KOREAN STEREOTYPES?

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Stereotypes are bad, right? Of course, everyone knows that. That’s why we always have to work towards disproving stereotypes and avoid being typecast. We have to do everything within our power to do things that are “un-Korean” and assert our complete assimilation into mainstream American culture. When you think about it, this shouldn’t be too hard to do. Just avoid other Koreans, stop using your mother tongue in case some ungodly accent invade your English, refuse to study anything remotely related to East Asian history, never ever get involved in extracurriculars that are usually flooded with Koreans, and look down on your parents for their foreign and backward lifestyles and social views. Oh, and God forbid that you should ever be caught wearing black with a cigarette in your hand outside of some trendy and exclusive Korean night club. All that is needed is a complete denial of anything remotely related to Korean or Korean-American culture...

Obviously, this is not the answer.

* *

Structuring your life around a philosophy geared towards disproving a stereotype is foolish because it hinders the discovery of the wonder and joy that can be derived in the exploration of one’s roots, one’s heritage, one’s culture. On the other hand, there is no denying the fact that stereotypes, themselves, are extremely deleterious and damaging. You only have to look to the 1991 LA Riots to see how misconceptions and assumptions made of Koreans were partially responsible for the mass destruction, injuries and deaths that the Riots produced just eight years ago. Then what is the answer? What can be done to fight stereotypes without inadvertently rejecting everything one considers to be Korean?

* *

The answer lies in the ability to regard others and one’s self as individuals and to discount any ignorant notions and categorizations surrounding one’s gender, age, or ethnicity. Ignoring this solution will have dire consequences for our future, for to deny someone’s (or your own) individuality is, in effect, the same thing as denying that person his humanity, his self-worth, his importance as a unique person. By the same token, no one can say that “This is Korean” or that “This is what it means to be Korean” because each person formulates and develops his own perception of what his culture represents and how it is defined. No definition or notion of what it means to be Korean can be termed better than another; they are all equally valid and important. So I ask you to read the articles and stories in this issue with the open-minded intention to understand what others think of their culture and their personal lives and to respect their views; at the same time, I ask you to think for yourselves and form your own educated ideas, not just about ethnicity, but more about where you believe you stand in this world as an individual.
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is list sounded like a watered down version of an Asian porn website. I was interviewing a Harvard student for an article on the “Asian fetish.” He had gained a reputation on campus for dating Asian women, particularly Asians who spoke little English. “They’re kind of mysterious and there’s an element of unattainability,” he explained. I asked him what physical traits he liked in these women. “Long straight hair … they usually have good bodies — skinny, kind of like the model type — smooth skin … are you flattered?” I choked out a sharp laugh, then wrapped up the interview without responding. A few days later, I responded by printing an accurate but derisive account of our interview. I also cut my hair, which flowed past my shoulders, to chin length. Although I counted my action as a step towards combatting stereotypes, in another sense I cut my ties to both my heritage and my sexuality.

I have not always tried to deny my Korean roots. I grew up in a Long Island suburb in which about one-third of the population was Asian, mostly Chinese and Korean. As the last daughter in my family, I would strive to emulate my beautiful and intelligent older sisters. Both dressed in the latest fashions (in black of course), played musical instruments (piano, violin and cello), and followed paths leading to lucrative and stable careers in scientific fields (medicine and pharmacy). They only socialized with other Koreans, listened to New Wave, and spent their weekends going to karaoke bars and the best Asian clubs in New York City. Through most of middle and high school, I followed their lead, but never felt quite comfortable in the mold.

At the time, however, it was easier in my extremely cliquey school to stick to the group of friends I already had than to try to join new cliques. As much as I disliked the social ladders and expectations of the Asian crowd, at least I understood the system of behaviors and relationships. I could not see myself in any of the other cliques in high school. In high school, I needed the secure network of friends who would understand my cultural background and the pressures I was under.

However, my Chinese American best friend Jackie had a different high school experience, and in some ways I envied her. She moved to a neighboring school district before freshman year of high school, where the community was predominantly white. She was friends with a mixed group of whites and Asians, and even dated a white boy. I began to notice that I could not even interact with her friends anymore. My friendships with Asians had become a crutch, so that when I met non-Asians I became very shy and quiet. In theory I believed in diversity and a color-blind society, but in practice I had a very homogeneous group of friends. Before coming to Harvard, however, I made a promise to myself. I decided to get out of my comfort zone, and learn to interact with people of other ethnicities. In the “real world” I would have to interact with different races, and college seemed like a good place to begin.

At first, this decision did not come at a high price. I did not purposely avoid Asians, I simply refrained from seeking them out actively. When I met new people, I would treat both Asians and non-Asians in the same way. Sometimes it would feel unnatural - when I met Asians, I naturally felt more comfortable and wanted to act friendlier to them. There were so many more things I could talk about with Asians, from parental pressures
to clubbing on weekends to church. There was a greater chance that we'd share beliefs about relationships, careers, or even music because our similar background and knowledge of a distinctive Asian American culture. I felt instinctively, however, that I could find just as many similar points of interests with non-Asians if I only tried harder. I noticed that I would seek out Asians in the freshman dining hall or ice cream mixers, so I consciously stopped myself from treating Asians differently from non-Asians. I also did not involve myself with the various Asian cultural clubs on campus, though I remained on their email lists. I did not disapprove of these groups, but I felt my time would be better spent on other activities.

By the end of the year, I had found my core group of friends, a mixed bag of races though most were from Pennypacker, my freshman dorm. Almost all the Asians I knew came from my science classes or the orchestras in which I played. When I left both the sciences and my orchestras at the end of freshman year, I lost even those connections. I became an English major and became more involved with the Undergraduate Council and a school magazine. My English classes did not have as many Asians as my science classes did, and the Undergraduate Council and the school magazine had much fewer Asians than the Mozart Society Orchestra.

Breaking the "Asian" mold had many advantages. At least two of my friends (incidentally, both Asian males) have described me as having "strong opinions," but I once expressed these opinions only to my close friends. None of my Asian friends, at least the female ones, were outspoken. I also felt very shy around strangers, partly because my parents had taught me all my life to stay quiet and obedient. In the company of more outgoing non-Asians, I found my voice. Unlike the majority of Asians, many of my non-Asians friends involved themselves in campus politics. Asian Americans, though among the wealthiest and most-educated ethnic groups in the US, have been notoriously invisible in politics, as seen by their comparably low voter turnout. My non-Asians friends, by their own involvement in politics, encouraged me to pursue my own interests.

I also began to rethink my old way of interacting with adults. As a child, I had never conversed with adults in the casual, easy manner of non-Asian Americans. I would never joke around with my teacher after class or ask personal questions. Like my other Asian friends, I simply did my work and expected to be rewarded on merit. Though I still have some trouble chatting easily with adults, I've shed much of my old inhibition. I would watch my new friends to see how they interacted with adults. They treated adults in almost the same way they treated their peers. Because I've learned to accept this type of interaction with adults, I've formed closer relationships with my teaching fellows, senior tutors, and professors.

Interacting with non-Asians also opened my eyes to other perspectives. A majority of Asians concentrate in the sciences. There are a number of reasons for this statistically proven phenomenon, including the fact that many first- or second-generation Asian Americans come from upper-middle class households that have only recently achieved this socioeconomic status. They're under a great deal of pressure to maintain this status through stable, lucrative professional tracks such as medicine and engineering. Enrollment in humanities in general have decreased for similar economic reasons, but particularly for Asian-Americans who already tend to excel in the sciences, as seen by an above-average mean SAT math score that is not matched by an equally mean high verbal score. Because of this phenomenon, I would often find that Asians, particularly the Asians who naturally grouped together, shared interests in the sciences.

Because I no longer selected friends for their ethnicity, I found myself with many more friends, both Asian and non-Asian, who concentrated in the humanities. I found it
easier to switch majors from biochemistry to English because most of my friends also
concentrated in the humanities. Careers other than medicine seemed viable. Furthe-
more, I found friends that I connected with in different ways than I had with my friends
from home. We had similar interests and passions, not just similar cultures. I chose
friends based on how easily we could discuss politics or literature, not because they could
make jokes with me about Korean food.

Finally and most importantly, in my new social sphere, I could break free from the
often stifling expectations for Asian women. Many of the stereotypes about the submis-
siveness and sweet personalities of Asian women have their roots in the expectations
that come from the Korean community itself. In the heritage section of my Korean lan-
guage class, the boys dominate the class while the girls stay silent. Back home, the
Korean American boys rewarded the soft-spoken and non-threatening girls by dating
them, while other American boys seemed more accepting of females with strong opinions
and feminist tendencies.

Furthermore, I’ve found that exclusively Asian cliques tend to perpetuate an unrealistic
ly thin body ideal for women. The Asian physique, true, naturally tends towards
the small and delicate, but my Asian friends from home would obsess over the smallest
weight gain. I even know girls who started smoking to suppress their appetites. As my
older sister would complain to me, “Asian guys love thin girls, but they don’t understand
what we go through to stay thin! All of my friends at some time have had an eating
disorder of some sort.” A 1986 study published in the International Journal of Social
Psychiatry noted that Chinese American adolescents feel more awkward than their Cau-
casian counterparts about their bodies and the physical changes they undergo during
adolescence1. I do not find their results surprising, and would not be surprised to find
the same results in Korean Americans. Many non-Asian women also have body issues,
but once I stopped limiting my social sphere to Asians, I found more women who cared
more about cultivating their minds than their bodies.

Still, over the past two years, I’ve begun to regret my hasty rejection of the Korean
community at Harvard. Early this year, while listening to a friend explain how the finals
clubs provide him with a social environment of people with similar interests and back-
grounds, I felt stirrings of nostalgia. This year, I’ve befriended some older Asian Ameri-
can women, who have provided guidance and sympathy I wish I had freshman year. For
example, one Chinese American senior who lived in my house gave me advice on finding
fellowships to study abroad. It meant so much to find another Asian American who
concentrated and excelled in English. Another Korean American female told me about
her difficulties explaining to her parents that she wanted to get a Ph.D in anthropology
on top of a medical degree. Hearing about her experiences has helped me to pursue my
own dreams. Furthermore, I’ve realized that I’m not alone in my interests in the humani-
ties and strong opinions. By trying to stay blind to color, I went overboard and missed
meeting people who do share both interests and a cultural background.

During my visits home, I realize other things I’ve been missing from my non-Asian
friends. I miss friends who don’t try to set me up with any Asian male they meet, and
who understand why my parents want me to date and marry another Korean. I miss
friends who know the difference between Campbell’s ramen and real ramen and don’t
complain about the smell when I eat kimchi. I miss Korean adults who comment so
honestly on how I’ve gained weight, then try to feed me more food. When an Asian Amer-
ican acts friendly towards me, I don’t have to wonder if he’s just trying to get his “thirty
thousand dollars’ worth of diversity” and make a token Asian friend. Asian males might
call me pretty or ugly, but never the word I’ve learned to hate, “beautiful,” which always
comes with the insinuation that I'm some strange, exotic, foreign creature. Other Asian Americans don't ask me, "Where are you from," then stare blankly when I respond, "Long Island." They don't ask me polite, probing questions about my culture, because they have the same culture.

I find myself enjoying my Korean language class more and more everyday. There's something comforting in a teacher that judges you on merit, that scolds you for yawning, and demands the respect which her age and authority deserves. In my English literature classes, the edge goes to the student who's learned the art of schmoozing and deconstructing. The other day, exiting from the Korean offices onto Bryant Street, I found myself feeling more at peace than I'd felt in all my days at Harvard. In small ways, my teacher, with her soft but honest personality, reminded me of the adults from home. I never noticed the artwork at home, but the beautiful simplicity of the Asian decor on 5 Bryant Street calmed me.

I can't escape my Korean heritage, nor should I want to. Separating myself from my Korean identity only perpetuates the idea that I'm the exception that proves the stereotypical rule. In a way, by avoiding Asians altogether, I acted just as prejudiced as those who see Asians as all alike. I assumed that no one who joined an Asian clique could possibly share my interests or have an outgoing personality. I also had not taken into account the fact that Harvard unlike high school has an environment that encourages individualism and feminism. Many of the insecurities I felt as an Asian American woman came from the insecurities I felt as a teenage woman, period. Furthermore, just as there are groups of non-Asians with dominating men and anorexic women, there are groups of Asians with enlightened men and confident women.

Moreover, when I avoid other Asian Americans, I give up an opportunity to change the status of women in the Korean community. I lose my voice in the community to point out weaknesses we must face as a community, from our invisibility in politics to unhealthy male-female power relations. Finally, I deny myself a unique community of peers with whom I share values and a cultural history, the “safe space” that everyone needs to survive Harvard's often harsh environment.

Recently, I've made efforts to change my situation. My friend Thomas always bugs me to attend Korean Association events—and I always flake out at the last minute. Last weekend, I finally went to the Korean Cultural Night. For moral support, I dragged along my roommate Miriam, who's of Swiss descent. I found that I knew more people at the event than I'd expected, people I knew from classes and my house. Munching on chapaeah and kimchi, I listened to various Korean students sing Korean songs I recognized from home, and I reveled in the company of people who looked like me. My roommate too appreciated the cultural experience.

"This food is sooo good, you should bring me to more of these Korean events," Miriam sighed, then noticed my introspective mood. "What're you thinking?"

I took a sip of coke and responded thoughtfully, "Maybe I should grow out my hair."

Can any American city such as Philadelphia or Los Angeles characterize the face of the United States? Perhaps a tourist in the Big Apple when asked offhand what America is like would immediately answer by describing his or her brief experiences in the city: “America is... so encompassing, hectic, bustling with automobiles and people who, by the way, are generally not very friendly. I love the shopping, however, and the diversity of cultures...”

