreo” (black on the outside, white on the inside) or a “chigger” (an Asian who acts “too black”). The use of the term “egg” represents an attitude that is rampant on the Harvard campus: that people who are not of Asian descent and yet are interested in Asia are “abnormal.” To dispel these misconceptions, I will explain my background and experiences.

LEARNING A CULTURE

My childhood played a large role in shaping my identity as an Asian and an Asian American. For most of my life, I have lived in Montgomery County, Md., which is a very racially diverse area. The large minority population includes wealthier first- and second-generation Chinese and Korean families as well as less well-off immigrants from Southeast Asia and Central America. Starting in fourth grade, I attended gifted-and-talented magnet programs which placed me into schools that were not only local for many Asian families, but also attracted many precocious Asian and Asian American children from other areas of the county.

At a high school that was already seventy-percent minority, I was surrounded by Asians and Asian Americans, many of whom became my friends. Through these friendships, I was immersed in their respective cultures. I heard Chinese spoken regularly. I grew up loving foods such as dried seaweed, squid, and lotus jelly. I gained a deep appreciation for Asian art. By sixth grade, I was begging my parents to let me enroll in Chinese school. While my friends complained about having to practice writing Chinese characters for long hours on Saturdays, I longed to understand this beautiful writing system and to be able to replicate it myself. I taught my family to use chopsticks. I listened to my friends complain about being forced to play the piano, and I picked up nuances regarding family structure, politeness, customs, and holiday rituals from the time I spent in their houses. When I was in ninth grade, a young Taiwanese woman lived with my family for nine months, further exposing me to Asian culture.

Culture goes far beyond language, food, and friends, but from these experiences, I gained the beginnings of a comprehensive understanding of Asian and Asian-American cultures, to the point that I felt as if I fit into both. I identified more with Asians and Asian Americans than with any other cultural group. My own racial heritage was still a part of me, but my identification with Asia was stronger.

AN EMERGING IDENTITY

My interest in Asia developed greatly in high school and even more so in college. I became fascinated with all aspects of life in different Asian countries. While Taiwan was most familiar to me because the majority of my friends were Taiwanese, my interests in countries such as Cambodia, Korea, and Thailand grew as well. After a brief stint as a Biology concentrator, I found my true passion to lie within the culture with which I had grown up. I became a Government and East Asian Studies concentrator. I finally realized my dream of learning Chinese through classes at Harvard; I also spent a year learning Korean and am now taking on the challenges of Cantonese. Most of my extracurricular activities involve Asia, and my career goals lie in the international relations of Asian countries. And yes, I do tend to prefer Asian men.
The exposure that I have had to both Asian and Asian-American culture has caused me to feel very much a part of them. This feeling goes beyond mere interest. Although much of my experience has mainly been in terms of Asian America and not of Asia itself, I still consider part of me to be Asian as well. Not having lived in an Asian country definitely limits the extent of that part, but my studies of Asia, my interactions with Asians, and the small amount of time I spent in Korea two summers ago have all shaped my identity. Many people assume that racial descent and cultural identity are closely linked, and for most people, this assumption is true. However, it is important to understand that some people feel closer to cultural traditions and trends outside of their race.

**‘WHY DO YOU CARE SO MUCH?’**

I have been asked countless times why I care so much about Asia and how a white person could say that she is Asian or Asian-American. On one level, I enjoy answering these questions because it allows people to learn about one of the parts of myself that I treasure the most. On another level, however, the tone of these questions is often very skeptical and critical: “Why the heck do you study Asia? Why do you care so much?” I care because it is my culture and because Asian countries have beautiful, rich traditions that are worthy of appreciation. Why shouldn’t it be my calling to appreciate them?

I have noticed that most of the criticism comes from Americans, especially Harvard students. I am not sure why Harvard students in particular disdain people who are interested in Asia. Perhaps aversion to the infamous “Asian fetish,” with the high incidence of dating between white men and women of Asian descent at Harvard, makes people skeptical. Or perhaps I haven’t had enough experience in the world outside Harvard to realize that others are skeptical of me as well. However, I have heard that people at other colleges have far more accepting attitudes than Harvard students do.

When I was in Korea two summers ago, I received only praise and excitement when people found out what I study. Koreans know that their country is worth studying and even assimilating into, so it is natural to them that I would be interested in Korea. Likewise, recent immigrants to the United States and those who have been raised outside of American society generally do not question my interest. But here in America, where, to many, it is inconceivable that people would be interested in countries less “important” or “significant” than the United States, studying other countries is considered to be abnormal and even frowned upon.

I once asked a fellow East Asian Studies concentrator of non-Asian descent why he studies Asia. While I usually answer such questions with explanations about my childhood, he gave a different answer: “Because it’s cool. I mean, why not?” The beauty of this answer lies in its simplicity. After all, how many Biology concentrators get asked this question as repeatedly as East Asian Studies concentrators do? Why should East Asian Studies be such a curiosity?

**YELLOW FEVER**

One of the most upsetting things I have had to deal with as a white Asian and Asian American is the talk about the “fetish”—the Asian fetish, “yellow fever.” A majority of people with strong interests in Asia tend to prefer dating those of Asian descent and culture. This tendency is labeled a fetish, which is a misconception. People prefer to date those with whom they have much in common. If you feel closely bound to a particular culture or ethnicity, you will most likely be inclined to date people who fall within that category. I always tell people, “it’s a preference, not a fetish.” “Fetish” implies an erotic or exotic element that is, in reality, absent in most people who truly do take a deep interest in Asia.

Of course, some view Asians—particularly Asian women—as erotic and sexually fascinating; arguably, those people have a fetish. But it is a misnomer to place this label on people who feel culturally bound to Asia. I grew up around Asians and Asian Americans and love Asian culture. An identification with and interest in Asian and Asian-American culture often—but not exclusively—extends to whom I date. Has anyone ever accused an Asian of having an Asian fetish? A Caucasian of having a Caucasian fetish?

I once asked a Caucasian in my Chinese class if he had gone to the Chinese Students Association’s dance the weekend before. His response astounded me. “No way,” he vehemently replied. “I would never show my face at one of those things because if I did, the rumors would immediately start flying about ‘the fetish,’ and I don’t want people to see me in that manner.”

It is truly regrettable that anyone should feel intimidated about going to such a function for fear of rumors. I know these rumors well because they circulate about me, too. “She only dates Asian men. Be careful, she’ll be after you too.” If someone tends to prefer brunettes, do they take interest in and chase after every brunette in sight? I have even been asked if I study East Asian Studies for the men. This is one of the most ridiculous things I have ever heard.
The assumptions that people make without understanding my cultural background have really hurt me when the rumors reach my ears.

The other accusation that I have received regarding my interest in Asia is that I am a white capitalist who is trying to siphon money out of Asia and into my pockets. My interest in Asia goes far beyond economic exchanges, beyond a simple focus of study. It is not just a fascination, and it is certainly not a fetish: It is my culture.

THE THIRD SYMBOLIC UNIVERSE

In my reading for a class on Chinese culture and literature, I came upon a fascinating article by Harvard Professor of Chinese History and Philosophy Tu Wei-ming. This article, “Cultural China: The Periphery as Center,” describes three types of people who are, in Tu’s opinion, culturally Chinese; he calls these categories “symbolic universes.” The first symbolic universe is that of “mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore—that is, the societies populated predominantly by cultural and ethnic Chinese.” The second is that of diaspora Chinese communities, such as the Chinese-Malaysian and Chinese-American communities. It was the third universe of cultural Chinese that struck me. It “consists of individual men and women, such as scholars, teachers, journalists, industrialists, traders, entrepreneurs and writers, who try to understand China intellectually and bring their conceptions of China to their own linguistic communities.”

This third category finally put words to something I had felt for years. As Tu states, it is not necessary to be racially Chinese in order to be culturally Chinese. By learning about and trying to understand China, and even by assimilating oneself into its social patterns, one takes on the Chinese culture as one’s own. Of course, while a person of this third symbolic universe and a person of Chinese descent are both culturally Chinese, there will be significant differences in the way each perceives this culture; however, the culture is still real to, and acknowledged by, both types of people. Extending this perception to Asian and Asian-American culture in general, I believe that my efforts, studies, upbringing, and feelings classify me as culturally Asian and Asian American.

I do not pretend to be racially Asian, but I proudly proclaim my Asian and Asian-American cultures. I am not an “egg.” I do not have a fetish. I have a culture with which I grew up and which forms a large part of my identity. By learning, understanding, and living this culture through my experiences, past and present, I may truthfully speak of myself as Asian and Asian American.

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MAKESHIFT

At every red light, my reaction is automatic: I put my foot on the brake and turn to look at the woman riding next to me, who at this point I still believe is my future wife. I search for similarities between my mother and her, but the two women couldn’t be more different. Molly has blue eyes and a chubby face. My mother’s eyes are almond shaped, and when she smiles, she reveals high cheekbones and a set of dimples that illuminate the path. More importantly, Molly is American, my first American girlfriend, and my mother, well, she still carries with pride the card that says she’s a Korean citizen.

“I hope she likes this dress,” says Molly, fastening the top two buttons of her Victorian-style frock. “It’s the most conservative dress in my closet.”

Green light. We’re going to my mother’s house—my house—a nice two-story rental in one of the less fashionable sections of Orange County. We’ll go in, the light will be low, and there’ll be no fire burning. The two women will meet, size each other up, exchange pleasantries, and formulate uneasy opinions. I, the very reason for the meeting of the two, will be merely a spectator watching from my seat at the dinner table.

The clock in the car flashes a whole number: it’s six o’clock. We’d be there just in time, if only there weren’t so many red lights on our way.

“I’m wearing it especially for her,” Molly continues, pointing to a dress that could only look good on Emily Dickinson. “I know how conservative Korean mothers are.”


“I should’ve worn my contacts,” Molly says, wiping her glasses with the sleeve of her Emily Dickinson dress. “I don’t want her to think I am a bookworm. I mean, that’s true, but I don’t know...Jin-su, tell me about your mother.”

“What do you want to know?”

“Things. Does she have a sense of humor? ‘Cuz then I’ll try to be funny. Or is she more on the serious side? I don’t want to appear frivolous. And what should I try to talk about? Should I even talk at all?” Molly asks.

She wants to be trained, groomed, prepped up, given a set of lines to memorize, standard answers to everything. Again, she is the opposite of my mother, who will offer you a joke and then no punchline, just to laugh at her own cleverness.

Red light. Brake. Check Molly. Her nerves are frazzled; her face is brittle like glass, and her hands are

by Samuel Park
(from Reflections, Stanford’s Korean-American magazine)
locked together in prayer. With her eyes closed, she’s trying to remember a documentary she’s seen on PBS about Korean families, or at least a few key words from MASH. Ah-nyong-ha-seyô. Ah-nyong-hee-ga-seyô.

To tell her about my mother. What can I tell her? Mothers are harmless, kind souls who bake pies and sew cover seats. They hunch over ovens all across America. But not my mother. My mother and I are like two displaced souls, living by ourselves and keeping each other company in the manner of the great odd couples of our time: Laverne & Shirley, Tony Randall and Walter Matthau, Harold and Maude.

From the time I was young in Pusan, Korea, I saw kids my age shun their mothers and venture into a world of fast roller-skates, improvised cigarettes, and long nights at the Arcade. I remained home, sitting at my mother’s side as she sang old Korean folk songs or told me tales about her own school days. Those moments of bliss were only interrupted by my father, a big, silent man who could express a lifetime’s worth of disappointment through the twitch of an eyebrow.

As a twelve-year-old boy, I still hadn’t gone through my growth spurt and was shorter than he. The man stared down at me, sometimes annoyed, sometimes with the fury of a bear whose hearth had been invaded. Surely I was the intruder, the sparrow in the canary’s nest. At ten months old, I slept between the two in their bed; at age seven, afraid of the dark, I began to share my mother’s bed, effectively relegating my father to the ground, where he snored ruefully. Finally at age twelve, when I should have been showing an interest in sports and picking fights on the street, I showed a knack for weaving and two-point knitting.

To vent his disappointment, my father immured me in menial work—carrying boxes with no true destination or washing the garbage can after each dumping. Whenever he made his presence felt, I would crawl on the floor closer to my mother, and she would put a protective hand over my shoulder. Impervious to my father’s look, she could weave a makeshift womb in a matter of seconds. Together we were untouchable.

Every night I secretly hoped that my father would die, and many a morning I’m sure he caught my look of surprise at seeing him still alive.

My father did not die, but he did leave us. Village gossip said that he’d moved to Seoul with another woman—a twenty-year-old virgin, the more vicious tongues claimed. But

Seoul was not far enough for mother, her tears having nothing to do with loss, but everything to do with embarrassment and consternation. “It’s one of those things one should wait to do until after one’s wife is dead,” she said at the time. After much thought, with my arm in one hand and a bag in the other, she walked onwards. Through the airplane gate, we were on our way to America.

Years later, settled in our home in California, I found out that my father had been an abusive husband. Of course, the signs had always been there: the sunglasses she wore on foggy winter mornings, the constant visits to the doctor. Whatever happened, in the end, it was a mutual separation. Debating who had caused the split would have been as pointless as discussing who had brought me into the world because, from that point on, a new union had been forged—one that, in order to exist, did not require the bonding agreement of a marriage certificate or a promise made to a priest.

“Jin-su, what did you tell her about me?” Molly asks, looking at her reflection in the side-view mirror. “I hope she knows stuff. I hope you’ve been telling her things about me.”

“She knows you’re Catholic, white, that we went to college together, that I like you a lot.”

Molly plays with the clasp of her necklace.

“I didn’t like what you did to me,” Molly says. No need to elaborate. She is referring to our college graduation day, a month ago. “It was cruel.”

“I’ve apologized.” But not enough. Not enough.

After the commencement ac-
activities and the last speakers were through, the class dispersed in chaotic directions as families and friends descended upon the grassy stadium.

Molly, whom I’d been seeing for a few months, stood by my mother and me, patiently smiling and waiting to be introduced. When it became clear that I had no such intention, Molly shot me a deadly good-bye look and walked off to greet her own parents, who had been waiting quietly by the band.

I spent the rest of the day thinking about poor Molly on stand-by, while my mother and I exchanged celebratory words in Korean. It had taken us less than a couple of minutes, but the two of us had managed to create a whole separate world with our own language and signals, shutting out everyone else. At that moment, Molly must’ve understood what I’d been trying to hint at all along: my mother and I were Siamese twins thirty years apart, male and female versions of the same dollar bill. We revealed our special connections in private whispers at the dinner table, and when someone stepped into the room, our conversations suddenly stopped.

Even then, I realized my mistake. I should’ve introduced Molly, I said to myself while shaving that night. But mother may have taken offense that I hadn’t mentioned Molly before, that I had kept Molly a secret and not shared. To my mother, my love interest was very important. She took an active part in finding a wife for me.

On social occasions like church meetings, weddings, or even funerals, my mother disguised herself as a Jewish matchmaker, pulling pictures of me out of her purse. She did that surreptitiously as if she were letting the other party in on an exclusive deal. She shuffled the photos around like rare baseball trading cards, except these came with few home-runs and even fewer winnings.

The girls’ responses were lukewarm. My mother collected a number of names and phone numbers, and she passed some of them along to me. Those were ones who had gone through a rigorous screening process—my mother had a detective’s eye for digging up background information and a social climber’s taste for good families. I feigned interest and promised to call.

In any other culture, this method of procuring dates might seem distasteful, even embarrassing—a type of evil scheme between mother and son to ensnare unsuspecting women. All this time, of course, I’d been seeing Molly, of whom my mother knew nothing until the day I told her I’d be having dinner at Molly’s house to meet her family.

"Don’t go. You’ll make a fool of yourself," she said. "I’ll make you some nice Korean barbecue, your favorite."

She placed a plate of fried tofu on the table momentarily, as if to express the end of a discussion that had not even started.

"I have to go. She really wants me to go. I was rude to her and she won’t forgive me. This is my way of making things up. I’ll be back early," Each word came on top of the next, guilt underlying each syllable.

"Don’t come crying later when you don’t feel too good," she said, putting some tofu on my plate. "I tell you about nice Korean girls and you don’t listen. Make me feel dumb."

"I’m sorry."

"American girls are not nice to their mothers-in-law," she went on. "If I try to see you or give you a hug, they’ll get jealous and say, ‘No, he’s mine now. He’s my husband,’ and pull you away from me. They’ll say, ‘Go away, you old woman.’ American girls are like that."

"Molly is nice."


After dinner she sat alone in the living room with her eight-track records playing. When I edged behind her and tried to put my arms around her shoulders, she moved her face away.

Dinner at Molly’s house was difficult. I’m paying for my inadequacies, I told myself at the hardest moments. For being so rude to her.

Molly’s mother, Lenora, a petite brunette with fake eyelashes and peroxide-smelling hair, began by asking me if I wanted some soup. I wasn’t sure how to respond. Surely I knew that in American restaurants you ate a four-course meal, but were things the same in American homes?

I did what my mother would do in such a situation. Instead of “yes” or “no," I responded with an appreciative “hmm." Molly’s mother took that as a “yes” and served me soup with mushrooms. It was called clam chowder, I later found out.

My initial lack of certitude set the tone for my behavior that night. While they ate, each member of Molly’s family talked at the same time, interrupting each other and commenting on comments not finished.

I felt that as their guest, I should contribute to the conversation, but I actually spoke very little. I was
used to eating in respectful silence at dinner and usually only spoke after making eye contact. I did not eat much either. Instead of my mother’s small dishes located close to me, here on this bountiful table were many large dishes spread out, and I didn’t know how to ask a stranger to pass me a dish.

Something told me that they’d appreciate me more if I remained a “foreigner,” an alien with strange habits and a curious demeanor. I thought being or appearing to be uncomfortable would be part of the dining experience. If I joined in too quickly, talking a lot and saying, “Honey, can you pass me the meatloaf?” it would brand me a phony. Amongst themselves, they might criticize me.

Like: “One small entrée and he thinks he’s an American.” Or: “I’m surprised. I thought the Japanese were more quiet.” “Korean, dear.” “Are you sure? I thought the Koreans were lighter.” Would that be their post-prandial conversation after I left? With Irving Berlin playing in the background and everyone gathered in front of a rerun of “Rawhide”?

“You’re not eating much, Jin-su,” said Molly’s mother, incorrectly putting the stress on “Jin,” instead of “su.” “You don’t like the food?”

Now I was to be accused of not liking the food!

“The food’s fine, Mrs. Richards.” But feeling that wasn’t enough: “You must’ve toiled laboriously in the cooking.”

She let out a little laugh. “That was Rosa, dear, our Mexican cook. I spent the afternoon at Bergdorf where I ran into...”

“You’ve maxed your card for this month already, Lenora. You’ve got to...” Molly’s father, Mr. Richards.

“...Nina Petropolous.” Mrs. Richards.

“Did I tell you guys about my research on the Mexican immigrant influence on the United States? It’s for my...” Molly.

“Well, then you could write a paper on how rich suburban families exploit recently immigrated foreigners in menial jobs. You could interview Rosa for that,” said Mrs. Richards.

“Lenora...” Mr. Richards.

“You know, this whole immigrant business has been one case of exploitation after another,” said Mrs. Richards.

“Lenora.” Mr. Richards again.

“The Chinese, for example, were brought to work in the railroads and were terribly abused, the poor chinks...”

“Lenora!” Mr. Richards stamped his fist on the table.

“What?” asked Mrs. Richards.

“Oh! I’m sorry, Jin-su. I really didn’t mean to offend you.”

I felt as if I were the one to blame. Maybe I should demand that she learn how to pronounce my name right, tell her not to call Chinese people “chinks,” bring Rosa or whatever her name was out of the kitchen and say, “This is a human being, not a slave.”

But I knew I would do nothing like that. I thought of filing grievances, of asking for my money back, or of being seated in the non-smoking section. Let the Unions, the FDA, and the FCC take care of me.

“It’s all right,” I finally said, “I’m not Chinese.”

There was a general sigh of relief in the room, so imperceptible that it would’ve taken a sophisticated piece of equipment to detect it. But I felt it and could read it on their faces, especially Molly’s.

For the rest of the evening, I ate little and spoke less, nodding at the right times and following my cues. I was accommodating when aggressiveness was called for, and I disappeared in silence when I should’ve made my presence felt.

As I said good-bye to Molly and thanked my hosts, I felt an enormous distance between them and me. I practically ran to my car, diminished into a four-year-old who, after accidentally being let into the adults’ lounge, was now taken back to his crib.

When I came home that night, the lights were still on. My mother had stayed up as usual to welcome me back to the hearth. She sat on a chair; I sat on the floor next to her. Her hand rested over my shoulder.

“So how did it go?” she asked.

“Did you like them? Did they like you?”

“Did you like them? Did they like you?”

“Did you like them? Did they like you?”

What answers did she want? Good, yes, and yes?

I offered no immediate response. When I spoke, it was an admission of defeat, whispered like a sinner’s confession.