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But this cultural and social description is particular only to some municipalities in the United States; and concerning New York, it is likely to be accurate only when describing various parts of the city. What about the quiet suburbs along the outskirts of New York (some of which, I am sure, may not be so quaint)? What about the farms scattered throughout the Empire State and the rest of the country, for that matter? Are these not pictures of America as well?

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The culture of the Republic of Korea is sometimes described or generalized by inaccurate “glimpses.” These glimpses are communicated to others by businessmen, U.S. military personnel and their families stationed in Korea, and Koreans themselves, both natives and second-generation Korean-Americans. More specifically, many social and cultural opinions and impressions of Korea are made upon cursory observations and experiences in the fast-paced, bustling city of Seoul, the capital of Korea. Let us be
informed firstly that less than one-third of the population of Korea exists in the capital city, and it is not unreasonable to assume that over two-thirds of the Koreans that reside in the United States are from Seoul. Thus, from my experiences, I have found that impressions of Korea are not, in fact, complete representations of Korea at all—they are more an image of the visible aspects of Seoul.

The "visible aspects of Seoul" are what is often delineated when young people in Western society ruminate upon Korea and its culture. The idea that culturally "Korea has changed" (implicitly, for the worse) lingers in the minds of those who wonder about the future of Korea. Images of young women in uncomfortable heels dressed fashionably who wear too much make-up plague our minds, not to mention the hoards of naïve adolescents found in nightclubs and bars, busily becoming intoxicated until rendered unconscious. Some may consider Korean music—to those who are familiar with it—very "happy" and "bouncy" and perhaps even primitive. Another possibly incorrect generalization is that most Koreans play pool in smoke-filled environments.

These images are neither incorrect nor foreign to those who have visited Seoul. Yet they must be taken in the right perspective, with a grain of salt, especially when conveyed to others who have not visited the city. It appears that Korean music has come to refer to music that appears on Korean television and "top 40" lists in Korea—it is the music that one will hear at Korean grocery stores, video stores, parties, and the like. Yet I am convinced that a third at most of the Korean population listens avidly to what we call "Korean music." And it is noteworthy that not all—nor even the majority of—women in Korea pay particular attention to their physical appearances. If you have adolescent relatives in Korea: do they all enjoy clubbing, drinking to excess and playing pool?

It is from my experiences that most people in Korea (and not merely those residing in Seoul) do not listen avidly to what one might call "Korean top 40 music." However, I would hold this statement to be true concerning any one type of music. But these statements are also true concerning music in the United States. No singular type of music is avidly heard by a majority of the American population, and thus there is great ambiguity when one talks of "American music." What is American music? I suggest that one should wonder the same thing concerning Korean music. What is it? It is my hopes that most will ask this question in the future understanding that not everyone, not even the majority of Koreans, listens to Korean top 40 music. Korean music entails folks songs, hymns, children's songs, Pansori (a type of traditional Korean narrative song), and many others.

Concerning the attention that women in Korea seem to give to their physical appearance and the stereotypes of intoxicated males and smoke-filled pool halls, I suggest alternative images that should be more heavily considered in order that the entire picture be accounted for. Imagine the woman with straight hair down to the shoulders and a simple brown hair band; no ear rings, no plucked eyebrows; no make-up; a half-smile. She wears an undorned lavender shirt and blue jeans (no belt) that are tapered at the bottom where one sees low, white, walking shoes. The jeans are not so long so that they drag on the ground. Now imagine a boy with short hair and black-rimmed glasses. He has a small frame and seems to be wearing a school uniform and backpack every you time you see him. He likes Korean professional baseball immensely, and he hangs out with his guy friends at the computer store looking for newly released games. He shoots pool once in a while but he is not that skilled; he would rather stay home with his family watching television. These images cannot be ignored when contemplating images of the Korean people.

It is unfortunate that because a tiny fraction of the population is seen to be materialistic that the entire country must be characterized and even blamed for it. I acknowledge that some young people in Korea today (in Seoul especially) fulfill these stereotypes, yet the enormous leap made from a few observations (which are often exaggerated rumors) to the determination of the fate of an entire nation in terms of image can be quite misleading and erroneous. Why this is deleterious is fairly obvious—for every one person who misconstrues images of Korea, ten others shall hear of it and pass on these images to spread misleading stereotypes exponentially. The "Korean stereotype" today seems to be prevalent, and I am struck with how many students (even Korean-Americans) believe it to be true in its completeness.

One may point out the fact that this phenomenon is not unique to Korea in order to downplay the seriousness of the issue. For example, the mystique surrounding Harvard is based on very little, especially for those who have no affiliation with the school. People often characterize the entire school based on their one-time experience in a conversation with another about Harvard. On a smaller scale, having eaten one bad meal at Annenberg may prompt one to claim that the food there is inedible. Conversely, the celebrated annual clam bake may lead one to assert that Harvard Dining Services is
the best in the country. The point: superlatives and generalizations are made profusely in conversations of every sort (this being one in itself, too), but there is a noteworthy difference in nature and in degree when making generalizations about Korea and distinguishing what is Korean. Firstly and most importantly, an entire people and their culture are at hand. One would not want to offend an ethnicity and be deemed politically incorrect due to generalizations. And secondly, inaccurate information and images concerning a country has farther-reaching consequences than misleading statements concerning a private institution. For example, one may hypothetically have just two conversations about Korea every year; thus, one incorrect assessment could not only last for several months, but it may also be passed along to others with little opportunity for correction and reinterpretation. For these reasons the miscommunication occurring in various discussions about Korea today and what is Korean is something that should be treated with a certain amount of gravity.

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Before coming to Cambridge, I had been residing in Seoul since 1988. I can vouch for the fact that Seoul has indeed changed dramatically in the past ten years, but we are not at a stage yet where we can confidently and accurately say that Korea has changed culturally. The economic leaps of the past 20 years (despite the recent catastrophe in the economy) do indeed show economic progression in Korea, but the social and cultural effects of this should not be exaggerated or overplayed. People have more spending power, yes; Korean exports and imports have expanded tremendously, yes; markets are opening up worldwide and businesses are expanding, yes; but this directly affects only a portion of Korea. Middle and high school students in uniform still go to school six days (45+ hours) a week and most employed adult males work 12 hours per day. In addition to the myriad stereotypes that many people have, these statements also reflect the culture of Korea, and should not be ignored in the conveying of images of Korea. They refer to almost the whole population of Korea, not just some visible miniscule minority in Seoul. In addition, what is observed in Seoul is still only a marginal representation of Seoumites and the culture of Seoul.

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Not everyone possesses solely the skewed images of Korea that I have described here, nor do all maintain stereotypes to the extent that I have portrayed them—but the tendency to have only such stereotypes in mind is remarkably common, especially among second-generation Korean Americans who may believe that these perverted conceptions of Korea are accurate, real, and/or the only images of Korea relevant for conversation. I do not, however, propose that we rush to break all stereotypes of Koreans by believing in the reverse of these images; instead, we may strive to know more about the whole of Korea by not only curbing hasty generalizations, but by listening to others speak of Korea with a discerning ear. Consider what is being said and about whom—are we really talking about Koreans, the people of the Republic of Korea, or are the people at hand simply a few friends who have Korean backgrounds? Seoul is the capital of Korea and the seventh largest city in the world; but it does not define Korea, nor is it the richest in Korean history among the cities in Korea. The city exemplifies unprecedented economic growth but not the 5000-year history and culture that underpin it. As a result, it would be an injustice to use Seoul as a standard for Korea—an injustice to whom, you ask? Why, to the “other” inhabitants of the country—the silent majority who, as a whole, more completely represent the Land of the Morning Calm.
It was that baby face that attracted me to Shelly. Some Korean girls just have that cute look to them, the youthful look that makes them appear to be very innocent. What I loved about her was that little-kid smile, the way her soft-looking lips curled around, showing her small white teeth. I loved the visible softness of her skin because it made her look almost like a doll. She was a T-shirt and jeans type of girl, down-to-earth, a little tomboy. But she wasn’t all that much of a little kid -- she just made herself out to seem that way. She knew what she was doing when she dimpled those cheeks and looked, coyly, at your feet. She always called me Opa, which means big brother in Korean, and that killed me. She tried to lead me on like she did with all of those suckers in the Asian night clubs who really believed that she was a sweetheart. Those kind of girls are bad--they act like they are pure and sweet but they are aware that they are pulling you in the whole time. You wonder if that smile is real, but it never is.

My line to Jessica when she wanted a commitment was, I don’t want to settle down. Let’s just have fun. I didn’t tell her that I didn’t feel she could hold a conversation about anything other than partying, clothes, or how all of her friends were bitches. At any rate, if she didn’t like our relationship she could leave because I’d gotten what I wanted. Later I missed the hand jobs that she used to give me with those perfectly manicured, soft hands. They were so well-manicured, so perfect, that they almost looked fake.

Cecilia spent more time shopping on Newbury Street than she did at Wellesley. Her favorite three words were, I’ll take it. She was strictly Armani and Donna Karan. She was loaded enough that she didn’t have to have all of her designer labels plastered on the front of her shirts; you knew she was wearing expensive stuff because you’d seen it while flipping through the Sales Fifth Avenue catalogue. It’s nice to look at a girl who knows how to dress though -- all of the guys agree on that. I think she hated using cash because it was below her and it was so much easier to whip out the Visa platinum. It’s tough when a chick has more money than you do; I couldn’t handle having a high-maintenance, rich-bitch. Anyways, when she got done talking about her haircut of the week, she didn’t have anything else really to say.

“Strobe light honey” is the term the guys use to talk about girls that look fine under the night club lights. You know, when you are at a club on the weekend, it’s smoky as hell because we’ve all been lighting up all night, and it’s just hard to tell what those girls really look like with all that smoke and dim lighting. Most of the time we are drunk off of our asses on whiskey or Heineken or both and can’t really see clearly anyways. When two o’clock rolls around and the lights come on, some of those strobe light honeys just look nasty and really fucking desperate as they stare at you with cold eyes. It’s also hard to tell in a dark night club because Korean girls cack on so much make-up when they go out. They and Michael Jackson, a class by themselves. Half the time they look like mannequins, except that mannequins have smooth skin and are beautiful, and who knows what some of these hoochies look like underneath all of that powder and eyeliner. Jane was a strobe light honey. Or was it Janette? Jane, Janette one of those. Jane, Janette, Jen. One of those. Sometimes my head is spinning so much that I never even think to ask for her name.

Carrie, she was a real hottie, one of the finest Korean girls in Boston. She turned guys heads like she was a Ferrari. Legs were long and they felt silky on my groping fingers when we came back from the dance club and were messing around on my bed, totally wasted. She was an A+, a perfect 10 -- not in the academic department. Long legs, long hair. She was a nice girl to take out because it felt so good to have her on my
arm, attracting all of those stares from the other guys. Top of the world.

I met her in a club and introduced myself. Walked up to her, just like that.
"Can I buy you a drink?" A bashful smile from her. It was as fake as her ID. Then a nod. "Where do you go to school?"

"Tufts. How about you?" How about you... three words I loved to hear. I always set up the conversation so that I will get asked that question. and then I can drop the "H" bomb. When I tell them I go to Harvard they can't help but be impressed.

Americans think Harvard is really great, but in Korea, Harvard students are right up there with God. Stanford, Princeton, even Yale -- peanuts in comparison. Every Korean child dreams of going to Harvard because their parents tell them that they have to go there from when they are in fucking kindergarten. So when you tell a Korean girl that you go to Harvard, you know you have them all wrapped up. To date a good-looking Harvard guy is a fine catch.

"You're cute and smart too?" A giggle and a smile as the bartender hands over the kamikaze shots. This time the smile seems one of more genuine interest, but I can't tell. All of those clubbing bitches are so fake it drives me crazy. I figure I deserve all of the girls I can get from the Harvard name. I made the sacrifice in high school, not going out or getting any action because I was always studying for SAT's or AP tests. My parents always said it would pay off later after they yelled at me because I was so lazy. I guess they were right because I'm making up for all of those dateless years. I didn't even kiss anyone until my senior year.

But with Carrie, at night in bed after we were done, I would get depressed because she would want to make out after I'd climaxed. This was the thing . I didn't want to see her or be with her anymore. I tried to convince myself that I liked her but there's only so much pre-tending you can do in one night. When it was late and she was asleep, I felt constricted, like I wanted the bed to myself, and who was this bitch that I was sharing it with?

Michelle was a drinker. Real ladies don't enjoy the act of drinking; Michelle did. I think she smokes too, as if I'd ever want to taste a smoky mouth. She was one of those types who was always at a club, every time you went, a real hardcore. No wonder she didn't have a boyfriend. No one wants a hardcore. You want a girl who is pristine, optimistic, and well-behaved. What you don't want is a rowdy bitch like Michelle who will drink you under the table. She's one of those girls you see at a table in a bar, pounding shot after shot with other mean-looking girls as if they were all guys or something. She's one of those drunk, vicious girls that you see at a club, clawing at a guy who has dumped her, or even breaking a fucking beer bottle over his head.

I like girls with pretty white teeth. They seem more refined because I can imagine them as ugly little kids with braces who grew into their beauty. They sacrificed before and now they have something to show for it. When I kiss them their mouths seem fresher, more pure. Freshness is the most important thing in a girl, because you don't want a girl who is all used up. You don't want a girl like Gina who has a reputation. I met Gina through a friend, who told me about her and then introduced me to her. Gina was supposed to be the kind of girl that you want for a girlfriend. Nice was the word that everyone used to describe her. Gina was nice and Gina was from Ohio, of all places. She wasn't a city girl, and she went to church. But when I brought her to my room, she was faster than I was, and she reached for my fly way quicker than any decent girl would. I found out later that she'd dated a guy in high school for three years and had broken up because she'd gotten pregnant.