“It was horrible. They must’ve thought I was a retard. I barely spoke. I was so polite and accommodating. I was almost fawning.”

“It’s okay, it’s okay,” she said in a singsong manner. “It doesn’t matter. Everything’s fine now. You’ve come home with me, and no one’s going to hurt my Jin-su.”

My head found its familiar spot under her chin, leaning against her chest. She patted my shoulders and then kissed my head, her lips warm against my hair. Her arms wrapped up my body like a shawl, and I felt my temperature rise. I was twenty years younger, being
comforted after getting hurt. This time it wasn't a skinned knee or a broken toe. It was just me, full of self-pity, thinking of my ineffectuality.

"It's your fault, you know," I said, my voice too low and too soft to be an accusation.

"I know, I know," she said, rocking her chair, her arms still wrapped around my shoulders.

"You baby me too much. Why didn't you make me tough? Why did you make me so weak?"

More whisperings.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry," she said, her fingers apologetically working their caresses into my hair.

"I'm afraid of everything. What will happen to me, ohn-ja? How am I going to find a wife?"

"Sometimes I wonder if things would've been different if you'd been raised by your dad. Would you have liked that?" she asked, slowly moving her hands away from me.

I turned to face her.

"Raided by him? Why are you bringing that up? He left us. He aban-

"I love Molly," I stated, as if someone had just accused otherwise. It was a lie, of course, but the indignation and anger underlying the words were real.

"I love her," I repeated. "And I think I'd like to marry her."

My mother did not speak to me for a week after that. And when she spoke, it was to accuse. She was hurt, betrayed. She said I kept things from her. That I lied. That I was ungrateful.

"I gave up all I had in Korea to bring you here and give you a better life! You abandon me now. You are worthless. Why don't you go to your father? Why don't you call him? Here!"

She threw the phone at me, breaking the extension cord. "Do you think he wants to hear from you? Do you think he wants you? No. That's the answer. No. I am all you have. Me."

When she calmed down, I asked her to forgive me. I was insensitive, I was bad, I did not think of her feelings.

After dinner one night, she said that she'd like to meet Molly.

"Bring her over for dinner. I'll be nice to her."

I was sitting in the living room, pretending to read a book and hoping she'd walk upstairs.

"Okay. I'll run the idea by her," I said.

"Be convincing. Persuasive. Tell her how much I like to meet my son's friends. I'll cook my best food. She'll like it," she said.

She leaned over for a second on her way to the record player.

"Your book is upside down."

I corrected it.

"You're so absent-minded. When you were little, you always mismatched socks. I had to start buying all same colored socks." She turned on the radio and tuned into Radio Korea. They were playing an old Fleetwood Mac song. She switched it off and put on a record. The ballroom version of John Paul Young's "Love is in the Air" be-

"It was horrible. They must've thought I was a retard. I barely spoke. I was so polite and accommodating."
gan to play. In my daze, I envisioned a crowd of middle-aged men and women two-stepping in a ballroom with garish lights.

"Do you remember when I tried to teach you how to dance?" she asked.

"Yes, I do. I did some damage to your feet. And in the end, I didn't learn anything," I said in the most conclusive tone I could muster. I buried my head in the book.

"That's too bad. You should know how to waltz. A young gentleman must know how to dance with a lady."

I lowered the book. "I happen to know how to waltz, thank you very much," I said in mock outrage.

"Prove it," she said, getting in position. Her arms, stretched in the air, awaited the touch of a partner's grip. She was an aggressive Cinderella, demanding attention from the prince.

I rose to the challenge. With one hand on her back, the other holding hers, I tried to remember the vague instructions of an old dance teacher in my freshman year at MIT. Step, step, back. One, two, turn. Again.

In our imaginary ballroom, couples stopped to watch and made way for us. We danced with grace, our heights matching, even though I was half a foot taller. In the beginning, she was leading, turning at will and waltzing away. Half-way through the song, I grasped her hand firm and started to lead. She registered some surprise.

I was a good dancer. I knew. I respected my partner's space and knew to avoid abrupt gestures. It helped that my mother was light and graceful in my arms. She was well preserved for her age, familiar with the benefits of yoga and vegetarian living. There was hardly an ounce of fat on her body, and she sometimes moved like an adolescent.

Near the end of the song when everything slowed down, mother leaned her cheek against my shoulder and wrapped her arms around my waist. My nostrils were filled by her natural smell, something wild and sweet, better than anything Chanel or Patou could sell in a bottle.

My arms tightened around her, pressing her body close to mine. This was such a familiar body, one I had hugged so many times and had never tired of. When I was little, all my energy had been drained from these hugs, these long, sentimental expressions of our shared love.

I tried to think of the scene in the way an outsider might. A twenty-three year-old man, barely past the gates of life, locked in an eternal embrace with a forty-eight year-old woman.

"Your father and I never danced together," she said quietly when the song was over. "Your father didn't like to dance. I learned with your grandfather, you know. Oh, what a man your grandfather was. Women were always throwing themselves at him. He was a beautiful man, a great charmer."

The grip in my hands loosened to let her go, but she pressed me closer to her body, and soon I was trapped in her arms again, with my heart beating rapidly but feeling safe.

* * * A few more minutes and we'll be there. I check the speedometer, the odometer. I'm almost running out of gas.

Molly keeps running her fingers through her long, blond hair. She has split ends, I can tell.

Molly is very nervous. She'll be even more nervous when I introduce her to mother, I know. She may be completely overwhelmed by the older woman's astute, self-confident posture, and she may even stutter. Mother will be patient, of course, a good hostess. But in her heart she will wonder why I'm dating this girl. No personality, she'll think to herself. No self-esteem. "Why?" Her eyes will ask me while we eat.

When Molly says something dumb or illogical, mother will shoot me a quick but meaningful glance, and I will lower my eyes, pretending to be interested in the sushi. At every mistake of Molly's, at every mishap, I will shiver and sigh inside. This is a race-track. Molly is my prize horse, but she doesn't know that. I'm keeping my fingers crossed, but my unlucky one gets sand thrown in her eyes by the other, older, more experienced thoroughbreds.

Afterwards, some small talk in the living room. A slightly tipsy Molly, who'd barely had a sip of wine during the meal, will drop some coffee on her dress. A commotion. "Flush it in the water," one of us will say. When Molly emerges from the bathroom, the wet spot forming a circle on her dress, she will bury herself on a seat, defeated. The two women will talk, and Molly will repeat her previous mistakes. But I don't care. I'm not paying attention to this game anymore.

I'm thinking of the night before, and the one before that and all of my nights from as early as I can remember. Here, Korea, maybe even before that. The womb—makeshift or otherwise.

When Molly finally turns to me, her face crimson with embarrassment, telling me that she'd like to go home, of course I'll be ready. Molly will say good-bye to mother and in her heart hope that she'll never have to see her again. We'll get into my Toyota and drive home.

At Molly's doorstep, no kiss, no touch. She will unlock her door quickly, shutting it fast behind her to keep away all of the demons and Eastern powers that she doesn't understand. She will call me incessantly, then furiously, for the next two weeks, but I will not answer.

On my way home from Molly's house, I will try to hurry because I know my mother is waiting. She is waiting patiently with all the lights in the house still on. Despite my hurry, I do not break any traffic laws or speed too much. As I approach a red light, I know there are no cars within a mile's radius—such an ungodly hour and deserted area it is. But I brake anyway, brake and wait for the light to change—obedient, dutiful—like a good boy should.
"On Walker Percy" by Sang Park '98
North Korea has long been a “taboo” subject among Korean Americans. As a generation once removed from the trauma and suffering of the Korean War, many of us know little if anything about the country, nor do we engage in research or discussions on the topic. However, the massive, human tragedy currently unfolding in North Korea calls for an end to our indifference. Korean Americans should put aside their reservations and preconceptions about North Korea, recognize the issue of basic human suffering underlying this crisis, and act to prevent the starvation of millions.

What are the facts?

In the summer of 1995, North Korea was hit with the worst flooding in its history. Concentrated primarily in the northern and western regions of the country, the disaster left half a million people homeless and devastated about 40% of the country’s arable land. The destruction of the fall harvest was so severe that massive food shortages and the beginnings of a gradual famine resulted.

Since 1995, hunger conditions have only worsened, particularly due to two more summers of devastating weather conditions. The summer of 1996 brought another wave of flooding, this time displacing 30,000 people from their homes and killing at least 200. Just this past summer, flooding was replaced with a severe drought, which subjected the country to over 60 days of extreme heat with no rain. This latest disaster destroyed 60% of the maize crop and ruined food production once again.

Over two full years of starvation conditions have resulted in a current situation which one United Nations official describes as “one of the biggest humanitarian disasters of our lifetime.” Relief agencies are now openly characterizing the situation as a famine, pointing to classic signs such as distended bellies of children, yellowing hair, and the emergence of clinical malnutrition and other hunger-related diseases. The North Korean government has estimated that 37% of the country’s children can be classified as “malnourished,” or in other words, weighing 80% of normal body weight; even this estimate is believed to be a conservative figure. This summer, food rations were also reduced to 100 grams a day, the equivalent of 350 calories or one bowl of rice.

In terms of numbers affected, the magnitude of this crisis exceeds that of the Ethiopian famine of the mid-1980’s. The main reason lies in the fact that even though the 1995-96 floods hit only particular regions, North Korea’s public rationing system has collected drastically reduced food supplies and distributed them over the entire country; the system is equitable, but famine conditions resulting from the failed harvests are now impacting the country’s entire 23 million people. In Ethiopia, five million were affected, of which one million eventually perished. The potential for mass deaths of an even greater scale is a constant reminder of the depth of the North Korean famine and the need for immediate action worldwide.

What is the state of famine relief work?

For the first time in North Korea’s history, international relief organizations became involved in flood relief work in 1995 as a result of the government’s unprecedented public appeal. The United Nations World Food Program has played the biggest role, distributing food primarily in flood-affected areas, conducting food-for-work programs among farmers to support land recovery efforts, and actively encouraging governments worldwide to make large-scale donations. While WFP works directly with the North Korean government, it closely monitors all food shipments received in response to its appeals for aid; 17 monitors are currently working in North Korea, and the number is expected to increase to 30 by January 1998. Despite the excessive media attention on the issue of food diversion to the North Korean military, not one case of diversion from WFP donations has been documented.

Despite WFP’s contributions, it is clear that the international response falls far short of what is needed to relieve the famine. The South Korean government, for example, initially prohibited civilians from sending donations and even now, only permits contributions channeled through the International Red Cross. In addition, the U.S., as the richest country in the world, has traditionally adhered to a humanitarian aid policy of contributing one-third of the annual food needs in famine-stricken countries; it followed this policy dur-
ing the Ethiopian crisis. In North Korea, however, the U.S. only donated enough to cover 4-6% of the estimated food shortage during the last harvest year. Total U.S. donations between 1995-97 equal about 10-12% of annual food shortages. Calculated over the entire population, this figure amounted to a mere $1.14 per person.

Political questions have hindered famine relief efforts. Nongovernmental organizations in the U.S. have vigorously criticized the government for using the famine to further U.S. military interests in Asia. Despite the government’s official position favoring food aid, State Department officials have made statements explicitly conditioning food aid on political concessions or economic “reform.” Moreover, the government claims to have met its obligations by responding to all WFP appeals. However, these appeals only equal a small fraction of the total food shortage in North Korea; for instance, the food shortfall (food need minus domestic production) during the last harvest totaled about 2 million tons, and the total WFP during the same period equaled about 333,000, or 16.7% of the total shortage. Even the WFP has consistently urged governments to make massive, bilateral donations and distribute food throughout the country rather than through WFP’s more limited network.

Korean Famine Relief. The group has affiliations with the National Network for North Korea Hunger Relief, as well as various local student and church groups in Boston. Meetings are held biweekly — monthly for affiliated community groups — and our activities focus primarily on education and fund-raising. We have also lobbied the U.S. government to make a greater commitment to famine relief.

Although increasing numbers of nongovernmental organizations are also becoming involved in famine relief work, the Boston Campaign has worked primarily with the American Friends Service Committee, a Quaker-based organization in Philadelphia. AFSC collects donations both for general food distribution through the WFP and also for agricultural development aid for Sambong Cooperative Farm, a 550-family farm with which AFSC hopes to cultivate a long-term relationship.

Donations can be sent to Korea Relief Fund, AFSC, 1501 Cherry Street, Philadelphia, PA 19102. Checks should be made out to “American Friends Service Committee” with “Korea Relief Fund” written on the memo line. The Boston Campaign can be contacted at P.O. Box 470556, Brookline, MA 02147, c/o Tae-hui Kim (617-493-9066 / kim20@law.harvard.edu) or Prof. Ramsay Liem (617-552-4108 / liem@bc.edu).
EDITOR’S NOTE
The following article appeared in the November issue of Wurisedae, a monthly magazine put out by students of Seoul National University (SNU). The article was apparently written from the perspective of students who do not live in dorms, as the majority of SNU students still commute from their homes or rent rooms nearby the campus. Dormitories in Korea perennially suffer from under-supply, and SNU is no exception. The article provides us with a rare glimpse of dorm life in Korea that maintains some uniqueness of its own, even as it increasingly resembles that of western universities. One aspect that featured prominently in the article below was the difficulty that most students face in their transition to dormitories. Living in their own houses, they could count on their parents to make sure that they wake up early, get every meal, work on their homework, and go to sleep when they should. In dorms, on the other hand, they are free to schedule their own time. While they appreciate the newly won freedom on the other hand, the necessary complement to freedom - i.e., self-discipline - seems conspicuously missing from lives of most students. Consequently, the authors reveal a mixed reaction to the kind of lifestyle that dorm students exhibit: they envy the greater degree of freedom that dorm residents enjoy, but regret the fact that most students stay up so late, miss breakfast, do not work hard, etc.

It’s 8:40 in the morning. An alarm clock goes off. L, who has a morning lecture, hesitates for a moment, unable to decide whether to go to class or not. Reluctantly, L gets up, turns off the alarm, and gets dressed. Throwing notes into his book bag, he thinks to himself, “If I hurry, I should be able to make it in time.” He picks up the newspaper protruding out of his mail-box, and steps outside. He regrets having stayed up late the night before, in his friend’s room, working on a paper. Compared to most of his friends who

관악 2000인의 터전 “관악사”
윤준희, 최해용

아침 8시 40분, 알람 시계가 울린다. 1교시 수업이 있는 L은 수업을 들을까 말까 잡시 갈등한다. 그러다가 마지못한 듯 일어나 시계를 끄고 옷을 입는다. 가방을 대충 정리고 ‘서둘러서 곤장 학교로 가면 늦지는 않겠군’하며 우편함의 신문을 빼어들고 밖으로 나선다. 아침밥에 친구방에서 같이 레포트를 쓰고 숙제를 하며 늦다가 너무 늦게 자버렸기 때문이다. 학교 밖에서 통학하는 친구들을 생각해보면 조금 앞서 일어나도 될 텐 여유있을 것 같은데, 그렇게 생각만으로 쉽지는 않은 모양이다. 이는 물론 L의 이야기지만 기숙사에서 살는 이들은 이와 비슷한, 예전에 집에서 생활할 때와는 조금 다른 생활패턴을 가져 보았을 것이다. 전국 각 지방에서 모인 2000명이 넘는 우리 학교 학생들의 생활공간인 기숙사. 일반 부모님의 영향권에서 벗어나 있는 비슷한 나이 토대로의 학생들이 모인 곳이기에 여러 면에서 다양한 모습들을 볼 수 있으리라 생각했다. 그래서 관악 캠퍼스 내에 있는 관악사 사생들의 생활모습을 살펴보고자 이에 거주하는 270명의 학부생을 대상으로 설문 조사를 해 보았다.
commute to the university, L should have more free time in the morning, but his poor time management prevents him from taking full advantage of it.

The account above, of course, applies solely to L's case, but many of those who live in dormitories must have similar experiences. Kwanaksa, the dorm complex, houses more than two-thousand students of provincial origin who attend Seoul National University. We surveyed 270 students in order to explore various aspects of their personal lives.

Breakfast, anyone?

70% of those surveyed either miss breakfast altogether, or have breakfast once or twice a week at most. On weekdays the school dining hall serves breakfast 7:30-9:30, but many students seem unable to make it. Part of the reason may be that most of them stay up late; 11.5% of those surveys admitted to going to sleep after three a.m. Also the dining hall is located inconveniently, near the old buildings. Some students testified that because they do not have parents around to force them out of bed in the morning, they choose sleep over meals. Instead, they often order pizza or fried chickens late at night to supplement their meals. It is regrettable that many of them, being young, do not yet seem to realize the importance of having breakfast in maintaining health.

Studying in the Dorms

The greatest number of those surveyed expressed overall satisfaction with dorms as a working environment, although many also called for improvement in books, desks, and other facilities. However, asked how much time they

어침식사는 긍정? 나이트?

관학사 사생중 70% 정도가 일주일에 한두 번 정도 기숙사에서 아침을 먹거나, 아예 안 먹는 것으로 나타났다. 평일의 식당 아침식사 시간이 7시 30분 - 9시 30분인데, 설문조사에서 나타나듯 대체적으로 늦은 시간에 잠자리에 들기 때문에 그 시간을 못 맞추는 게 하나의 이유로 나타났다. 또한 식당을 구관과 복는 동안에 있어 신관에 사는同学们은 가기가 불편하고, 부모님이나 누군가가 먹으라고 쌓지 않기 때문에 밥대신 잠을 채는 경우가 많다고 한다. 그러고는 늦은 시간에 의무에서 면할 때에는 피자, 맥주, 통닭 같은 간식을 자주 사서 먹는다. 아직 건강한 나이이기에 건강의 소중함을 잘 못느끼면서 아침식사를 소홀히 하는 듯 해서 부처 안타깝다.

기숙사에서의 공부

기숙사에서의 공부여건을 묻는 질문에서는 '그런데로 편찮다'는 의견이 가장 많았다. 기숙사 도서관과 책상 등의 시설에 관한 개선의 바람들이 가장 높은 점에서 많이 보였으나 대체적으로 만족스럽다는 의견이 좀 더 많았다. 그러나 기숙사 내에서의 실제 학습시간을 묻는 질문에서는 '1시간 정도 또는 그 이하'가 70%가 넘었다. 기숙사 씨 아침 학교의 도서관 등지에서 공부나 숙제를 할 수도 있었지만 기숙사가 의식주 생활의 기본인 음식을 생각해 보면 공부나 독서시간이 조금 부족하다는 인상을 지울 수 없다. 혹시나 외국의 문제로 기숙사를 편안하게 이곳 관리사를 공부해탈이 사는 곳으로 생각한다면 그것은 조금 잘못된 생각인 것 같다. 대부분의同学们 이 1학년이기 때문에 이러한 분위기가 형성되기 쉬운 게 아닌가 싶다. 그리고 기숙사에서의 여가 시간들을 묻는 질문에는 컴퓨터를 이용한 온라인 통신, 전화 통화, 운동 등의 매달이 많았다.

기숙사의 장단점

지방생들이 할 수 있는 자취, 하숙 등과 비교해서 기숙사가 특히 좋은 점으로는 생활비가 적게 들고 학교가 가깝다는 게 단점 손꼽혔다. 한 학기에 24만원의 기숙사비와 함께 1800원의 식사가 하숙이니

“Seoul” Photo by Jay Mok ‘99
actually work in dorms, more than 70% responded “1 hour or less,” suggesting that dorms as they exist are not conducive to studying. The surprising response can be partly accounted for by the fact that a majority of those living in dorms are freshmen, who do not work hard anyway. Many students wrote that they spend their leisure time on the internet or playing games on their PCs, as well as getting exercise.

Pros and Cons of Dorm Life

Why may students from other parts of the country prefer dorms to other means of accommodation, such as getting an apartment? Low rooming fee and proximity to the campus definitely ranked the highest among responses. Not only are the rooming and boarding costs low (US$240 per semester for rooming, and less than US$180), but they also get spared transportation cost. Some respondents also cited "free" lifestyle and a greater chance of socialization as possible advantages. One advantage of Kwanaksa is that all individual rooms are provided with telephones, in contrast to other campus dorms. Among the chief sources of discontent are: poor quality of diet, furniture and laundry facilities that cry for replacement/renovation, and the inadequate heating system. However, 74% of respondents, including those who cannot stay on because of failing grades, said they would like to live in the dorm the next year, suggesting that advantages cited above outweigh disadvantages. It must be noted, however, that most students find it difficult to remain in the dorm for another year, because preference is given to incoming freshmen in allocating scarce space.

12% of Total Students Live in Dorms

Since its opening in 1975, Kwanaksa complex has been continuously expanded to comprise one administration building, two student centers, and thirteen dormitories that house the total of 2,382 students, including graduate students. Even now construction is under way behind the old buildings. Just as the university has a university council, Kwanaksa has its own students government that plans various student events as well as taking part in dorm administration. Every year the student government organizes dorm festivities; invites guest speakers; discusses matters related to dining service through the dining services committee; and runs a bulletin board for student input and communicates with provosts, in its endeavor to heed student voice. Moreover, student organizations such as Kwantak (a table-tennis club) and Hansori (a choir) help uniting the student body as a community.