Mackin' on girls is the best when all of your friends are watching. It becomes sort of a "Top Gun" thing where we make wagers on whether we are going to score, or crash and burn. It starts out at school on Friday night when we are getting happy over a bottle of Absolut in Jonathan's room, joking about the love that we will find that night. I always get shit because I get a lot of pussy. But none of us really keep a steady girlfriend because the girls we meet always turn out to be sluts, not the girlfriend type at all.

So we all go to a club together and are lighting up with our Zippo's, taking drags and scooping out the girls as they walk in. We rate them on a scale of one to ten -- this is not academic -- and whenever anyone says a number, we know what he is talking about. Sometimes a chunky girl walks by. Perfect 10, someone might say excitedly, jabbing me, Why don't you make your move, Romeo, and we both crack up in laughter.

God, it is fun to go up with Bobby to a couple of girls on the dance floor and just start to bump and grind with them. We wait for our favorite techno songs to come -- always the same ones, every night. We give the girls the look and the smile, and see how responsive they are. If things are going well, we offer them a drink. I'll dance with a girl, not looking her in the eye, moving to the beat of the music, slowly slipping my hand on her side and then into the small of her back and pulling her close to me. It's the best feeling in the world because it's domination, it's power. Dancing closely with a girl is the greatest thing because you feel so close to her, as your hips are pressed closely and are moving together. You feel so intimate with her -- you and she are the only people in the world.

You never let the girl pay. Ever. It
wouldn’t look right. It’s a Korean male thing, where the girl offers, and you have to refuse. After a bunch of times, she quits offering and accepts it because she never expected to anyways. We get paid back in other ways.

The girls at the club have $1000 dollar watches on.

I had to dump Joanne when I found out that she had dated a whitey a couple of years ago. It was an image thing -- I didn’t want to be associated with that kind of girl, with that kind of past. I kept thinking of her white boyfriend, unzipping her, undressing her, and I would get so fucking pissed at her, who was crying again. “I don’t know why she went all interracial and shit,” I told Bobby.

“Two words, Jungle Fever.”

“What if they’d ever had kids, what would they look like?”

“Those two must have looked like shit together too. The ho has no respect for her culture. God they must have looked like shit together.”

“Fucking white guys. Why they steal our women like that?”

My mom explained to me once how her friend’s daughters just thought Caucasian men were nicer, but I didn’t buy it for a second. When I used to hang out in high school with my white friends, we all paid separately, even when a guy and a girl were together. I always pay for the girl on my arm. The guys would give me shit otherwise.

If you want to know the truth, I liked Debbie the most of them all, and I never even got to kiss her. She wasn’t really gorgeous or anything, but she was cute and she didn’t wear a lot of make-up, definitely a plus. It was different with her because I never wanted to touch her. Maybe I felt like I didn’t want to spoil her. She had the nicest laugh, a real smile, a cute wrinkle above the bridge of her nose when she laughed hard. I’d met her at MIT once when I was visiting a guy named Jimmy that I had known in high school. It was random how I had met her -- she was just in his room playing a video game on his Sony Playstation, and I asked her if I could play. We talked for a while as we played, about family and church and music, and I remember thinking to myself, this is a girl I could marry. I saw her randomly around MIT after that when I would go to hang out with Jimmy and his friends, and we always took a moment to talk -- but for me, it never seemed long enough. I never asked Jimmy for her number though.

On weeknights, I practiced playing pool in the rec room of the dorm. A true Korean male has to be good at pool. That and he has to be able to sing Korean songs at the Korean karaoke bars. The hip Korean pop music was shipped to the states and we all got to know it well. Plus, half of us went to Korea during the summer just to hang out and go clubbing some more.

Personally, I’ve never been to Korea, but James tells me about “booking” when a group of guys at a club gets a table and pays the waiter to bring random girls to meet and get to talk to. “There are fine women all over the place, and then some,” he says as he takes another swig of Heineken. It’s a man’s world, and you can pick and choose which one that you want. It’s like ordering steak.

Stacey was a player. I was with a group of the guys when I scoped her out at one of the clubs. She was the petite type, with short bouncy hair. I have a weakness for slim girls like her who wear halter-tops when they go clubbing. You can see their smooth white stomachs and their belly buttons and sometimes you start to get hard right there. Her tits weren’t all that big, but really perky. That’s how I like them, because size doesn’t matter to me as much as shape. Jimmy saw me looking. “Fucking cock teaser, stay
away.” I nodded. She probably had five guys interested in her at once. Nice little ass though.

Bobby always says that guys are like wine and girls are like cheese -- we get better with age, and girls just get more aged. It sucked to be a freshman guy, even a freshman Harvard guy, but each year after that was good because we could check out the new merchandise each fall at the “Asian Night” of the various clubs. The problem with freshman girls is that you had to break them in and you really have to work to even kiss them. Getting your hand under their shirt can take fucking weeks. But that’s the fun part, because you know that you are getting them for the first time. Once someone has broken her in, she’ll be that much easier from then on, like worn-in leather. After a while she’ll be all used up, and in a year shell be jealous of the latest shipment of freshmen girls.

I think the young ones are the best because all of the fun is in chasing someone, trying to get some action. After you’ve kissed her and felt her up, you realize that her mouth is not all that much different from anyone else’s and her tits are just as boring as the last bitch’s. It’s all the chase I guess. The great thing about it, says Bobby, is that guys get better with experience. You begin to understand that, even when a girl says no, you can still find a way to keep her in your room. What’s wrong? you say, when you go for her bra and she places her hand on yours, shaking her head, saying No, too fast. You pretend like you are hurt, sensitive. You tell her that you would never want to go faster than she does. You ask her to just lay there with you. After ten more minutes of kissing her, gingerly, ten more minutes of telling her how great she looked that night, you go for her bra again, and -- slowly, feeling her hand resisting -- you still manage to get it off. If she doesn’t get pissed, you know that you’ve reached a milestone with her and that you won’t have problems getting it off again. You feel better after it is off, closer to her because of your physical closeness. When your bodies are together, skin on skin, I guess it’s about as close as any two people can be.

Bobby said that I was looking in all of the wrong places when I went to clubs and intercollegiate parties. According to him, the really fine Korean women were at Cambridge Korean Church. The few times I went, I noticed that some of the same girls I’d seen at Club Nicole dancing the night away earlier that weekend were at church too. They were wearing the same clothes -- black J. Crew suits and cashmere overcoats. During the sermon, Bobby would whisper in my ear about which girls he thought were the cutest, and it would kill me. Even he didn’t try to pick up on girls while we were still at church though. It’s sort of blasphemous I guess, since we all grew up in Korean churches and we all called ourselves Christians.

Now that I think of it, her name was Jen, not Jane.

The whole time at a club, when I meet a girl and sit with her at the bar, I am just trying to get her to ask me where I go to school, and waiting for someone to bump into me so I can put my hand on her shoulder or something and pretend that it was an accident. You do that to tell whether she likes you or not -- let your hand rest on her shoulder for a little bit longer than necessary and wait for that smile, that fake fucking smile. You see it, and buy her an expensive drink and ask her for her number.

When you call her up the next week and try to have some sort of conversation with them, you realize she is really like a mannequin, nothing at all inside. Pretty soon the dead silence comes.

I’ll guess I’ll see you at the club this weekend, you say with pretend enthusiasm.

Time to make up an excuse and hang up.

Sometimes, I come back to my room from a club without a girl. None of the guys are there to pal around with, and I think of the dozens of hotties that I saw that night, but they all blend into each other and seem indistinct, impersonal, and so far away. None of them are girls that I really want to be with, none of them are girls that I could ever really care about. My clothes smell as smoky as a used-up cigarette. I can smell the thick smell of a thousand cigarettes which have been absorbed into the sticky gel in my hair. I want to brush away the bitter taste of alcohol out of my mouth so that I can forget about how much I drank that night. It’s way, way too late to call anyone. I look at the pictures on my wall of home and of my parents. Then I go into the bathroom, and smoke one last cigarette out of the bathroom window so I don’t set off the fire alarm; it’s just me and my smokes. Then I strip off my clothes, which are heavy with sweat and smoke and spilled beer, and turn on the shower so that I can wash the smoke away. I take a shower, and come back to my room, sit down on my bed, naked. My head is still spinning a bit from the alcohol, and I wonder why, of all the girls at the club that night, none of them are here with me now. In that dark hour, I lie down and I wait for sleep to come. When it does, then who gives a shit anyway. There’s always next time.

Joseph Chong ’98 is an English concentrator living in Eliot House. He plans on a career in consulting.
WHEREVER I GO, I SHOULD BECOME ACQUAINTED WITH KOREANS. THEREFORE, WHEN I WAS IN ELEMENTARY AND JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL, I THOUGHT THAT I HAD DISAPPOINTED THEM. UNLESS I WAS ADOPTED, WHICH I CONFIRMED I WASN'T, I SHOULD DEFINITELY BE KOREAN. IF MY FACE WASN'T LINKED TO THE MOTHERLAND, WAS THERE ANY HOPE FOR THE REST OF ME?

Cultivating my identity has been a source of amusement, hardship, and wonder throughout my life. I agree that this isn't a special task. Almost everyone has to do some occasional soul-searching. However, it's been a special challenge for me because of my physical appearance. I don't look distinctive in any particular way. People usually point out that I'm short and that I have tremendously small feet (size 6). Otherwise I share many of the same characteristics as other Asian women. The connection to identity is that most people do not identify me as Korean-American and furthermore, when they know that I am, often tell me, "Well, you don't look Korean."

Both reactions to my physical appearance have always surprised me. It was particularly unsettling when I lived in a primarily Caucasian neighborhood. I thought that I was Korea's little representative. My grandmother has sent me a hanbok nearly every year since I was born. My friends and I studied Korean traditional dance for ten years. We performed at almost every Korean association event in Portland, Oregon. I attended Korean school until high school, and I still only speak with my relatives in Korean. Although I'm not a gourmet chef, I appreciate a variety of Korean cuisine. I grew up with other aspects of Korean material culture and values permeating my entire life.

I also became upset every time someone misidentified me because of my parents. Both of them are very proud of Korea, and have passed those sentiments on to my sister and me. My father is especially patriotic and unconditionally supportive of other Koreans. He always tells me that every Korean is intrinsically connected to one another. Wherever I go, I should become acquainted with Koreans. He also reinforces the idea that all Korean yisei must maintain a strong connection to the "motherland." My mother is more moderate in her attachment to Korea, but she emphasizes cultural pride as well. Therefore, when I was in elementary and junior high school, I thought that I had disappointed them. Unless I was adopted, which I confirmed I wasn't, I should definitely be Korean. If my face wasn't linked to the motherland, was there any hope for the rest of me?

In high school, I moved to a more ethnically heterogeneous neighborhood. My high school student body also encompassed individuals of various races and ethnicities. I began to understand the confusion that can arise in such an environment. Many of my new friends told me that they can't distinguish between persons of different Asian backgrounds. Therefore, asking me if I was Chinese or Japanese wasn't a deliberate error. Even assuming that I was Mongolian or Malaysian was
still a shot in the general vicinity for them. However it still upset me when Asian-American students, particularly Koreans, couldn't identify me. I presumed that they could pick out subtle features that make me Korean. Apparently these characteristics did not exist or I didn't possess them.

I tried to conduct some informal research to resolve my puzzle. I thought about the "quintessential Koreans" at my school and their physical features. My friends, both Asian and non-Asian, tried to help me as well by naming characteristics they considered Korean. In a very egotistical manner, I made myself the subject of comparison. Some people concentrated on the face. I needed to have lighter skin, smaller eyes, a more slender nose, and soft, small lips. Others focused on body composition. A Korean girl could be plump or model-skinny, but always symmetrical. Smooth black hair, beautiful hands, and gorgeous smiles were also mentioned. It began to occur to me that Portland was probably the breeding ground of potential Miss Koreas. I couldn't acquire beauty, but I pondered whether there was anything else I could do be more "Korean."

When my private deliberations began to frustrate me, I turned to my parents for answers. My father dismissed my quest as nonsensical. His family had been in Korea since the beginning of recorded history. Wasn't "Kim" the most popular name? I couldn't look anything but Korean. My mother was more understanding. She pointed out examples of family friends and acquaintances who also didn't "look Korean." One gentleman looks Russian. Another seems distinctly Southeast Asian. She also referred to history. Despite its track record of isolation, Korea must have had some immigrants. Infusions from foreign gene pools must certainly affect present-day Koreans. Case in point: a certain Korean prince took a bride from a royal family in contemporary India. Supposedly some of their descendants still have hints of this unique ancestry. Maybe I am representing some of my non-Korean ancestors. My mother's family, after all, had been established in Korea by ancestors from central or southern China. Perhaps even a thousand years of blending with indigenous Koreans couldn't eliminate certain characteristics.

I also started implicating myself as the responsible party. Maybe people were just "reading" me and guessing incorrectly. There are several counts on which I might be held accountable. I have a penchant for jade jewelry. My favorite hairstyle is what I call the "Madame Chiang Kai-shek chignon." I wear chipaos and kimonos as often as I wear my hanbok. Furthermore my academic and personal interests give me away. I am a joint concentrator in Government and East Asian Studies - China. The only country in East and Southeast Asia I haven't studied in college is Korea. Originally as a method of accommodating other's incorrect assumptions, I learned Mandarin Chinese and Japanese. My logic was that if I was going to be continually classified in those ethnic groups, I should at least know the languages. Now I enjoy them both and aspire to learn more Central/South East Asian languages. I listen to music from Hong Kong and Taipei (and Seoul!). If I become a consultant, I hope I'll end up in Kuala Lumpur or Singapore. It could be very simple to look at the "composite me" and get confused.