The student body is made up of unique personalities. Even after two o’clock at night, one can observe that more than half the rooms have their lights lit, with a faint bouncing noise coming from the basketball court. One is free to do activities anytime, with those around him. As the winter vacation nears, we imagine what kind of community Kwanaksa will be next year, with new residents.
THE ACTUAL SURVEY RESULTS
1. How much sleep do you get?
   (1) before 11:00 (0.4%)
   (2) between 11:00 and 1:00 (27.4%)
   (3) between 1:00 and 3:00 (60.7%)
   (4) after 3:00 (11.5%)
2. How often do you have breakfast every week?
   (1) none (36.2%)
   (2) once or twice (33.9%)
   (3) three or four times (17.4%)
   (4) almost always (12.6%)
3. How much is your monthly living expense?
   (1) less than $200 (2.2%)
   (2) $200-$300 (29.2%)
   (3) $300-$400 (41.3%)
   (4) $400-$500 (20.7%)
   (5) greater than $500 (6.6%)
4. How is your dorm's study environment?
   (1) Excellent (2.2%)
   (2) Satisfactory (51.1%)
   (3) Not satisfactory (43.4%)
   (4) I don't know (3.3%)
5. How much time do you study in your dorm?
   (1) almost never (29.4%)
   (2) less than thirty minutes (12.5%)
   (3) thirty minutes to an hour (30.3%)
   (4) one to two hours (14.9%)
   (5) more than two hours (12.9%)
6. What is the single greatest advantage that living in dorms has over other means of accommodation, such as getting your own apartment or renting a room?
   (1) less living expense (39.9%)
   (2) proximity to the campus (40.3%)
   (3) greater chance of socialization (6.9%)
   (4) free lifestyle (9.5%)
   (5) easy to find help with my academic work (2.2%)
   (6) others (1.2%)
7. What is the single greatest disadvantage that living in dorms has over other means of accommodation, such as getting your own apartment?
   (1) irregular lifestyle (17.6%)
   (2) farther from the shopping district (20.0%)
   (3) poor quality of diet (28.3%)
   (4) restricted privacy (14.9%)
   (5) restricted mobility (15.8%)
   (6) others (3.8%)
8. Would you like to live in the dorm next year?
   (1) yes, if I can (61.1%)
   (2) yes, but my grades aren't good enough (12.9%)
   (3) no, I would like to move out (13.2%)
   (4) I am not sure yet (12.8%)

설문결과
1. 당신은 보통 몇시에 수면을 취하십니까?
   (1) 11시 이전 (0.4%)
   (2) 11시와 1시 사이 (27.4%)
   (3) 1시와 3시 사이 (60.7%)
   (4) 3시 이후 (11.5%)
2. 일주일에 평균 아침 식사는 몇번이나 하십니까?
   (1) 안먹는다 (36.2%)
   (2) 한두번 정도 먹는다 (33.9%)
   (3) 세번 정도 먹는다 (17.4%)
   (4) 꾸준히 먹는다 (12.6%)
3. 한달에 생활비는 어느 정도 드나?
   (1) 20만원 이하 (2.2%)
   (2) 20-30만원 정도 (29.2%)
   (3) 30-40만원 정도 (41.3%)
   (4) 40-50만원 정도 (20.7%)
   (5) 50만원 이상 (6.6%)
4. 기숙사의 명확한 기준 설치의 노동 여건 - 이 어려웠다고 생각하십니까?
   (1) 잘 갖추어져 있다 (2.2%)
   (2) 그런데도 괜찮다 (51.1%)
   (3) 만족스럽지 못하다 (43.4%)
   (4) 잘 모르겠다 (3.3%)
5. 기숙사에서 공부(숙제, 독서 등)는 하루에 얼마나 하십니까?
   (1) 거의 안 한다 (29.4%)
   (2) 30분 이하 (12.5%)
   (3) 30분-1시간 정도 (30.3%)
   (4) 1-2시간 정도 (14.9%)
   (5) 2시간 이상 (12.9%)
6. 기숙사가 다른 자취나 하숙에 비해 특별ly 좋다고 생각하는 점은 무엇인가?
   (1) 생활비가 적게 든다 (39.9%)
   (2) 학교가 가깝다 (40.3%)
   (3) 많은 사람들과 어울릴 수 있다 (6.9%)
   (4) 생활의 무지개 자유롭다 (9.5%)
   (5) 학습과 관련해 도움을 받기 수월하다 (2.2%)
   (6) 기타 (1.2%)
7. 기숙사가 다른 자취나 하숙에 비해 특별히 안 좋다고 생각하는 점은 무엇인가?
   (1) 생활이 불규칙하다 (17.6%)
   (2) 녹두거리에 가기가 힘들다 (20.0%)
   (3) 먹는 것이 부실하다 (28.3%)
   (4) 개인 생활에 제약을 느낀다 (14.9%)
   (5) 활동 범위가 줄다 (15.8%)
   (6) 기타 (3.8%)
8. 내년에도 기숙사에 남고 싶습니까?
   (1) 가능하면 기숙사에 남고 싶다 (61.6%)
   (2) 기숙사에 남고 싶지만 화학 문제로 남을 수 없다 (12.9%)
   (3) 하숙이나 자취를 하고 싶다 (13.2%)
   (4) 아직 잘 모르겠다 (12.8%)
Eliminating Prejudices Against Foreign Workers

by Kim Keun-Ho and Chung Jin-Soon, translated by Jung Kim

Writer’s Note:

The number of foreign workers in Korea is on the rise. The inflow of foreign workers, since its inception in 1988, has accelerated considerably, to reach a total of 220,000 this year. The government, which encouraged the development in order to solve labor shortage, has yet to provide a legal framework by which the workers’ right may be protected. The trouble is that under the current law, most foreign workers are classified as “trainees,” not workers, and the officials treat them as such, turning a blind eye to rampant delays in wage payment, workplace injuries, detention of workers, and workplace violence that plague foreign workers.

A number of Economics concentrators of Seoul National University have recently formed an alliance with foreign workers to address their grievances. The organization, called “Committee of Democratic Alliance,” has drawn considerable attention from the general public, and we have met with Chung Hyuk, the committee’s chairman, to discuss their activities.

Q: What prompted you to start the organization?
A: On May Day this year, some students of humanities organized “The Movement for Implementation of Mass Alliance.” Three agendas had been put forward. One of them concerned the foreign worker issues, and we economics concentrators have begun the effort to ally with foreign workers on those issues, which since then has grown into the current move—

인테뷰
- 외국인 노동자를 바라보는 편견 없어야

저자: 김근호, 정진순
번역: 김경규

外国の労働者が 늘어나고 있다. 서울을 둘러싼 고수준의 외국인 노동자들은 범죄 약 22만명에 이르게 된다. 인천에서 허덕이던 중소기업들의 불만을 무마시키기 위하여 외국인 산업기술영상성을 마구잡이로 돌리보내면 경리는 아직도 외국인들의 권리를 보장해주지는 법조차 마련하지 않고 있다. 외국인 연수원생들은 노동자가 아니라라는 논리로 내세워 외국인 노동자들에게 가해지는 온갖 피해, 즉 임금대결, 산업재해나 감금노동, 현장의 폭력 등에 대해 수수방관하고 있다.

이러한 외국인 노동자들의 이야기에 소감이나나 도움을 주고자 경제학부에서는 올해부터 외국인 노동자 연대 사업을 벌이고 있다. 일시적인 관심에서 끝나는 것이 아니라 지속적인 사업을 추진해 나가고 있다는 점에서 이들의 활동은 주목을 받고 있다. 보다 자세한 내용을 알아보기 위하여 외국인 노동자 연대운동사업의 중심이 되고 있는 <민주연대협찬장>의 정책 위원장을 만나 보았다.

 처음에 외국인 노동자와 연대사업을 벌이게 된 계기가 무엇입니까?

봄에 4월 30일 베이징에, 사회대에서는 '민중연대실천단'을
ment. There have been some student movements before - such as “Mass Alliance” and “Worker-Student Alliance” - but their activities were largely confined to attending mass protests and discussing ideological issues. To actually alleviate their difficulties, we needed an organization that would work with foreign laborers on a more constant basis. Hence the Committee.

Q: Could you summarize your activities so far?
A: The actual contact with the workers takes place through “The House of Foreign Workers,” located in Buchon. Every week we visit the House to hear about their difficulties and gather relevant information. We edit their newsletter, and we recently circulated a booklet around campus that introduced the newsletter. Our association recently formed a sister-agency affiliation with LACOMIK, the union of Myanmar workers in Korea, and held a soccer game to commemorate the alliance. In addition, we have taken part in the training conference organized by the House, and also attended the Youido conference of the Democratic Union of Workers (editor’s note: the largest peak association in Korea) and the fasting protest organized by the Council on Addressing Foreign Workers’ Issues, which took place in Myeongdong Cathedral. During the fasting protest, we met with the minister of labor, and drew a verbal agreement from him that he would present a foreign-workers’ law during the current session of the Diet.

Q: What was the foreign workers’ reaction to the fact that students have allied with their cause?
A: At this stage we are trying to get to know each other better. Foreign workers, in general, are not yet spoiled by what you might call a capitalist mind-set, and so they appreciate our good intentions. Because they are away from home, they appreciate our company as well. However, depending on their level of political consciousness, they exhibit a variety of reactions. Those who sought refuge in Korea for political reasons are usually better educated, and they understand why

구성하여 활동을 벌였다. 활동분야로 크게 세 가지의 제안이 있었다. 그 중에서 경제 A반에서는 외국인 노동자 문제에 관해서 활동을 벌였다. 그들과 가까이 하기 위해 연대 사업을 벌였고, 그 활동이 계속 이어져온 것이다. 예전에도 ‘민중연대나 “내국인연대”라는 이름으로 활동하는 경우가 있었지만 단순히 집회 참가에 참여만한 이론이 밑에서 일하려는 경향이 있었다. 노동자들을 도 우리나로 그들과 함께 하려는 심경적 노력이 더욱 절실했고 생각한다. 그래서 기 숭적인 연대사업을 하게 된 것이다.

지금까지 활동한 내용에 관하여 간단히 소개해 주십시오.