Nevertheless I am still searching for how I can look Korean. I know that it's impossible to create a thorough, universal set of characteristics. Perhaps, then, I will always be misidentified. My introduction to every Korean community I encounter will be a confirmation that I indeed am Korean. In the ever-growing sea of Asian-Americans, I might have no other choice to assert myself and my identity as a Korean-American. Regardless, I am trying to convert this identity crisis into a strengthening experience. I will simply have to be more Korean, if that's possible, on the inside to compensate for any incongruity with my external self.

Loretta Kim '99 is a Government & East Asian Studies concentrator living in Kirkland House. A writer of short stories in her free time, she is looking forward to a career in academia or diplomacy.
A Korean Identity? the three kingdoms revisited

BY PAUL YUNSIK CHANG

It is often taken for granted that the people whose heritage and origins lie within the small Asian peninsula known today as North and South Korea constitutes a homogenous race, culture and identity. Albeit for different reasons and at different times this sentiment has been articulated in a variety of ways. For example, at the turn of the century Korean intellectuals adopted the notion of 'nation' to make salient as well as encourage solidarity amongst the Korean people. The idea of 'national identity', understood here as constituting a shared history, language, culture and blood, became a means to unify the Korean people in face of foreign incursion. One such thinker, Chong In-Bo, articulated the concept of ol which for him meant the affirmation of a 'unique spirit of Korea'. Chong argued that this ol runs throughout Korea's 5,000 yearlong history providing the spiritual essence of a cohesive racial/national identity. With this in mind, this essay tries to see how this notion of a holistic singular Korean identity fares in light of recent social scientific research.

In a series of experiments, British social psychologist Henri Tajfel showed that one way in which individuals develop self-identities is through participation or identification with larger groups. He goes on to note that group identity is defined through the basic differentiation between 'in' and 'out' groups. Through social engagement with others we realize our similarities and differences which in turn contribute to our self-understanding. For instance, a Harvard student taking a class at MIT might be more aware of his/her school affiliation just by the fact that everyone around him/her constitutes the 'other' for this particular social-identity category. This heightened saliency of the student’s identification with Harvard in turn can contribute to his/her own individual identity. From this paradigm we can understand the formation of self-identity as a functionary process relating to particular situations that the individual finds him/herself in. This is to say that self-identity actually constitutes various social-identities which resound and come to the fore depending on the social situation. Thus in a classroom setting my social identity as ‘student’ becomes salient while at home with my parents my role as ‘son’ might be more relevant. Within this gamut of social identities of a particular individual, national identity constitutes only one rubric. Often times in our daily activities our social identity, based on a national or racial sentiment, is marginalized in favor of a more relevant identity. But still, for many of us our national/racial identity significantly contributes to our self-understanding, thus justifying an attempt to apply this research to a ‘Korean’ identity.

First and foremost it is hard to forget that there are actually two Korean nation-states. The Republic of Korea and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea was
formally established in 1948 in the south and north respectively. It is even more difficult to forget that these two Koreans engaged each other in a vicious and unprecedented civil war from 1950-1953. The basic categories through which these two groups differentiate themselves lie along political and ideological lines. While the North strives to develop the society that their particular notion of communism calls for, the South embraces a form of capitalism both domestically and internationally. The point to note here is that each government grew out of its relation with the other. As Leon Sigal poignantly states, "[E]ach (ROK and DPRK) based its legitimacy on being the antithesis and antagonist of the other."10 Thus we find a dialectical relationship regarding this political-identifying criterion; South Korea becomes more 'south' vis-à-vis the North and vice versa. The severity of this in/out group differentiation became manifest during the war where millions of people died at the hands of 'fellow Koreans'.

We can better understand these differentiating experiences in light of Tajfel's research regarding in-group favoritism as a function of a salient in-group identity via the 'other'. Indeed, how deep must the chasm that separates in versus out group be in order to justify such brutality?! Unfortunately this salient sense of difference perpetuates itself as the war years' generation inculcates this in/group differentiation in their progeny. In their classrooms, South Korean children are taught the 'otherness' of communism (in a negative light no doubt) in both subtle and overt ways.6 In spite of almost a half-century gone by, it can be argued that these differences remain steadily intact.7

Although less dramatic, the gap that differentiates Koreans living in the Republic of Korea and those in the diaspora is no less significant. Rather than finding its source in politics or ideology, the categories upon to ground in/out group differences has to do more with language and culture.8 Very fundamental and thus of utmost importance are differences in language. It can hardly be repudiated that there has been a significant reduction in the use of the Korean language (hangul) amongst second generation Koreans. Aside from the difficulties in linguistic communication between Koreans living on the peninsula and those in the diaspora, it is speculated by some linguists and philosophers that different languages actually contributes to distinct cognitive potentialities.9 In any case, those Koreans that are living outside of the peninsula are constantly exposed to other peoples and other cultures that invariably inform their life experiences. In this way, we can say that the second generation Korean-American experience is distinct from that of the immigrant generation as well as those in Korea.10

As noted above, the situation is an important predictor of which of our group identities becomes salient. When asked by non-Koreans as to "where I'm from" or "what nationality I am", it is enough to answer 'Korean'. In contrast, in discussions with people who were born and raised in Korea, it is no longer sufficient to answer simply 'Korean'. I now have to add on additional adjectives such as 'second generation' (or *yisei*, incidentally the name of this journal). In these situations, I would argue that I become even more Korean-American than I was before. Again, like the case for North and South Koreans, our Korean-American identity is reaction ary. That is, in-group identity becomes salient via the 'other'. Like most in/out groups, we have ways of labeling and stereotyping each other contributing to our separateness. We call them F.O.B.s while they respond with the equally stereotypical label *gyopo*.11 In Los Angeles there are cafés and other hangouts that are known to be more Korean-American than Korean-Korean. This is not to say that there aren't any exchanges between these two groups.12 But still, the differences are significant enough to warrant distinct social-identities.

The in/out group differentiation between those who are part of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and *yisei* in America is probably the most removed. For one thing, a lack of physical contact between the two groups propagates stereotypes and misunderstandings. The limited mediums through which Korean-Americans learn about North Koreans contributes to this ignorance. Korean-Americans usually learn about North Korea through their parents who might recall a time when the DMZ was unfathomable. It is doubtful that this process of passing on knowledge regarding North Koreans is an objective process. As mentioned above, North and South Koreans have distinguished themselves from each other and consequently hold certain stereotypes and expectations that constitutes most in/out group relations.13 In this way, Korean-Americans get a 'tainted' image of North Korea. Even more so is the second dominant way in which Korean-
Americans learn about fellow Koreans in the north. Given the history of anti-communist propaganda in American media, it is not surprising that images of North Korea comes to us in stereotypical fashion. The few chances that North Korea breaks into the American media usually has to do with some kind of threat to US national security (the ‘nuclear crisis’ in 1994 is a case in point). These are the opportunities that Korean-Americans have to define the North Koreans as the out-group.

It is interesting to note in Korean historiography there is a debate whether or not the period of the Three Kingdoms (Silla, Paekche, Koguryo) can be considered to constitute a homogenous people. In light of the above discussion we might apply this same debate to the contemporary situation. What happens to Chong In-Bo’s concept of ol when fellow ‘Koreans’ become differentiated and distinct in the very act of interacting with each other? More importantly what do we mean when we say “I am Korean”? Is our only common ground reduced to the fact that our ancestors at one time shared the same land? In an attempt to answer these questions, I would like to bring in one more variable to the equation. Given the way group processes work, individual identity formation is not left to a deterministic process. Individuals have and often do exercise their choice in affiliating themselves with this or that group. For those of us who would encourage Korean solidarity we can consciously and actively work towards building upon the common ground shared by the yisei, North and South Koreans. Social psychological research does note that there are those superordinate goals that foster solidarity even between out-groups. Only with this kind of active striving to learn about, and identify with, the ‘other’ does an insistence on a holistic Korean identity gain merit.

2 One import of this assumption of ‘multiple social-identities’ has to do with its effects on psychological health. For one particular category of application see Peggy A. Thoits, “Multiple Identities: Examining Gender and Marital Status Differences in Distress” in American Sociological Review, 1996, Vol. 51, (April: 259-272).
3 Indeed, sometimes it is actually a hindrance. I remember an argument with my mother about future marriage prospects. She insisted that I marry a Korean woman . . . my response was to remind her that I am not marrying a country but rather an individual!
5 Of course there were other nations (China and the United States being the leading ones) who participated in the Korean War that also suffered atrocious casualties.
6 For example, Harvard’s Korean language department uses a Chinese character book for their second year course that includes the vocabulary word meaning ‘anti-communist’ (ban-gong). This text book goes on to use the vocabulary in context which roughly translated means “Our nation was divided into North and South because of the communists.” This text book was actually written to teach Chinese characters to elementary school children in South Korea.
7 Most would argue that this gap is growing as a new generation lives out their lives without any first hand memory or experience of a unified Korea.
8 ‘Culture’ is admittedly an elastic term. Both politics and ideology can be seen as important manifestations of culture but here I use the term to refer to ‘social’ or ‘political’ culture. ‘Culture’ is an elastic term. ‘Culture’ is a better term.
9 In this vein, both Ludwig Wittgenstein and Michael Foucault argue that language not only articulates meaning but actually constructs meaning by its imposition of limit on the process of conceptualization.
10 It is not tied to the reality to reality is more complex than the clean categories used for heuristic purposes. There is of course a 1.5 generation that grew up partly in Korea and the US who would fit both these categories so smoothly.
11 Let’s make clear here that sometimes these differences are not without substantive reasons. As two of my friends argue, their Korean-American identity or Asian-American identity has to do with the fact that their political agendas and aspirations have to do with their place (a minority one at that) in American society. Thus they feel more kinship with other Asian-Americans fighting for similar ends than those Koreans in Korea.
12 Is it an irony that a popular way in which Korean-Americans can participate in Korean culture is through the enjoyment of Korean pop-music which actually is a derivative of Western musical genres? This process involves the importation of Western music by Koreans in South Korea, subsequent ‘Koreanization’ of these genres and then finally exported back to America as ‘Korean’ pop-culture.
13 I would like to qualify this statement by noting that this differentiation might be reserved to those categories in contention, namely political and ideological ones. South Koreans might very well feel more solidarity regarding other categories such as diet (shared foods), language (use of hangul), etc.
14 Has anyone seen the Saturday Night Live cartoon skit “The Ambiguously Gay Duo”? If so, did you catch the episode when the ‘bad guy’ was a gross caricature explicitly described as a North Korean communist?

Paul Chang is working on his Masters at Harvard Divinity School. His future plans include doing research on Korean churches.

15 Art by Soo-Ryuan Kwon
存款 city palace

PHOTOGRAPHS
BY HEEYOUNG BAE
Heeyoung Bae is a visiting student from Ewha Women's University in Seoul, Korea. She is a studio arts major with a focus primarily in painting.
The Manchuria region of northeast China is a land with a long, complex history and rich historical remains. When tracing the cultural and historical traditions of what would eventually become what we know as Korea, one finds that many of those trails lead to the hills, plains, and forests of Manchuria. For this reason I recently spent over a year in northeast China studying the archaeology and history of the region, especially those aspects related to Korean history, and while traveling throughout the three provinces of northeast China I visited a number of historical sites associated with the ancient states of Puyo, Koguryo, and Paehae.

Clearly the importance of this region in the study of early Korean history cannot be overstated. The earliest polities associated with Korean history are to be found there. Many of the elements that constitute Korean cultural tradition may also be sought there - even the Tan'gun myth describing Korean origins may have been derived from a tradition associated with the Puyo state. However, since the territories north of the Yalu and Tumen river borders were never incorporated into the later Koryo and Choson kingdoms, those lands were thought of as al-

만주의 한국

동북 중국의 만주 지역은 깊고 복잡한 역사와 풍부한 역사 유물을 가진한 곳이다. 우리가 한국으로 알고있는 나라의 문화 역사적 전통을 거슬러 올라가 보면 만주의 언덕, 평야와 숲에 많은 자취가 남아있는 것을 볼 수 있다. 이러한 이유로 한국 역사 연구를 위해 나는 최근 중국의 동북 지역에서 고고학과 지역사를 연구하며 일 년 남짓 머물러 있었다. 그 지역의 세 지방을 다니며 부여, 고구려, 그리고 발해와 관련된 역사적 지대를 방문할 수 있었다.

분명 한국 역사 연구에 있어서의 이 지역의 중요성은 매우 크다. 이 곳에서 한국 역사와 연관된 최초의 국가를 볼 수 있다. 그리고, 한국의 시초를 묘사한 단군 신화도 부여 전통에서 유래한 것일 수 있다는 점에서 한국 문화 전통을 이루는 수많은 요소들을 이 곳에서 찾을 수 있는 것이다. 그러나 압록강과 두만강가 북쪽 지역이 후에 고려나 조선왕조 국토에 포함되지 않았기 때문에 이
most external to the history of Korea. This thinking was re-evaluated in late eighteenth century Choson, but even then more realistic sentiments prevailed. While those northern lands were thought of as a kind of spiritual motherland of one part of the Korean cultural constitution, they were considered lost and beyond reach.

This situation changed somewhat toward the end of the Qing dynasty, when Koreans began to migrate north of the Yalu and Tumen rivers. A large number of Koreans crossed over to escape famine in 1869, and with the Japanese annexation of Korea some four decades later, Koreans fled to Manchuria in waves. Today a substantial Korean population remains in this region, particularly in Jilin Province, which lies along most of Korea’s northern border. Koreans are the majority in the city of Yanji (Yon’gūl), the capital of the Yanbian (Yonbyon) Korean autonomous region (the eight easternmost counties of Jilin Province), where nearly every Chinese sign or billboard has an accompanying equivalent in han’gul. While walking through the streets of Yanji one gets the impression of being in a place somewhere between China and Korea. But Korean is the language most often heard in Yanji, and it was there and in no other place that I witnessed ethnic Chinese speaking Korean.