외국인과의 연대는 붕괴 외국인 노동자의 지층을 통해 이뤄지고 있다. 매주 그곳을 직접 방문해 자원봉사자나 실무 자들을 만나고 있다. 외국인 노동자들이 겪는 어려움에 대해 듣기도 하고, 관련 정보를 얻기도 한다. 그곳에서 발생하는 소식의 전달은 우리 ‘민중연대위협’에서 맡아서 하고 있으며, 한편으로는 그 소식의 내용을 토대로 하여 교내에 소식을 만들어 배포하기도 했다. 얼마 전에는 LACOMIK이라는 재한 미얀마 노동자 공동체와 경제 A반이 자매결연을 맺고 함께 어울리 진선 촉구대회를 하기도 했다.

그 밖에도 지난 여름에는 부천 외국인 노동자의 집에서 주관하는 수련회에 참가하였고, 민주노총 주최로 열린 여의도 집회, 외국인 노동자 협의회가 주관한 평등성당 단식농성 등 여러 집회에 참여하기도 했다. 특히 평등성당에서 이뤄진 농성에서는 외국인 노동자 협의회 노동운동 장관의 면담이 이뤄져 정기국회 협의증례 없음에 대한 구두약속을 미러하게 나마 받을 수 있었다.

학생들이 외국인 노동자 연대 사업을 한다는 사실에 대해 외국인 노동자들의 반응은 어떠할까요?

설교처럼 전해지를 생각만큼 노력하고 있다. 외국인 노동 자들은 아직까지 자본주의의 논리에 저어있지 않기 때문에 순수하고, 틀어서 말뿐만기념 같이 없기 때문에 우리를 부적박가는 것 같다. 그 이유는 노동자의 수준은 편차가 웅적 웅적이 우리 활동에 대한 반응을 제각각이다. 민 경정의 상황 때문에 도포적 성격으로 우리나라에 와 노동자들은 대체로 의식수준이 높다. 그들은 자발적이 두 멋과 자신의 권리를 찾아가는 노력이 강하다. 우리의 활동을 제대로 이해해 주는 사람들도 비로 보고 있다. 반면 단순히 돈을 벌는 것을 목적으로 하는 외국인 노동자들은 의의의 수준이 다소 높지 않아, 우리를 그저 ‘고마운 사람’ 정도로만 인식하는 듯 하다.

외국인 노동자 연대 활동을 하면서 협력이거나 어울렸던 정이 있으면 말씀해 주십시오.

우리들이 활동을 하면서 주위로부터 긴밀히 받아왔던 질문이 있다. 우리나라의 경제사정이 그리 좋지 않은데 외국인 노동자들끼리 군이 평길 필요가 느껴지는 것이다. 또, 우리 노동자들의 권리도 제대로 보장되어 있지 않은 상황

“When he visited his boss to demand payment of overdue wages, however, the boss called the police, and he was immediately extradited.”

we push for establishment of foreign workers’ entitlements. Those workers who came to Korea for economic reasons, on the other hand, do not really care about legal issues, and do not appreciate our effort in that regard.
Q: Tell us a little about difficulties you have faced.
A: Those around us kept asking, “Why worry about foreign workers when our own economy is in trouble? Is it not too early to press for foreign workers’ rights when those of our workers are not properly established?” This kind of criticism arises from an us-versus-them mentality, or even racism that does not regard foreign workers as fellow human beings. Such views, prevalent in the general public, have prevented us from garnering wider support. Also I was disappointed by the lack of interest in other universities. Under such slogans as autonomy and solidarity we planned to draw participation of students from other colleges, but none of them actually supported our activities. We must grow beyond the confines of Seoul National University if the movement is to be meaningful at all, but at least I take solace from the fact that we are providing a starting point.

Q: On what occasions have you felt especially strongly about foreign workers’ issues?
A: Foreign workers in general do not get compensated for workplace injuries. A worker from Sri Lanka I met, for example, was in charge of drying dyed textiles. Once his fingers got sucked into a roller that dries the textiles. His thumb skin all fell off, and he also suffered serious burns on his palm. The factory left him without any form of emergency care, and so it was a while before he was treated at a hospital. Because he was uninsured, he was not compensated for the hospital fee. Worse, the firm forced him to quit once it became apparent that he could not work as efficiently after the injury. It is extremely rare that a foreign worker actually gets compensation for workplace accidents. Most employers take advantage of their legal status as illegal workers, to delay wage payments and avoid legal responsibilities.

Another memorable occasion is of a college-educated worker from Myanmar, who actively helped us with our activities. When he visited his boss to demand payment of overdue wages, however, the boss called the police, and he was immediately extradited. Through his case I came to appreciate the extent to which employers abused foreign workers.

Q: In closing, would you like to add anything?
A: Korean workers suffered at the hands of foreign capitalists only decades ago the same kind of exploitation that foreign workers face today in Korea. We shall not forget that and repeat the same mistake. We cannot look down upon foreign workers just because they are from poorer nations. Don’t regard them as foreigners but as fellow workers with the same rights as we have. On the foreign workers’ part, they need to unite among themselves. They may be from diverse backgrounds and nationalities, but they share common difficulties. An individual may be weak, but the sum of those individuals can exercise power.

에서 외국인 노동자들의 권리를 찾고자 하는 것은 너무 시기적으로 이르지 않느냐는 말을 듣기도 했다. 이것은 외국인 노동자들을 우리와 같은 인간으로 보지 않고 특수한, 우리와 다르다는 인간, 외국인 노동자로 보는 시각에서 나온 편견이다. 일반인들의 시선이 대부분 그러하기에 우리의 활동은 아직까지 대중적 지지를 얻기 힘들고 있는 것 같다. 그리고 타학교 학생들과의 연대가 잘 이루어지지 않은 정도 아쉽게 생각한다. 처음에 참여자들이, 연대라는 이름으로 타 대학생들과의 연대를 계획했다. 그러나 명목상의 연대일 뿐, 실제로 활동에 참여한 단위는 거의 없었다. 단지 서울 대 학생들만이 되고 있지 않는 것 반전하게 된다. 하지만 지금도 지속적인 연대의 힘을 마련하고 있다는 점에서 의의를 찾고 싶다.

활동을 하면서 외국인 노동자들의 문제를 심각하게 느꼈던 것은 연대임이다.
외국인 노동자들은 산업제재를 당해도 제대로 보상을 받지 못하고 있는 실정이다. 밀로안 두른 사례를 직접 접한 기회가 있었다. 어느 스타일한 노동자였는데, 그는 실패한 공장에서 엄격한 한단을 간조하기를 작업을 하고 있었다. 작업 도중 그의 손가락에 삐며 달리는 물에 담린 둥근 모양의 손가락의 피부가 모두 벗겨져 나가고 손바닥에도 심한 화상을 앓았다. 사고 직후 신속한 응급처置이 없이 방치더니 가 항원이 지나서야 병원에서 치료를 받을 수 있었다. 그 회사는 손상 보상에 기여하지 않았기 때문에 그는 보상을 받을 수 없었다. 부상으로 그의 작업능력이 떨어지게 되자 회사는 그를 강제 해고시켰다. 이처럼 수많은 외국인 노동자들이 산업제재로 부상을 입지만 보상을 받는 경우는 드물다. 대부분의 사업주들은 이들이 불법취업한 외국인 노동자를 이용하여 일급 체불은 물론이고 산업제재, 보상에도 소극적이다.
또 한가지 기억에 남는 사람이 있다. 미란다에서 대학까 지 졸업한 자녀였지만, 평소 우리들을 적대적으로 대하는 사람이다. 그런데히 체불 일급을 받으려고 사업주를 찾아갔다가 신고를 받고 온 경찰에 강제 불법 취업자로서 강제 출국당했다. 많은 외국인 노동자들이 고통을 받고 있지만 사업주들은 그들을 너무 무시하며 대우하고 있음을 실감했다.

마지막으로 하고 싶은 말씀은,
외국인 노동자들이 지금 겪고 있는 고통은 불과 몇십 년전 우리들이 선진 자본주의 국가에서 당했던 것들을 빼고 있다. 과거의 기억을 빼지 않고 감을 잃을 때도 과거의 뇌가 되어 있는 것이다. 경제적으로 열등한 나라의 국민이라고 해서 그들 을 무시해도 안 된다. 그들은 외국인으로 보지 말고 풍족한 민권을 가진 노동자로 보아주기를 바란다.
그리고 외국인 노동자 스스로도 자세히 활동을 구성하려는 노력이 필요하다고 본다. 비록 국적이 다르지만 자신의 권리를 찾기 위해서는 같은 처지에 있는 사람들끼리 단결해야 한다. 한사람의 힘은 약하지만 그 약한 사람들이 만들어낸 단체의 힘이 강하다.
"On Walker Percy" by Sang Park '98
A Child’s Love

By Thomas Ryou ‘00

No morals...no big themes...just a look back at where you came from is enough...not only to remind yourself but to also show other people what it was like to be you.

— Anonymous

Do you know what it feels like to be in a zone? There’s nothing else like it in the world. It’s a spiritual experience. You’re out there on the asphalt with this punk-ass defender on you, fouling you and talking trash right up in your face. But when you’re in a zone, such words have no place at that moment—they do not belong. This person with baggy shorts and an NBA replica jersey has no effect on you because he is not there...Well, no, that’s not quite right. When you’re in a zone, he’s there, but not as an obstacle. Instead, he’s there to help you look good; he’s there to falter and look like a fool at exactly the right moments to make your actions on the court seem that much better. You call for the ball as if you have a legal claim on that piece of rubber (or leather, if you’re rich), and when you do get it, you think nothing but “shoot” first. In other words, you didn’t go out there to help other people put the ball through the hoop; you came here to get your own. And after you make about ten in a row from behind the arc with such confidence that you don’t have to look at the ball once it leaves your hand to know that it’s all net, you become bored and decide to blow by your man, get hacked, and still make the basket with a cockiness that seems to say, “Get the hell off of me, fool,” or something to that effect. Before you know it, you’re talking trash mercilessly and strut ting your skills from baseline to baseline, and all the other team can do is watch and give you some room to let you do your stuff.

I treasured moments such as these. I mean, let’s face it, they were an ego boost, but more importantly, these moments also gave me respect as a youth growing up in LA Koreatown. I was raised right on the corner of Serrano and 1st, next to such Korean landmarks as kaju naketa, HK Super, Hollytron, and Cosmos (a.k.a. cosimoso). Basically, I had a great view of the LA riots. I was typical of most Koreans of my generation back then. I was not an imposing figure—short and skinny (still am). I was also not one of those hard-core Korean gangsters who cut their hair in weird conformations and walked around with spray-paint cans looking for a tree stump to misspell a word on. In short, I was neither a muscleman nor a gangster, so as a student in one of the public schools of the famed LA unified school district, I was pretty much screwed. The kids there came to school every day to accomplish one thing: to pick on someone they thought was weak. And out on those courts, man, I don’t think anyone looked weaker than me.