Generally, the farther one goes north or west from Yanji the less one is likely to hear ethnic Koreans speaking their mother tongue. In these places it is not unusual to find Koreans who speak only Chinese. In fact, South Korean students at universities in Changchun often supplement their incomes by teaching Chinese to ethnic Koreans living there. Before visiting Yanbian, I had heard that many of the ethnic Koreans in China resented their South Korean counterparts, that the latter typically behaved in an arrogant and overbearing manner toward their less affluent cousins. However, ethnic Koreans I spoke with while visiting Yanbian were generally quick to refute that charge. In fact, I was often told that South Koreans were viewed quite favorably among the Koreans in Yanbian, an image helped, no doubt, by the economic energy Seoul has been pouring into Yanji over the past few years. Among other things, the appearance of noraebang and fast food restaurants in cities like Yanji, Hunchun, and Dunhua attest to the rising presence of South Korean influence in

이러한 상황은 한국인들이 압록강과 두만강 북쪽으로 이주하던 중 왕조 후반에 들어 조금씩 변하기 시작하였다. 1869년의 기근을 피해 많은 수의 한국인들이 강을 건너 40년 후 일제의 합박에서 벗어나기 위해 만주로 건너갔다. 지금 많은 한국인이 이 지역(특히 침린 지역)에 거주하고 있다. 한인 자치지역인 연변의 수도인 연길에서는 한국인이 다수인으로 이 지역의 거의 모든 한자 간판에는 한글이 함께 표기되어 있다. 연길 거리를 돈다 보면 중국과 한국 사이 이등가에 있다는 느낌을 받게 된다. 한국어가 연길에서 가장 많이 사용되는 언어이며, 한국어를 쓰는 중국인을 발견할 수 있는 곳도 여기이다.

일반적으로, 연길에서 북으로나 서로 갈수록 한국인들이 모국어를 사용하는 경우가 적어진다. 이런 지역에서는 중국어만 사용하는 한국인을 발견하는 것이 특이한 일이 아니다. 실제로 청동의 대학교에서 유학하고 있는 남한 학생들은 그 곳에 사는 한국인들에게 한국어를 가르치며 용돈을 버는 경우도 많다. 연변을
Yanbian.

Since Seoul and Beijing normalized relations in 1992, South Korean tourists have been traveling to the Manchuria region in increasing numbers. The most popular destinations outside of Yanji are Paektusan and Ji'an, the early capital of the Koguryo kingdom, where one may visit some twelve thousand ancient tombs, including several colossal royal tombs, the walls of the ancient city, and the famous stele of King Kwanggaet'o. When I traveled to Ji'an in 1994 I saw no other tourists, but during a return visit the following year I noted quite a few South Koreans. While most Koguryo sites in Ji'an were open and free to the public four years ago, today nearly all of them may be accessed only after paying an entrance fee (30 Yuan, or about $3.60, was the going rate for tickets to all sites as of summer 1998). Ji'an is very quickly becoming a tourist town catering mostly to vacationing South Koreans. In general, the Chinese craftsmen and merchants who offer their wares to visitors at the ticket gates in Ji'an are very happy to receive South Korean tourists and their money.

방문하기 전, 중국의 한국인들은 남한 사람들이 자신들에게 거만하고 위협적인 태도로 대한다는 이유로 남한인을 실례하다고 들였다. 그러나 내가 연변에서 직접 만난 사람들은 그 말에 동의하지 않았다. 오히려 서울측이 최근 몇 년 간 연길 지역에 부은 경제적,政세에 대해 매우 긍정적인 이미지를 갖고 있다고 했다. 무엇보다 연길, 춘천, 그리고 문화 지방에서 보이기 시작한 노래방과 페스트푸드점은 연변에 있어서의 남한의 크나 큰 영향력을 증명하고 있는 것이다.

1992년 서울과 북경이 관계를 원활화한 이후로 만주 지방을 여행하는 남한인의 수는 계속 증가하고 있다. 황조의 무덤을 포함한 백두산과 약 12000개의 고대 무덤, 고대 도시의 성벽, 그리고 광개토 대왕의 유명한 비석을 볼 수 있는 지안(고구려의 수도) 지역이 가장 인기있는 곳이다. 내가 1994년 지안을 여행할 때에는 여행객을 발견할 수 없었지만 그 이듬해에 다시

값을 때에는 짧은 남한 여행객을 보았다. 4년 전까지는 헛도 지안의 대부분의 고구려 사적은 모두 무료로 공개되었다. 그러나 지금은 거의 모든 곳이 입장료를 내야할 입장할 수 있게 되었다. 지안은 빠르게 남한인들의 관광지가 되고 있다. 일반적으로 지안의 관광자 입구에서 상품을 판매하는 중국 상인들은 남한 관광객의 돈을 벌는 것에 대해 매우 만족스러워 하고 있다.

한편, 최근 4년간의 불미스러운 사건들로 중국지역 관계자들은 고구려와 발해유적지를 관광객들로부터 특히 남한 관광객(특히 남한 관광객) 금지시켰다. 1994년 지안 근처의 유명한 고구려 무덤은 말 그대로 벽이 벌어지고 도굴되었다. 끝내 범인을 찾는 못했지만 범인은 지역 사람들과 함께 합세한 남한인이라고 남한과 중국 모두 믿고 있다. 그 무덤을 관리하던 중국 박물관 관계자들은 해고 당한 후 절대 중이며 무덤은 출입이 금지되었다. 일년 후 리아닝 지방 관리들은 고구려 지대를 중국인 외에게는 접근 금지시켰고 진린 지방도 같은 이어

However, in the past four years a number of unfortunate incidents have provoked the Chinese provincial authorities, who have placed Koguryo and Parhae sites (other than those in Ji'an, which are closely controlled by the museum authorities) off limits to foreigners, especially visitors from Korea. In 1994 a famous Koguryo tomb mural near Ji'an was literally peeled off the walls of the tomb and stolen. The thieves were never caught, but it is widely believed in both Korea and China that the thieves were South Koreans who acted in

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concert with paid locals. Chinese museum officials responsible for the safekeeping of the tomb were removed from their posts and sentenced to prison terms, and the tomb itself was sealed off. A year later the Liaoning provincial authorities placed all Koguryo sites off limits to non-Chinese, and Jilin Province followed shortly thereafter. This past summer all cultural properties offices at the county level in Jilin were instructed not to receive non-Chinese visitors. Under these conditions, it is not surprising that the Chinese staff members of museums and cultural properties bureaus in the Northeast are fearful of being approached by non-Chinese. This has proved to be a serious hindrance to non-Chinese academics studying the history or archaeology of this region.

Perhaps even more damaging to Korean-Chinese academic relations at this level are the nationalist sentiments of some Koreans, which many Chinese perceive as threatening. China appears to me to be rather insecure when questions of territoriality come up, and it is for this reason that South Korean historical pride concerning the former lands of Koguryo and Parhae often comes across to Chinese as nationalist or even irredentist sentiment. Although the great majority of South Korean tourists and scholars are respectful of their hosts and create no problems during their visits, there have been other groups, such as the almost militant Tamul tourism group, which have aggravated their Chinese hosts with nationalist displays (Tamul is a Koguryo word, which some have inaccurately interpreted as meaning to reclaim lost territory -- it actually means to restore conquered territory to its original ruler). Although such displays were not necessarily meant to be provocative, they were viewed as threats to territoriality by the Chinese, who have tended to overreact and take a defensive posture, often refusing information to non-Chinese.

그렇게 대처하였다. 이러한 상황 속에서 박물관과 동북중국 문화재부의 중국관리자들은 중국인이 아닌 방문객들이 접근하는 것을 두려워하게 된 것이다. 이것은 이 지역을 연구하는 비중국인 학자들에게 큰 장애물이 아닐 수 없다.

아마도 이 상태에서 한중 학문관계에 더 해가 되는 것은 중국인들이 위협적이라고까지 여기는 일부 한국인들의 국수주의적 감정일 것이다. 중국인들은 영토에 관련된 말이 나올 때 불안정해 보이며 이 때문에 고구려와 발해 지역에 대한 한국인의 역사적 자부심은 중국인들에게 국수적이거나 irredentist적 정성으로까지 보인다. 한국인 관광객과 학자 대부분이 중국 ‘주인’에게 감사하고 아무런 문제를 일으키지 않는 반면에 국수주의의 표출이 중국인을 괴롭힌 거의 군사적기까지 한 ‘다울’관광객도 있다. (다울은 고구려어로써 원래의 통치자에게 정복된 땅을 돌려준다는 의미를 지닌다). 이런 행위가 반드시

Mark Byington is a fifth year graduate student in the East Asian Languages and Civilization program. His focus is on early Korean history and archaeology.
scholars, including those who are obviously not nationalisti-
cally motivated.

It is unfortunate that Korean-Chinese relations at the
academic level should take such a sour tone now that a win-
dow of opportunity has opened for research into Korea’s an-
cient past in the Manchurian region. The only solution to this
problem is, I believe, increased efforts toward mutual under-
standing between the two parties. South Korean scholars and
tourists visiting the Chinese northeast should be aware of
Chinese sensitivity when territorial questions are raised or
implied, and Chinese scholars should understand that the Ko-
orean attachment to the former lands of Koguryo should not
be perceived as realistically threatening. Only when such Chi-
nese fears are allayed can productive joint projects between
scholars of the two countries begin.

To illustrate this point, in the early 1960s a joint ar-
chaeological project between Chinese and North Korean ar-
chaeologists, wherein many tombs of Parhae royalty were ex-
cavated, ended disastrously when the two parties disagreed
sharply on how Parhae nationality should be interpreted. The
North Koreans insisted that Parhae was a Korean state while
the Chinese maintained that it was a Tang tributary and un-
related to Korea. Because of these fundamental disagreements
rooted in issues of nationalism and territoriality, this was the
last time such a joint archaeological project was undertaken
between China and North Korea. It would be most unfortu-
nate if promising projects between China and South Korea
are similarly thwarted because of an unnecessary misunder-
standing of the other country’s sensitivities and values.

Today, Chinese archaeological work on Koguryo and
Parhae sites in Manchuria is very poorly funded, and every
day valuable archaeological sites are destroyed before they
are used. The most obvious source of external funding
for such archaeological projects is South Korea, since South
Korea has both the economic means and the cultural interest
to support such work. But as things stand today the Chinese
would immediately reject any proposal for a Korea-funded
project aimed at rescuing archaeological information at
Koguryo or Parhae sites before they are lost. However, even
though the outlook today appears bleak, I have hopes that
increased mutual awareness will ultimately prevail, and that
we will one day be able to reap the benefits that Korean-Chi-
nese joint archaeological work in Manchuria would most cer-
tainly provide. •

1 The Tamul group, which aimed to “reclaim” Manchuria by
economic influence, is described in an article by Steve Glain
in the October 9, 1995 issue of Wall Street Journal.
THE AGREED FRAMEWORK

In November 1998, Congress appointed former Secretary of Defense William Perry as the new North Korea Policy Coordinator. His specific task is to investigate the secretly discovered suspect underground site in North Korea in order to determine whether it constitutes a resumption of Pyongyang's nuclear weapons program, and hence a violation of the 1994 U.S.-North Korea Agreed Framework. In light of North Korea's past practice of brinkmanship and "pinging" the United States in order to catch Washington's attention, the current crisis appears to be another case of Pyongyang's established pattern of behavior. In this instance, Kim Jong Il's regime is evidently reacting to Congress's delay in meeting the heavy fuel oil shipments requirement of the Agreed Framework. To date, of the 500,000 tons of heavy fuel oil that the United States is obligated to deliver to North Korea, it has only shipped 390,000 tons.

During the recent Congressional deliberations over the suspect site, Republican members renewed criticism of the 1994 nuclear accord and called for the cessation of American involvement in the agreement. Such a demand is irresponsible and shortsighted.

In the first instance, canceling the Agreed Framework would lead to a revisiting of the 1994 North Korean nuclear crisis that nearly ignited a second Korean War. The accord averted such a conflict by fashioning together an international organization that is responsible for replacing North

1998년 11월, 미 의회는 전
국방장관인 윌리엄 페리를 새
대북정책관리자로 임명했다.
최근에 발견된 북한의 지하시설
사찰을 통해 평양의 핵무기
프로그램의 부활인지를 확인하는
것, 즉 1994 미-북 동의서가
위배되었는지를 판단하는 것이
그의 임무이다. 워싱턴의 주목을
끌기 위해 극단정책을 취하던
북한의 과거행적에 비추어 볼 때
현재의 위기도 그 습관적 행위의
한 형태라 할 수 있다. 이번 경우,
김정일 측은 그 동의서에 따른
중유분반 요구량의 따르지 않고
있는 미국에 대해 반박하고 있는
것이다. 미국은 요구량의 오심만
톤의 중유에 반해 지금까지
북한으로 39만 톤 밖에 전달하지
않았다.

최근의 지하시설에 관한
의회의 검토 중, 공화당원들은 1994
동의서에 반대하여 미국이 이
동의서에 관여하지 않기를
주창했다. 이 요구는 무책임하고
근시적인 것이다.

첫째, 동의서를 취소하는 것은 제
2차 한국전쟁을 일으킬 뻔한
1994년 북한 핵 위험사건을
재발시킬 것이다. 위기 극복책의
일편으로, 이 동의서는 북한의
과거 핵 프로그램을 두 개의
새로운 핵 반응기로 대치 할
국제가구를 설립하기로 하였다.
새로운 핵 반응기는 홀쭉 적은
Korea's past nuclear program with two new modern nuclear reactors. In doing so, this international body — the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) — is effectively removing North Korea's ability to build a nuclear weapons arsenal as the new reactors will produce significantly less amounts of plutonium required for a nuclear warhead. Moreover, the new reactors will be under close international monitoring and verification.

Since the 1994 agreement, remarkable progress has been achieved towards realizing the ultimate goal of a nuclear weapons-free North Korea. Indeed, in early 1998, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) — the UN body responsible for safeguarding against the conversion of peaceful nuclear energy programs into weapons development projects — confirmed that North Korea had shut down its graphite-moderated reactor and ceased construction of two larger ones. More importantly, it verified that the 8,000 spent fuel rods previously removed from North Korea's sole operating reactor had been canned and were ready for shipment abroad. The significance of this event was that the primary source of plutonium for nuclear weaponry had been secured, marking, in essence, the beginning of a nuclear free zone on the Korean peninsula.

In addition to being reckless, Congress's call for the Agreed Framework's demise is severely myopic as an American abrogation of the accord could reverse the advances recently realized in inter-Korean relations. While there have been bumps in the road since the signing of the agreement — with North Korean submarine incursions into South Korean waters and North Korea's missile test over Japan — inter-Korean relations overall have benefited greatly as the agree-

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* Subject to IAEA safeguards as of May 1992 pursuant to North Korea's obligations under the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT); future application of safeguards uncertain.

** Under IAEA safeguards pursuant to NPT obligations and a bilateral U.S.-North Korea-IAEA agreement.

The image contains a map with labels indicating key locations such as Yongbyon, Taechon, Paksan, and others. The map is used to illustrate the nuclear facilities and activities in the Korean Peninsula. The map is labeled with geographical names and some key notes about nuclear reactor construction and facility locations.

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The text continues discussing the implications of the Agreed Framework and its impact on nuclear proliferation. It mentions the ongoing challenges and the need for continued monitoring and verification to ensure that North Korea adheres to the terms of the agreement.
남북한 양국이 이러한
목표를 달성하는 데에 있어서 큰
역할을 맡고 있는 기구는
KEDO이다. 이 기구를 통해서야,
동의서에 의한 남북한 간의 전례
없는 의사 전달과 협력이
이어지는 것이다. 다시 말해,
이 교괄과 유대는 동의서 이행은
남북한의 협력에 의해서만
가능하다는 점을 내포하고 있다.
동의서 상에 평양 측이 남북한
대화를 재개해야 한다는 구절이
있기는 하지만, 그것을 강요하는
면은 없다.
그러나, 북한의 새
혁대적 원자로의 안전을
도모하는 목적 달성에는
서울측의 도움이 절대적이기
때문에, 남북 양국 간의 대응이
어떠할 지는 설명이 필요 없다.
이것은 서울 측이 새 원자로 건설
비용 중 70%를 부담하는 것뿐만
아니라 한국전력회사가 원자로
제작 관리 전반에 책임을 진다는
사실에 근거한 가정이다.

북한 측은 동의서에
있어서 서울 측의 협력 없이는
북한의 혁신에 필수적인 새
원자로 건설이 불가능하다는
것을 잘 알고 있다. 결론적으로,
북한은 김대중 정부와 협력하는
것 외에는 별다른 대응책이 없다.
따라서, 남북한 관계 향상 면에
있어서 이 동의서는 북한의
행동에 강력한 영향을 가하고
있다.

이 동의서의 또 다른
중요성은 미국과 남한이 함께
대북정책의 방향을 설명했다는
것이다. 이 동의서는 이제부터
김정일 정부와 적극적으로
교류한다는 것을 진술하고 있다.
이러한 정책은 북한을 더욱 더
건설적이고 신중한 방향으로
조종한다는 의도를 갖고 있다.

미국과 남한은 북한이
핵무기 프로그램을 끝낼 것을
강요하고 있지만, 분명
그렇게 할 것을 유도하고 있다.
In a practical sense, the sunshine approach is laying the foundation for a reuniﬁed Korea, the reality of which is not too far in the future. Cognizant of both the enormous costs borne by the former West Germany when it essentially absorbed its eastern counterpart, and the reality that South Korea would not be able to repeat such an economic and social feat, especially in the midst of a debilitating ﬁnancial crisis, the Kim Dae Jung government is using the Agreed Framework as an instrument of stability. The Blue House (the Korean version of the White House in Kwanghwamun) hopes that with stability will come the prospect for the utilization of private sector investment — largely South Korean in origin — to build up North Korea’s economic infrastructure to a suﬃcient level required for a smooth reuniﬁcation. This would, in eﬀect, facilitate the much sought after “soft-landing.” The recent tourism deal between Chung Ju Yong, the Hyundai chaebol founder, and Kim Jong Il, constitutes a landmark agreement that will further open the door between the long-divided Koreans.

Let there be no doubt that what has facilitated this constructive environment is the Agreed Framework. To cancel the accord over a hole in the ground, albeit a very large hole, would sacriﬁce the only bridge that enables Pyongyang, Seoul, Tokyo, and Washington to cooperate and to work together towards a common end. While it is prudent to investigate this suspect nuclear site, it is foolhardy to draw the sweeping conclusion that it is a resumption of North Korea’s nuclear weapons program. At the moment, the true purpose of the site is very much unclear. If, after the planned U.S. inspection or “visit,” as it is being termed in Washington, the evidence conﬁrms that the site was indeed set-up for prohibited nuclear activity, efforts to address this violation of the Agreed Framework would be meritied. Until that time, the accord should remain the primary engagement instrument in South Korea’s and the U.S.’s approach to North Korea.

John S. Park is a Ph.D. Candidate at Cambridge University and is a 1998 - 99 Research Fellow at Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government.

이러한 점으로 볼 때, 미국과 남한 양국은 “나그네의 결코를 벗기는데 뜻은 거센 바람이 아닌 파스한 햇빛이다”라는 중국 속담에 따라 행동하고 있는 것이다(김대중의 북포용 정책 역시 이에 근거한 것이다).

현실적 측면에서, 이 북포용 정책은 그리 열지 않은 한국 통일의 기초가 될 것이다. 전서독이 동독을 흡수할 때 부담한 거액의 비용과, 남한이 전과 같은 경제적, 사회적 위험이 달성하기 어려울 것이라는 현실로 봐도 때, 김대중 정부는 이 동의서를 안정을 기한 도구로 사용하고 있는 것으로 보인다. 안정을 통해 사적인 투자를 활성화시켜 원활한 통일에 필요한 북한의 경제적발전을 기한다는 것이 청와대의 바람이다. 결과적으로 이것은 그토록 바라던 ‘연락통’을 불러올 것이다. 최근의 정주영과 김정일 간의 관광거래는 오랫동안 근절되어 있던 남북간의 확대적 교류의 문을 열어주었다.

확실히 이 모든 정정적 환경 뒤에는 1994 동의서가 있다. 아직 배경의 커다란 홍점 위에서 동의를 취소한다는 것은 남북한, 일본, 그리고 미국간의 협력에 의한 유일한 교류를 희생시키는 행위이다.

지하시설 사찰이 신중한 대처인 것은 사실이다. 하지만 이것이 북한 핵무기 프로그램의 재발이라고 단정짓는 것은 매우 어렵석은 일이다. 현재, 이 지대의 목적은 불분명하다. 만약 미국의 사찰 후 이 지대가 실제 급자되어 있는 핵무기를 재기 시키려는 것으로 확인된다면 북한이 이 동의서를 위반했다는 사실의 증명이 필요하다. 그 시점 이전까지는 이 동의서는 남한과 미국의 대북정책의 주된 도구로 남아 있어야 한다.
Last December Kim Dae Jung was elected President of the Republic of Korea (ROK) amidst the most severe economic crisis that had gripped Korea, as well as other parts of East and Southeast Asia, in decades. Kim won with 40.8% of the vote against the ruling Grand National Party (GNP) candidate Lee Hoi Chang’s 38.7% and 19.2% for Rhee In Je, a breakaway candidate from the GNP. Elected with this relatively narrow margin of victory in coalition with the far more conservative Kim Jong Pil and his United Liberal Democrats (ULD), President Kim was faced with the enormous challenge of leading Korea through “the worst crisis since the Korean War,” as the economic crisis was often called, restoring economic stability and progress to Korea while simultaneously promoting greater democracy, positive relations with the major powers, and a policy of engagement with North Korea. So far Kim’s administration has weathered the crisis better than many observers had expected, and although the worst of Korea’s economic difficulties may now be over, serious challenges still lie ahead.

Kim Dae Jung’s career has been an extraordinary example of political,
and physical, survival. Born to a family of modest means on an island off the coast of South Cholla Province, Kim was educated in the mainland city of Mokpo and was first elected to the National Assembly in 1961. After the military coup instigated by Park Chung Hee that year, Kim became a leading figure of opposition to successive military governments and probably the champion of Korean democracy best known to the outside world. Kim survived several attempts on his life, including a celebrated kidnapping from his hotel room in Tokyo by Korean intelligence agents in 1973 and a death sentence handed down by the Chun Doo Hwan government in 1980. Kim’s execution was narrowly averted by the intervention of the US government, and Kim spent the next few years in exile in the United States, residing at Harvard.

Kim ran unsuccessfully for the presidency in 1971, 1987, and 1992, before joining forces with Kim Jong Pil, the current Prime Minister. Kim’s election marks a milestone in Korean democracy, the first time a candidate from the opposition party has won the presidency (Kim Young Sam was elected in 1992 after he joined the ruling coalition of the Roh Tae Woo government). The current administration’s challenges lie in four major areas: economic recovery, democratic consolidation, North-South relations, and relations with the major powers in Northeast Asia.

THE ECONOMY

The ROK may have reached the bottom of its economic crisis, but difficult times still lie ahead. After peaking at 7.6% in July, the unemployment rate dropped slightly to 7.3% in September, well short of the 9-10% predicted by gloomier analyses but still historically unprecedented in a country with little of the economic and social infrastructure for absorbing large numbers of the unemployed. Organized labor has been more amenable to the reforms put forth to address the economic crisis than many expected, but
labor disputes remain a potential problem. The restructuring of the major business conglomerates or chaebol, the so-called "Big Deal", has yet to show many results. In short, despite the likelihood of another year or two of recession, the Korean economy seems to have stabilized. Whether and how much positive economic growth will be regained remains to be seen.

DEMONSTRATIONS

Democracy in Korea has come a long way since the mass demonstrations of the 1980s that helped bring down the military government. Kim has been a major advocate of greater and more substantial democracy in Korean political life, and he fulfilled his idea of “participatory democracy” shortly after coming to office through the creation of a “Tripartite Committee” to address the economic crisis, consisting of representatives from labor, management, and government (No-sa-chong). A persistent champion of human rights and democracy in Korea and in Asia as a whole, Kim is also a pragmatist who has to hold together a diverse ruling coalition and deal with an often fractious National Assembly. While defections from the GNP have helped consolidate the ruling party’s majority in the Assembly, Korean politics is still beset by regionalism and “personalism”, or coalescing around individuals rather than policy issues. And despite the relaxation of restrictions on political freedoms and the release of many political prisoners through an amnesty earlier this year, the National Security Law - which allows for the arrest without due process of those suspected of aiding or praising North Korea - remains an impediment to genuine political openness and free public discourse.

NORTH-SOUTH RELATIONS

The Kim Dae Jung administration has advocated a policy of engagement with North Korea more actively than any previous South Korean government, expressed in Kim’s “Sunshine Policy” of greater contact with the North. While North Korea has so far not shown much direct response to the South’s overtures, it has agreed to an unprecedented multi-billion dollar tourism deal with the Hyundai corporation, which saw its first fruits in a luxury cruise to the Kumgang mountains in mid-November. For perhaps the first time, ROK policy toward North Korea is running ahead of the US, and the biggest impediment to “Sunshine Policy” may not be the Korean National Assembly but the US Congress, where the 1994 US-North Korean agreement to halt North Korean nuclear weapons production in exchange for supplying energy to the North

보이지만, 앞으로 얼마나만큼의 경제발전을 이룩할 수 있든지히는 미지수이다.

민주주의
군사정부의 종말을 불러온 1980년대의 대모 이래로 한국의 민주주의는 오랜 역사의 길을 걸어왔다. 김대중은 한국 정치에 있어서 더욱 더 활성되고 현실적인 민주주의 움호로서 대통령 취임 직후 노사정 위원회를 구성해 자신의 "참여민주주의" 이론을 실현시켰다. 한국 뿐 아닌 아시아 전체의 인간권리와 민주주의의 승리자인 동시에 김대중은 여러 지배층을 다스리고 자주 분열되는 의회를 다스려야 할 실제주의자이다. 한나라당의 결정이 의회에 있어서 다수여당을 확립하는 대가를 한 것은 사실이지만, 한국 정치는 여전히 정책문제보다는 지역 감정이나 개인적 관계에 의해 좌우되고 있는 게 현실이다. 또한 정치적 규제의 완화와 올해 초에 이루어진 정치범들의 사면에도 불구하고 ‘보관법(북한을 득거나 찬양하는 행위에는 특정한 절차 없이 체포 가능)’은 진정한 정치적 자유와 자유로운 의사표현을 방해하고 있다.

남북관계
북한과의 접촉 증가를 위한 북포용 정책에서 볼 수 있듯이 김대중 정부는 에전의 여느 정부 보다도 훨씬 더 활발한 남북 접촉을 움호하고 있다. 아직 직접적 응답을 하고 있는지 알지 않지만, 11월 중순에 금강산 관광의 결실을 맺어 북한과 현대그룹은 수 천억에
is under serious strain.