Education wasn’t a major priority for me at the time. When you have students throwing punches at teachers, desks flying out of the window, and big-ass gangster wannabes trying to run you over in the hallways, the last thing on your mind was school work. Life was tough back then, almost depressing. I never felt safe. My only solace was my Korean friends—friends who are now either in jail or just bumming around...but they were good friends. We stuck together and watched each others' backs because we wanted to show Korean solidarity and more importantly, to have someone to back us up when we were about to get into a fight. But sometimes, your friends weren’t around to help you out, and then, well, you had a story to tell your friends after you recovered and came back to school. But I think that I had it easier than my friends in a lot of ways. They had to walk home after school from McCadden to Hobart, and each of them carried some type of knife or sharp object to protect themselves from the punks (Korean, Black, Mexican—it didn’t matter) who jumped them throughout the year. I was lucky, though; I was never (severely) beaten up. I survived. I survived because I made sure that potential bullies saw that I kicked ass on the ball court, and gang member or not, there was an unwritten rule that people carried in their minds: you have to respect someone who’s a baller.

I think that this is why I worked so hard at sports when I was younger. I knew that I had to maintain a certain level of physical excellence so that I would be welcomed to play in the games on the “A” courts with older, more athletic
players. I had to make sure that I was out there every lunch period because that was the only court that anyone, including potential people you might face in a fight, paid any attention to. It was the best feeling to be out there, to feel accepted by people who everyone considered to be cool. But it wasn’t always easy. There’d be days when older players from Fairfax, Morningside, or some other high school would drop by their old stomping grounds to play ball and try to embarrass some of the junior-high schoolers. And inevitably, on these days, I’d always be stuck guarding some quick high school guard with unbelievable hops who talked more trash than anyone I had played against before.

“They’d think of FOB’s, slanty eyed orchestra members, and a whole bunch of other bullshit like that.”

It was always worse for me, though, because there was a certain type of racism displayed by the players on the court. Most of the ball players were black, and whenever they saw some short Korean kid trying to keep up (a situation that occurred very rarely, indeed), they’d break out the “this fucking chink’s going to guard me?” jokes. They rarely thought of Koreans as a unique ethnic group, and when they did, they’d think of FOB’s, slanty-eyed orchestra members, and a whole bunch of other bullshit like that.

From the start, then, I was at a severe disadvantage, because in their minds, they believed that they were better than me; I was nothing to them. That’s why I had to work twice as hard as any player there to get the ball, take my own shots, and gain respect. But eventually, the game would always become the ultimate equalizer. Race lines, age differences...everything would soon be forgotten, and it would all boil down to three things: you, the ball, and your defender. And there was nothing sweeter in the world than blocking out all of the jeering and excessive fouling, taking your defender to hole, and forcing him to shut his big mouth. But sometimes, things didn’t go your way, and your opponent would knock you on your ass after a nice play and let you know about it for the rest of the game. It was a constant struggle out there to prove to everyone that you could play and deserved to be treated with respect. I guess it didn’t matter how smart you were, how talented you were in the arts or something like that; it never entered anyone’s mind that everyone deserved to be treated with respect. The only thing that mattered out there was whether or not you could perform, whether or not you could hold your own.

That’s the reason that I never studied in those days. It didn’t matter what grades you got; your life was determined out there on the courts, not in class. So, when I came home from school, all I did was play ball, mostly by myself. No one ever really came around to play pick-up, so I had the place all to myself. The court that I played on became a second home for me, and when I was out there alone with nothing else but a ball in my hand, the game finally became more for fun than a tool for respect. It was a special time for me. I could just play and finally feel safe; I didn’t have to put up some hard-ass baller exterior because there was no one around to take notice. Looking back, there was something almost romantic about this kid pounding away on those lonely courts, dreaming his big dreams. That was special. It sucked though when it rained because I still had to go out there, and I came back inside only when I couldn’t move my fingers anymore or after I had slipped on the wet ground and fucked up a knee or something. But that would be my only complaint. I treasured every moment out there because that was the only time I was allowed to be myself (whoever that was) and not have to fear any repercussions. I never gave a second thought to everything else in life that I was missing out on because basketball was life. It was life in that it kept me safe at school. It was life because it was all that I knew...all that I loved.
I find the great thing in this world is not so much where we stand as in what direction we are moving: To reach the port of heaven, we must sail sometimes with the wind and sometimes against it - but we must sail, and not drift, nor lie at anchor.

- Oliver Wendell Holmes.

Reflection...0

At the beginning of freshman year, an unni (older sister) from a local church reprimanded me for choosing my church based on what it could offer socially. I had just made the decision to attend the Korean college fellowship at the Boston Korean Church in Brookline. She said, surely your English is good enough that you could attend an English worship. Going to church was about spiritual growth and meeting God, she said, the language of worship should be secondary. She knew that many foreigners chose native churches because of friendship, to meet potential marriage prospects, or to escape social isolation. I never thought about my motivations, and I responded simply that I felt more at home with the language I was accustomed to, Korean.

I recently again switched churches, this time to the Cambridge First Korean Church; I had deliberately sought out a Korean place of worship. As a Christian, I am told, “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35 NIV). In purposely choosing to attend a Korean fellowship was I saying that I felt differently toward the Christian of the same ethnicity than toward the Christian of another ethnicity? The second commandment tells me to “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39 NIV). Not being able to love fellow Christians equally, how could I purport to seek to love all men?

My initial impulse is to bemoan the injustice of the accusation. In most extracurricular, volunteer, or sports activities, spending an intensive amount of time with the same people naturally leads to closer friendship. This causal relationship is not questioned. The confounding of a religious experience...
organization with social and personal interactions, however, is often interpreted as betraying closed-mindedness and fanaticism.

So, I try to answer honestly when I ask myself whether I am discriminatory when it comes to churches. My answer is yes. When I claim to be a Christian, I necessarily open myself up for others’ moral evaluations and judgements against the Christian standard. As a Christian, I have pledged to try to love everyone equally. Being an open Christian, I invite others to challenge and hold me accountable to the standards I have set out for myself, one of which is that my love be available to everyone; it is no longer a personal freedom because I have already offered it as a public good. Perhaps, though, I should allow myself the chance to explain my own bigotry...

Confession

I spent most of my youth, in English-speaking schools. At home I spoke Korean with my parents and family friends; at school I spoke English; and with my sister, I spoke our unique blend of Konglish. My vocabulary naturally diverged. My academic and rhetorical vocabulary and faculty of speech became much stronger in English, whereas expressions of emotion and everyday speech came more easily in Korean. Speaking English is something I’m more used to doing in an intellectual and academic setting. In English, the words tend to come out more organized and more eloquent, which sometimes stifles the honesty of what I am trying to express. In speaking Korean, I am forthright, polite, and more personal. I have heard similar stories from others who are bilingual. Certain situations, certain conversations, and certain people call for a specific language.

Lacking a background in linguistics, I cannot provide a theoretical explanation for this phenomenon. I firmly believe that different sets of vocabulary exist for different languages, and these are a function of the culture itself as well as the circumstances under which the language was acquired by the individual. I mentioned that I am more expressive about my feelings in Korean. One example is a word “ashuipdpa,” which concisely captures a complicated emotion I often experience. In English, I search fruitlessly among words such as “regretful,” “feel badly,” and “wistful.” All of them capture a fraction of what I seek to express, and yet, taken separately, come off as more blunt and coarse than my intended emotion. English for me is a language that I use with equals; Korean is the language I learned from my parents, and so it brings out the calm, respectful side of me.

I feel more “right” when I worship in Korean. In English, the word “God” sometimes feels overused and debased, but the word “hanahnim” (God in Korean) for me retains a sacred quality that makes me pause every time I use it. When I pray, I want to pray to the being who is “hanahnim” to be; “God,” I feel, is someone I met more recently. What I need is more than a simple issue of the ability to communicate. As my school friends tell me, I would be better served attending an Bible Study, which is certainly an intellectual
endeavor, in English. I could be more articulate and intelligent. Yet in Bible Study, as in prayer, I want to be weak, vulnerable, and utterly simple; I do not want to be collected and intellectual.

Tomorrow

Being comfortable growing in a Korean congregation was something that I was conditioned to be through my early years. I could similarly learn to grow and love an English-speaking congregation. Attending a campus Bible study freshman year, I was taken aback by how much communal prayer was done out loud, and how easily “God” and “Him” were used in a spiritual discussion. It seemed that each time someone used these references, it diminished the sanctity of God the entity. I feel this less strongly now.

Looking in the mirror, I see a Christian who seems to insist on being Korean-centric. My dependence on the Korean language as a medium of worship is a weakness. Even now, I am instantly at ease when I walk into any church, but I am even more so entering a Korean church. Ideally, I would like to become comfortable enough everywhere I go that I can worship and pray just as sincerely in one sanctuary as in another.

During the Thanksgiving season in 1997, a group of Harvard students spent a few hours at Boston’s Kingston House, which services the homeless and acts primarily as a soup kitchen. Christian students and adults from all over Boston, as well as high school students from New Hampshire, all gathered on a Saturday morning to make Thanksgiving baskets for poor families. I joined the table that was peeling, cleaning, and chopping up squashes.

Six of us stood around a small round table. At first, each of us, knife or peeler in hand, began silently peeling, cleaning, and chopping. Fifteen minutes later, three men were peeling, another lady and I were cleaning, and the sixth man was chopping. All of us individually wanted the same thing; to do a good job by finishing as many squashes as possible. In the course of realizing that goal; we had unanimously agreed, without exchanging words or making eye contact, to divide tasks. By this point our table was maintaining a steady, quick rhythm of output. Within the comfort of our teamwork, we turned to each other and began to learn about each other. All five of them were Caucasian American. At the end of the day, we smiled warmly at each other, prayed as a group, and said goodbye.

I believe that the mode and place of worship will change as my spiritual walk evolves; I do not believe that I can change my spiritual walk by first changing how I worship on the outside. In the two years I have left at college, I will be met with unanticipated opportunities for change and growth. I may not recognize myself when I graduate in the way I worship, praise, and pray. I am at peace with the more passive and self-centered Christian that I find myself to be now. I am at peace not because I am complacent, because I know I will be challenged and made to grow. I have my eyes set not on where I am now, but on where I am headed.
Language is malleable. It is described as the means into a culture, and it clearly provides the means to move within one.