RELATIONS WITH THE MAJOR POWERS

By the end of this first year in office Kim Dae Jung will have had summit meetings with the heads of the United States, Japan, and China. His reception abroad, especially in the US, has been overwhelmingly positive. However, it is in Japan that Kim's foreign policy has shown its most visible success so far. Kim's meeting with Japanese Prime Minister Oguchi signaled a move toward greater economic, political, and security partnership between the two countries, and the Japanese Emperor's expression of "deep sorrow" for the Japanese colonization of Korea went some way toward mollifying Korean animosity toward Japan. Though many outstanding issues remain, the Kim administration's decision to lower barriers against Japanese cultural imports and the continued close cooperation in Korean-Japanese co-hosting of the 2002 World Cup are further indications of reduced tensions in this perennially difficult relationship.

CONCLUSION

Kim Dae Jung was elected in extraordinarily difficult times to see Korea into the twenty-first century. Kim's main concerns have long been democracy, human rights, and Korean unification: managing an economic crisis is probably not the first task he expected to take on as President. Nevertheless, Kim's administration has weathered the economic and political storms of the past year in reasonably good shape, and Kim remains a popular President. The reality of "globalization," a slogan invented by the previous administration, has hit Korea particularly hard, and Korea under Kim Dae Jung will continue to struggle to find its place in the world over the next few years.

달하는 관광사업에 동의했다. 아마도 최초로 대한민국의 대북정책이 미국을 앞세우고 있는 것 같다. 북한의 핵무기 생산중단을 미국이 강요하는 대신 연료를 제공하기로 한 1994년 북-미조약 체결의 혼선으로 인해, 북포용정책의 최대 결과들인 남한이 아닌 미국이다.

강대국과의 관계

취임 첫 해동안 김대중은 미국, 일본, 그리고 중국의 대담을 가질 것이다. 외국, 특히 미국의 김대중에 대한 반응은 긍정적이나, 일본에서의 김대중 외교는 획기적이라 할 만큼의 성과를 보였다. 일본 수상 오구치와의 회담은 양국간의 경제, 정치, 보안상에 있어 향상된 관계를 불러올 것이며 일본이 한국의 "깊은 한"이라고 인정해 한국의 적대적 대일감정이 어느 정도 누그러지리라 믿는다. 김대중 정부의 일본문화 수임규제 완화와 2002년 월드컵 공동 주최도 한일 간의 긴장감 해소에 큰 역할을 할 것이다.

결론

김대중은 매우 어려운 시점에서 대통령으로 당선되었다. 민주주의, 인권존중, 그리고 남북통일이 주관성있었던 김대중에게 아마도 경제 위기 극복이 대통령으로서의 첫 임무가 될 것이라고는 예상치 못했을 것이다. 그럼에도 불구하고 김대중 정부는 경제 사회적 위기의 폭풍우를 제일 잘 이겨냈고 김대중의 인기도 여전하다. 전 정부가 강조한 "세계화"의 현실이 한국을 강타했다. 앞으로 몇 년 동안 김대중 정부 하의 한국은 세계에서의 위치를 찾으려는 노력을 계속할 것이다.
Life of an IDOL

BY PERRY AN

Glen Choi: An Inside Perspective
"I WAS THE FIRST EVER TO BREAK THE BARRIER OF TEENAGE STARS... IT'S A FACT," says Glen Choi, former lead singer of the music group Idol. He refers to the recent breakthrough in Korea of teenage singers—Idol, the first teenage singing group in Korea, emerged in the fall of 1995. The young, innovative group attained nation-wide fame with its single, "Bow Wow," which reached number one on the Korean music charts in May 1996. Idol was comprised of two young, energetic individuals, Glen Choi and Mackeno Lee, who no longer work in the entertainment business. Choi agreed to an interview in which he revealed the ins and outs of entertainment in Korea based on his experiences of stardom and disappointments as a professional singer. The following is based on his accounts from that interview.

Choi's interest in entertainment was sparked by seemingly-innocent observations made in the eighth grade as a Korean-American residing in Seoul. "I saw how much of a presence entertainers had on the people around them, and I wanted that attention," said Choi. But his mother, the famed actress, Naomi Choi, initially discouraged Choi from acting upon this desire. Said Choi, "At first, she didn't want me to go into entertainment because she had been an actress during the early '70s, and she knew there was corruption within. Also, she wanted me to focus on school work." However, perhaps inspired by Choi's extraordinary desire to become a singer, Choi's mother in the end supported her son's pursuit, and so the two set out to look for a singing partner for Choi.

At the end of the summer of 1995, that partner, Mackeno Lee, who was originally from Brazil, was discovered at a Denny's located five minutes from Apgujeong-Dong, a popular area for young people in Seoul. Said Choi, "While my brother was eating, he noticed that my partner was using English. He walked over and asked him if he wanted to become a singer. And the rest is history." And so that is how Lee and Choi became acquainted with another. But how did the two get into the entertainment business?

Connections always help, don't they? Choi was familiar with a former singer named Hwang Hyun Min (referred to here as Hwang), of the group Zam. Over a casual game of pool, Hwang asked Choi if they could meet some time to "talk." It was during that talk that Hwang asked Choi if he wanted to sing as a professional. "Of course I was surprised. I thought at the time that it was impossible for someone like me to become one."

Nonetheless, events began to unfold as Hwang's manager, a man in his mid-forties named Lee Ho Yun, became Choi's manager. "My manager told me that he could make it happen." But things were not always peaceful between Choi and Lee, although a good relationship would be necessary for Idol to become a hit. Said Choi, "He was a true dictator... In the end, he doesn't care about anything but himself." Choi talked of the many disagreements that he had with Lee, starting from the selection of a name for the group: "It wasn't my idea and seriously, I don't like the name. I had a lot of suggestions that were turned down by my manager." Lee found Choi to be disrespectful, and Choi perceived that these disagreements were due to his not following "the Korean way." The former singer admitted, "I objected to everything."

The trio of Choi, Mackeno Lee, and Lee Ho Yun started working together furiously in the fall of 1995 on an innovative album that would cater to the hearts of the younger population of Korea. Idol was on a mission, and to accomplish that mission, its members had to work diligently: [I remember] non-stop work sometimes going on
for over 24 hours—no sleep except inside the car [when traveling].” Sometimes, said Choi, he was working 130 hours per week.

But all these efforts paid off for Idol in the first quarter of 1996. Starting with their first live television appearance on January 4, 1996 on SBS (Seoul Bang Song or Seoul Broadcasting Station), the future of Idol looked promising. “My first live [performance] was where I thought I was going to faint,” said Choi, who sang “Bow Wow” at that performance. “So many people there in front of me ... At first they were silent, seeing if it was real. Then they went wild.” Other Korean entertainers such as Shim Eun Ah and Hong Roikki made encouraging remarks to Choi and Lee: “You guys are going to be big. I can feel it,” recounts Choi.

There were separate people who wrote the lyrics, composed the music, and choreographed the dancing, explained Choi. He and his partner just had to follow orders along the way, something that many may not consider so glamorous. However, said Choi, “Putting so much effort into something and seeing the end result is just an awesome feeling.” That was what mattered to Choi.

Idol saw its popularity skyrocket over the course of the next few months, and by May 1996, its hit single, “Bow Wow,” had reached number one status in the Korean music charts. Idol’s first album was well-known to a large segment of the younger population (I myself remember), and the future looked bright for the young group. Choi reflected on the moment of glory when he was to be crowned as the number one singer in Korea: “I was making history in Korean entertainment. 56,000 people had gathered to see this event just about to unravel ... I was just honored to be in that position.” Choi said, “The whole waiting room was in chaos with directors searching for people and stage coordinators looking for props and clothes.” Again, Choi felt as if he were going to faint.

However, there were significant investments and setbacks on the road to attaining the nation-wide fame in May. “I had a bad moment almost every week. Fights with the clothes coordinator, with the manager, having to wake up after 30 minutes of sleep ... not being able to sleep at home for over two weeks, always eating ramen if even that,” stated Choi.

Choi shared the financial workings of his experiences in the entertainment business. “3.5 for me, 3.5 for my partner, and 3 [for the manager],” said Choi, translating to 35 percent of the earnings to Choi, 35 percent to his partner, and 30 percent to their manager. This sounds like a pretty fair deal, right? But, said Choi, “He [the manager] took almost everything, except for concert appearances where we got [most of the] money.”

What is more intriguing is the bookkeeping of Idol’s financial earnings. “Record sales and stuff like that were not reported to me and my mom. I didn’t have a set contract,” said Choi. But he explained these unusual circumstances: “Nothing was signed because my mother didn’t want me [to be] tied down.” And so Choi was indeed at the financial mercy of his manager, although this arrangement always gave Choi the option of ending his singing career for studying purposes. “My school work was more important,” said Choi, who knew that he could leave the entertainment business whenever he wanted.

The most significant setback and disappointment in Choi’s career came with the realization that there was indeed real corruption in the entertainment world. Choi was very frank about his disillusionment: “Seeing my anxiety, my manager walked over to me. I guessed he was going to give me a little pep talk ... In the midst of all the pandemonium, something my manager said caught my ear. ‘Don’t worry, I took
care of it with all the producers.' I knew exactly what he meant when I looked into his eyes. He had set it up with his producer cronies to have us win. He gave me a wink and left me with my thoughts," said Choi.

"I was aware now that everything organized for this big event seemed worthless, a deception. How could I feel the overwhelming joy of being the number one singer in Korea if it was just a setup?"

In addition, Choi hypothesized that his single could have been number one for three months as opposed to the three weeks during which it boasted that title: "The broadcasting companies didn't want some young teenager being number one on the charts because it reflects society... You know how conservative it is. I would have been [at number one with my single] for three months."

Despite the apparent corruption, however, Choi did enjoy some of the "kicks" of being a popular singer. He especially remembers the attention of thousands of young female teenagers. "I thought it was great, I loved the attention. Millions of harassing phone calls, letters... I remember when I would pick up my cell phone and when I knew it was a fan, I would stay quiet. Then the fan would keep begging me to say something but even for 30 minutes, I wouldn't say a word. I just left the phone in the corner of the room until that person hung up."

But with the affectionate, almost ridiculously worshipful attention came the negative attention that was sometimes too much. "There were letters written in blood that were really bad to look at. It made me sick," said Choi.

Idol's second album, entitled "Fantastic Experience," was released in September 1996, seven months after the first. It was also a success, although not as convincingly as their debut album. Other albums recorded by Idol include a Christmas album and a Remi album, both also released in 1996.

The group disbanded in February 1997. "School was my main goal. It was my decision to disband. I really wanted to go back to a normal life," stated Choi. On his life as a student and a singer, he recalls: "The days during my sophomore year where I had to work [as a singer] and go to school were horrible." And so the "idol" that grew to be so popular in young Korea was cast down in early 1997.

After these series of events, Choi's life returned to normalcy as he entered high school. There were times of depression and anxiety because of the absence of the glamour that had once been so central to his life, but he has survived admirably. Choi is now a senior at the Seoul International School, in Seoul, Korea, and he will be pursuing a college education in the near future. He is in the process of sending out applications to colleges and universities in the United States.

Idol was an innovation and breakthrough that happened to occur in the right place and at the right time. Historically, the group was the first of its kind in Korea in that the singers were only of middle school age. In addition, the background of Choi (from the U.S.) and his partner (from Brazil) is particularly noteworthy. One could not help but theorize that Idol paved the way for the slew of young singers like H.O.T. and S.E.S. that have dominated Korean pop charts in recent years.

I asked Choi as a concluding question what he learned from his experiences as a singer. He responded accordingly: "I learned how different types of people operate, how people can manipulate and be manipulated. And the less you say, the more of an advantage you have." I was surprised by the cynical response.

But Choi added, "It has its moments and it was all definitely worth it." Perhaps that's all that matters sometimes.*
"The proceeding was pretty open, but the result was sort of a foregone conclusion. The only question was whether I would be actually imprisoned or given a suspended sentence."

The year was 1977, and Paik Nak-Chung, a professor of English literature at Seoul National University, was under arrest for violating Korea’s National Security Law prohibiting communication with communist nations. Paik’s violation: he had published a compilation of travel reports and academic articles on China — a “communist” nation — written by a stellar array of Western liberals and Japanese scholars including figures like John Kenneth Galbraith. Within a span of ten months, Paik was arrested, indicted, and convicted by a district court which sentenced him to one year in prison. Paik appealed, and though his conviction was upheld in appellate court, his punishment was reduced to a one-year suspended sentence. Asked how he managed to avoid receiving a harsher sentence, he said, “even dictators have to consider public opinion.” His case was well-publicized by friends both at home and abroad, and among his vocal supporters were the original contributors to his volume, prominent and unquestionably anti-communist Westerners who were astonished that their writings could be classified as dangerous communist propaganda.

1970’s Korea was a dangerous time to be considered a dissident by the military dictatorship of Park Chung-Hee. According to Amnesty International, many dissidents targeted by the Park regime remain imprisoned even today, victims of “a consistent pattern of illegal arrest, incommunicado detention, torture and coerced confessions.” Yet by 1977, Paik had already gained a reputation as being one of Korea’s most outspoken intellectuals against the Park government. Frequently subject to arrest by the Korean Central Intelligence Agency and the military police, perhaps his most dangerous moment came in 1974, when Paik became the lone professor at SNU to sign a statement of protest against the newly-created yusin constitution granting the president unlimited powers. He was asked to resign from his position as professor, and when he refused, he was subsequently fired by the Ministry of
Education in a highly publicized affair.