Thus, when I decided to take an introductory Korean senior year, I had high hopes. Although I only expected to be able to say a few rudimentary sentences after the term, I still harbor aspirations to better understand Korean culture. In fact, even as I learn to pronounce classroom nouns or new verbs, I stay alert to the signs that I am growing in tongue, growing in vocabulary, and in some way, seeing more of Korea.

While I still cannot order in a restaurant with true comfort at this point, I have noticed certain things that have provided glimpses into the cultural language. I must admit that the reason I even notice these things is that my learning is at the character-level. I notice simple fundamentals in hopes of learning the basics. As I was studying one day, I noted something about the verbs. Indicators of our actions, Korean verbs can be conjugated into three basic echelons: the plain, formal, and honorific forms. Japanese has analogous levels, perhaps even more numerous, and French has two. Just as one can choose to tuoyer or vouvoyer, one chooses one of these levels depending on the age and status of the person one is addressing. Each form even has a polite and formal ending that when added to the verbs of this agglutinative tongue, allows one to indicate the closeness and intimacy of the relationship.

In attempting to explain the different occasions for using these variegated forms, the text noted that the “yo” form, the polite informal ending, was more commonly used by women, while “sum-ni-da” the more formal ending, was more commonly used by men. When I read this, I stopped to think. The “yo” form is common to familial relationships and to intimacy expressed among friends. Given that most Korean women remain at home while most Korean men go out to the workplace, I concluded, “understandable.”

With my eyes now opened to gender specificity, I noticed that Koreans have sex-specific descriptions of getting one’s hair trimmed or styled. I realized that American terms are parallel. In English, more women than men get their hair “styled” or “done” in “salons” while more men get their hair cut in a “barber shop.” Most Americans, however, generically describe the process as “getting a hair cut.” Korean has analogs to the “salon” (mi-jang-won) versus the “barber shop” (yi-bal-soo), and also has two different verbs that are used to describe the cutting itself. Gha-ka describes the cutting of male hair and jal-la the cutting of female hair. One would “gha-ka” the grass on a lawn but “jal-la” a piece of yarn, thus creating connotations corresponding to a buzz cut versus shoulder-length layers. These differences are understandable and justifiable.

It also seemed understandable that many of the students made mistakes. Not only when trying to describe one’s hair cut, but more seriously when conjugating verbs in sentences describing our teachers’ actions. While English has respectful forms of address, verb forms do not need to vary if you are addressing a superior. In Korean, however, the status and relationship are clearly stated—how you enunciate each additional syllable. As we learned to say that our grandmothers sleep “joo-mo-shi-da” (honorific form) and never “ja-da” (to sleep in plain form), I saw the respect Korean culture holds towards senior family members and educators.

In the back of my mind, I wished that U.S. citizens would hold their teachers in greater regard, or at least, effectively “create” such a regard in their salaries. Similarly, I wondered if U.S. youth might benefit from a larger
dose of parental or senior authority. America might benefit from some new verb permutations or some deferential additions to the term "teacher."

One cannot look from the perspective of one language, however, without taking note of the flip sides of the issue. Much of the profound respect Koreans hold towards education is linked to the solidly established Korean social stratigraphy. Professional tracks are established early on for many young people through college entrance exams, possibly contributing to how rigid the hierarchy can be. Koreans heavily respect and weight the educational process because of the importance of education so early on. This emphasis on education has innumerable other cultural causes, but it is undeniable that the high valuation of education is closely intermingled with the cut and dry professional tracks. The respect paid to education has a cost in the delineation of societal roles, but comparing Korean literacy to U.S. literacy makes the benefits clear.

The social hierarchy in Korea is also clear, so much so that in Korean corporations, a multitude of suffixes to a person’s last name are available to indicate their position. I wondered if the language reflected a solidity of social organization, a certain concreteness firm enough to support a language. Just as English lacks these echelons in verbs, the social mobility in American society far exceeds that found in South Korea. While one cannot generalize to other English-speaking nations around the globe, at the root of language lies the expression of social interaction.

I’ve noticed walking along American city streets that signs including the epithet “unisex salon” are increasingly common. One day, I passed by a business named “The Gentlemen’s Salon” in the North End of Boston. Evidently, things can change. In this case, I would not feel too much regret if they didn’t. From the female perspective, I find that going to get one’s hair “done” far surpasses going to get it “cut,” not only in terms of service, but in terms of cost. I once went to a barber shop to get the bottom part of my hair cut, feeling slightly awkward waiting for my turn reading Sports Illustrated, but I hardly went in search of equality; I merely hoped to save some money. There are, and will continue to be, differences between some men’s and women’s cuts.

I’ve also noticed, however, when watching the Korean news via cable, that the male announcer simply talks more than his female “companion.” Because my comprehension is truncated, instead of noticing what they are saying, I notice that the male broadcaster takes responsibility of the closing remarks and farewell of each session. Under the discussion of the formal versus polite forms in my sourcebook, the text noted that the formal verb forms characterize radio and television broadcast. More men use the formal form; more women use the polite (less formal) form. Men broadcast more than women.

What is at the root of women using the closer “yo” verb form with greater frequency than men? I cannot swallow ideas that the “feminine sense” and ability to notice detail, qualities supposedly supportive of relationships and intimacy, make women more apt to use the form. Such reasoning evokes other “reasoning” that I know to be wrong. Language is indicative of culture, but the more common usage of the “yo” polite form by women hardly mandates that they will continue to remain in the home.

In parallel, the uniformity in English verb tenses hardly precludes the U.S. from evolving towards a more substantial respect for seniors or educators. It might be quite healthy for our youth if such were to happen. It would be stimulating to see language evolve in spheres where the results are more substantial than a “unisex” salon sign. Each political platform has a plank of educational jargon that can be expanded. It is always refreshing when the jargon encapsulates a deeper plan for change. It doesn’t matter as much whether the female Korean broadcaster continues to use the “yo” form, but she should speak more on the news regardless of the conjugation she uses.

As the means within a culture, language begins with the basics. Language is also malleable, though, and so are we.
Book Review

Winter 1998

Young In ‘98

NATIVE SPEAKER

A Novel by Chang-Rae Lee

Asian-American, especially Korean-American, voices have only recently entered into the debates raging in literature and the arts. Korean Americans, curiously absent in the rosters of artists, writers, sports figures, actors and politicians, have had little chance to discuss quality of life issues and the American experience for Korean immigrants. Chang-rae Lee’s Native Speaker is one of a small but rapidly-expanding group of novels by Korean-American authors, ranking among names such as Ronyoung Kim’s Clay Wall and Helie Lee’s Still Life With Rice. Native Speaker not only serves as an example for tentative, aspiring Korean-American authors, but it also vocalizes and captures the experiences of many Korean immigrants in the United States.

Seen through the perspective of Henry (Harry) Park, Native Speaker is the story of a second-generation Korean American. The novel begins with the adult Henry, musing over his career and failed marriage. His wife Leila, a White woman he calls his “American wife,” has left him, asking for a divorce. Her reasons, listed in a poem, sum up Henry: “...illegal alien/emotional alien ... Yellow Peril: neo-American/great in bed ... anti-romantic ... traitor/spy.” She has left him because he has lied to her about his job. From the very beginning of their relationship, he has carefully hidden some part of himself from her, a habit or practice that Lee seems to suggest stems from Henry’s Korean background and father’s influence. Leila and Henry met at a party: Leila guessed Henry’s ethnicity from his last name. She said, “A friend in middle school taught me about Korean names, how Park and Kim were also Korean, the other names like Chung and Cho and Lee maybe Korean, maybe Chinese. Never Japanese.” Impressed by her navigation around language and names, Henry likewise places her by her last name—a Boswell from Massachusetts. Immediately attracted to each other, they started a relationship that eventually led to a child and a marriage. After spending years together, through the death of Henry’s father and their son, they separated because Leila could no longer tolerate Henry’s secrecy and detachment. His refusal to talk about their son and his death infuriated her, but the deciding factor was his unwillingness to share his job. Henry told Leila he worked in business. He actually works for a small firm in New York, one that researches individuals, usually recent immigrants, for multinational corporations. “We provided them with information about people working against their [the corporations’] vested interests,” Henry describes his job. In other words, he helps large companies destroy the credibility and lives of immigrants who threaten profits.

Henry’s latest assignment is a popular Korean-American city councilman, John Kwang. He volunteers at Kwang’s headquarters to gather information on the prosperous businessman and politician. As the story unfolds, Henry comes to respect and genuinely like the councilman, impressed by Kwang’s seemingly seamless entrance into American society and politics. Increasingly, though, Henry discovers that John Kwang is deeply mired in racial and ethnic politics and maneuvering, until the situation finally explodes after the murder of one of Kwang’s supporters.

John Kwang provides a contrast with Henry’s father, the other major Korean influence in Henry’s life. Henry’s father was a stern man who attained a master’s degree in engineering in Korea but worked as a grocer in the United States. Henry’s wealthy father embodies the model minority success story: he gave him a large home in an affluent suburb of New York City and sent his son to a good college. Henry understands, though, that his father, like Kwang, hungered for an impossible dream. No amount of money or education in the United States would have won a place in mainstream America. In the end, the Korean immigrant works long hours only to be beaten by thugs and the Korean politician is exposed and alienated. In the end, Henry realizes the “ugly immigrant’s truth”: “I have exploited my own, and those others who can be exploited.”

Although Lee recycles old stereotypes of a Korean father’s actions and attitudes and a Korean son’s mixed resentment and love, he paints a powerful portrait of one aspect of the Korean experience. John Kwang, Henry’s father, and Henry’s son are the trite victims of a color-conscious society, but the novel flows so smoothly and quickly that the cliche fails to detract from the plot. More importantly, Native Speaker confronts many of the issues relevant to interracial relationships. How does the child of an interracial marriage find a niche? How do the parents view their children’s spouses? Henry sees his son’s death as a sign that White America is not yet ready for interracial relationships—the neighborhood kids called his son “words like mutt, mongrel, half-breed, banana, twinkle,” and it was their football game that killed his son. Henry thinks his father saw their “union logically, practically, ... perhaps he thought he saw through my intentions, the assumption being that Leila and her family would help me make my way in the land.” For an immigrant who wanted to achieve the American Dream, only marriage with a White American gained entry into a larger society for his family. Can full equality overcome the power imbalances in interracial relationships? Although Lee cannot answer the questions he raises, his Native Son is a Korean voice that chimes into the discussion, presenting a rounder, fuller picture of Korean life in the United States.

Yisei magazine hosted a reception and discussion with Helie Lee in 1996.