Born in Taegu in 1938, Paik graduated from Brown University with a split major in English and German, receiving his M. A. in English in 1960. Returning to Korea to perform his military service, he came back to the United States in 1962 to begin his doctoral work, but as a result of periodic interruptions in his study, he didn’t receive his Ph. D. in English literature from Harvard University until 1972, writing his dissertation on the novels of D. H. Lawrence.

The interruptions in his graduate studies were hardly times of inactivity or idleness, for they were periods in which Paik’s vigorous energy and breadth of interests began to bear fruit. In 1963, Paik founded the quarterly journal *Ch’Ang-jak guwa bee-py’eong*, a name loosely translated as “Creation and Criticism,” in which there appeared original literature as well as literary criticism, social criticism, and political commentary. Today, *Ch’Ang-jak guwa bee-py’eong* is a leading literary publication in Korea, having published works by writers like Shin Kyeong-Nim, Ko Un, and Hwang Seok-Yeong, and it has been the recipient of several prestigious awards.

When asked what motivated him to start a magazine, Paik responded, “At the time in Korea, quarterlies were hardly known. I felt the need to establish a standard somewhat higher than what the monthlies were maintaining, so that was one reason why I decided to do a quarterly. Also, I wanted to contribute something to our literature, but not strictly confined to *belles lettres*... My notion of literature was that the truer to literature you get, the wider it spreads out to everything else. And especially at the time, and still [now], Korea has been facing serious historical and social problems... At the time, I felt we should address those, so this is a literary magazine with a social concern, so to speak.”

He continued, “From the very first, we’ve had this struggle against military dictatorships. Opposition to dictatorships, but also a concern for the well-being of the majority of the population... the ordinary people. And also we were specifically concerned about the reunification of the country.”
The contributors to his journal provided a sharply critical commentary on the contemporary social situation, with writers often expressing “radical” opinions. One especially traumatic experience — the Kwangju Massacre of 1980 — left an imprint upon the Korean national consciousness which caused a sharp political radicalization in the 1980's, culminating in the arrests and trials of Presidents Chun Doo-Hwan and Roh Tae-Woo in 1995 for their involvement in the bloodshed. Paik notes that current literature provides ample evidence that “Kwangju is not a thing of the past, [but] still [remains] a part of the contemporary experience.”

Issues like unemployment and homelessness have become especially important in the wake of Korea's economic crisis, and Paik continues to advocate a greater social awareness of these problems. Regarding the recent Hyundai venture into Keumkangsan in North Korea, for example, Paik said that “Though he supports Hyundai’s idea ‘in principle,’ it is the duty of scholars and intellectuals to examine what kind of money is being transferred to North Korea. Should North Korea be allowed to reap enormous profits off Hyundai’s venture while workers are being laid off from Hyundai factories in the South?” Paik has devoted his life to raising and discussing important questions like: “What is going on?” and “How can we make things better?” He has gained both fame and respect from his colleagues for his willingness to ask these tough questions on important social issues.

Harvard University Professor of Korean History Carter Eckert writes, “In a country with a highly literate population, where writers and scholars are widely read and highly regarded, Professor Paik stands out as a literary and social critic of immense respect and influence. He is learned, thoughtful, and civic-minded, somehow managing to combine nationalism and cosmopolitanism, intellectual reflection and political engagement in an interesting and judicious mix that defies simple categorization.”

Paik is characteristically much more modest about his achievements, saying, “I was a student of literature, I love literature, I wanted to work in the literary world, which I have done, and whatever I have done in the so-called non literary fields really has grown naturally out of my concern with literature... My notion of literature is that it’s something important in itself, but the truer you are to literature, the more concerned you become with everything else. Because literature is concerned with everything in life.”

An important lesson of Paik’s accomplishments may be the way his life exemplifies his firm conviction that it is the duty of intellectuals to address social issues. That he can use his love for literature as a motivation for his vocal social conscience inspires all of us — no matter what our fields of study — to do the same.

Paik is currently in residence at Harvard as a Harvard-Yenching Visiting Research Scholar. He will be returning to Korea next summer. •

1 See the Amnesty International article at http://www.amnesty.org/ailib/aipub/1998/ASA/32501598.htm
Untitled

Walking in the sun, matching watermarks in our skin.
I step into the shade, seven shadows arise circling my unrequited,
Its eyes suck me in, its confidence predatory.
Everything about it I hate, its color, its bloated size, its deformity.
I strike, impact, the release is gratifying.
But they are persistent, suffocating.
So easy to give in, surrender your self.
They surround her, engulf her, consume her,
I scream, “Fight! Fight for your self.”
I lunge at one of them, sinking my teeth in its head I am so desperate.
Suddenly they disperse, peeling themselves away like rotten skin off aged bones.
At the core, nothing but digested waste.
Lost within the shadows, the watermark invisible in the darkness.
I step into the light, ripping the lingering shadows away.
Suddenly noticing for the first time the sparkle in her eyes as the seven shadows covered her and the possible superficiality of the mark.

Jay Mok '99 is an Economics major living in Eliot House. He is planning on a career in finance.
The wall was speaking to me again, nudging me awake from my deep sleep. With my bed pushed up against it, the cool white surface held captive the voices that came from the other side, as if it had absorbed them in order to feed them directly into my unconscious mind. I tried to go back to sleep, but the voices were insistent, demanding to be heard. My twelve-year-old mind had been trained by experience to regard the voices as a dream, and return to the quiet safety of sleep. But this time, the voices were just a bit too harried, the strain in Mom's voice heightened as she intoned her grief with rapid fluctuations in pitch. Dad's voice seemed defeated and sad. He sounded uncharacteristically human, parental even, as if he had finally surrendered to feelings beyond his everyday anger. They spoke Korean, of course, and although I could easily dull my senses and translate their Korean into a meaningless jumble of sounds, my brother Joshua's English cut across the indistinct murmur and pierced my hazy mind. No matter how comatose I was, his deep voice always wormed its way through my subconscious and stayed there. "Fuck, I can't deal with this," Joshua said. The disembodied voices behind the wall grew clearer pulling me out of my drugged state. I got out of bed in search of them.

* "Mom, what happened?" I asked, not really wanting an answer.

"Nothing, nothing for you to worry about. Go back to bed, honey," mom replied in shaky Korean.

"Your brother, the Psycho, is at church, and we have to bring him back home," Joshua answered for her spitting out the words.

"He's your brother too, you know." I said.

"Yeah, I know, Psycho's my brother, too," he said with a smirk. "Go take a shower, Stinky," and then he whispered, "take care of mom.'

Joshua and Dad left soon afterwards leaving me to cope with a hysterical mother. I took one look at Mom who was asking some unseen person, "Why did this happen to me? What did I do wrong as a mother?" I knew better than to interrupt her dramatic scene, so I retreated back into my room without saying a word and buried myself under my covers. Burrowing my head into the mattress, I tried to reach that place of sleep. The years of practice enabled me to easily get there, as if in a self-induced trance, and in that little world, I was powerful enough to create my own reality. Once there, I stirred the voices behind the wall and the image of mother until they attained that thick, syrupy consistency of dreams and became a swirl of color and sound, with the edges bleeding into each other. Only in this form, could I handle what I had seen and heard, as sleep transformed the incident into another dream.

I continued to dream in this way for another six years. Episodes and voices woke me now and then, but I always could conjure the magic spell needed to disconnect myself from them. A fist punched through a door, chairs hurled through the air, a fully-grown man sobbing in daylight—these images lost their reality and became blurry stills from a long-forgotten film, or if I was lucky enough, the memories lost their
WIDENING HIS EYES, HE'D GRAVELY SAY, "YES, I AM GOD." THEN, TO EASE THE TENSION, HE'D FLASH HIS BOYISH, TOOTHY GRIN, HIS EYES CRINKLING AT THE CORNERS, LOOKING LIKE A FRESH-FACED TEENAGER. MY KUN OH-BBAH WAS THIRTY-ONE YEARS OLD, AND HE STILL GOT CARDED.

visual form and became inky pages from a novel.

*  
The summer after graduating from high school, I lost my power to transmute memories into dreams. No longer was forgetting so easy. This was mainly because of my brother Joshua, who painted himself as a Jesus Christ who suffered so that I might grow up happy. But it was my oldest brother Ben who was Jesus in the literal sense.

His smile was innocent, boyish, hinting of a simple mind, but really betraying the tangled paths of his thoughts. Ben was thirty-one years old, living off of government checks for the mentally ill. He was a mild schizophrenic, but he kept his delusions of being Jesus to himself and his family. He wasn't a threat to society at all. He was always between part-time jobs, but he lived comfortably enough. He watched movies, played computer games, read the newspaper. He was living the good life, an eternal boyhood filled with fun, food, and plenty of sleep. But his only friends were his family, and family members never make good friends.

"But Ben Oh-Bbah, why would Jesus come back as a short Korean man who collects Star Wars memorabilia? The Bible says he'd return with hosts of angels to Mount Olive in Jerusalem, not to the ghettos of Detroit," I would say like a Pharisee.

"The king first came as a Jewish baby born in a manger. The second time, he could come back as a Korean baby born in a shitty apartment. Maybe I'm just waiting until the time I can reveal myself to the world." He calmly retorted. "And also, Lisa, Luke Skywalker was the new hope for a universe in need of a savior Jedi-knight," he added just to get on my nerves.

I never felt comfortable around my big brother. He was thirteen years older than I, and we hardly ever talked. He was also the type of person that filled the room with an odd, tenebrous energy that put everyone on edge. Also, he was always a step behind. His stuttering was not the problem, but his thoughts stuttered as well in their illogical ordering. Because he was mostly alone, when he did speak, he spoke freely from the top of his mind, expressing exactly what just occurred in his mind, without bothering to edit with logic or sense. Thus, his comments jarred the flow of conversation and revealed his erratic thought process. Like feeble jabs in the dark, his thoughts were futile attempts at reaching reason.

But sometimes, he came out with these great lines like, "You know, I imagine hell being a very icy, cold, dark place, not at all hellfire and flames. After all, God turns his back on the damned, and you'd be in the shadow of God. Yeah, hell is cold and dark." Lines like these came out of nowhere while he was driving on the middle of the highway and I was gazing dully at the passing cars. I'd turn slowly to my brother saying in that patronizing tone reserved for the mad or young, "Okay, whatever you say. And you'd be the one to know, since you are God. Right, Ben-Oh Bbah." Widening his eyes, he'd gravely say, "Yes, I am God." Then, to ease the tension, he'd flash his boyish, toothy grin, his eyes crinkling at the corners, looking like a fresh-faced teenager. My Kun Oh-Bbah was thirty-one years-old, and he still got carded. He had discovered the fountain of youth that Vasco da Gama totally missed—believe you are God, then shall you be immortal.

Although we weren't close at all, I was pretty much his only friend. Dad was a painful memory he was trying to forget. Mom would only lecture him to get better, saying that schizophrenia was an illness that he could get rid of with the traditional Korean work ethic. And his only brother Joshua couldn't endure spending time with him. Their personalities bristled against each other, and they were at each
other’s throats. Besides the usual brotherly spite, their relationship was such because Joshua felt that he needed to compensate for his brother’s shortcomings with glorious success. Ben became the embodiment of this unbelievable pressure for Joshua. Thus, I was his healthiest, and sometimes only, human contact. But our relationship was that of casual acquaintances. It was very different from my relationship with my other brother.

Joshua was nine years older than I, and because Dad was too busy working, he became my surrogate father. However, he extended that role and became the ruling force in my life. He outlined my intellectual development, molding my mind with his choice of books and films and music. Creating me in his own image, he had given life and consequently gave himself the title of God. Naturally, I adored my brother, the purveyor of all the secrets of the universe. Joshua was charismatic, funny, tragic, brilliant, and at times, simply glamorous, which is strange for a guy, but he could pull off anything. Pompous and at the same time sensitive, he seemed to radiate the same energy that fueled dictators in conquering empires. His teachers had even dubbed him a “cult of personality.” I knew what everyone else knew, that Joshua was destined for greatness. The person who knew this the most was, of course, Joshua.

He had a beautiful Korean girlfriend in high school. She followed him to college, and even law school. Then after seven years of a tempestuous, painful romance that only Joshua could make beautiful, she left him, in search of someone saner and safer. The breakup stripped him of his powers. He lost his position in the heavens and became pathetically mortal. It was around this time that I too lost my magic powers of conjuring reality into dreams. Maybe there was a connection, some domino effect that knocked down first creator and then creation. Anyhow, I found myself with a broken god in my hands.

Joshua became embittered, shrunken, defeated at age twenty-five. He took time off from law-school and began getting therapy. Always in style, he also took the trendiest drugs on the market. Mom believed his break-down to be the effect of a broken heart, the loss of a first love. When Joshua would cry out his girlfriend’s name in his fitful sleep, Mom thought she understood all too well. After all, she still cried out in the middle of the night and at random points during the day for her first love. I could remember ever since I was a little girl that when Mom was washing dishes or reading a book, and she didn’t know I was watching, she’d call out softly, mournfully, “oh-bbah.” I thought she was calling for my uncle, but the tone seemed too foreign to my childish ears. I didn’t know then that oh-bbah also was a term of endearment for an older male friend, as well as brother. But Joshua didn’t think his breakdown was due to a break-up. That was too boring, too mundane. He needed more drama than that. No, this was only the catalyst, the trigger that opened his eyes to all the wranglings of his inner self. He discovered what a “fucked-up” person he was and took devilish glee in it. That summer, he lived in a den of iniquity, ate off a veritable hedonistic smorgasbord. Alcohol and women were the usual fare.

He would tell anyone his story, and he often did. He’d wrinkle his brow and peer into the listener’s eyes, displaying a face that mesmerized with its stark sincerity. He’d spin his tale of woe, working the story with the deftness of a skilled performer knowing just when and how to manipulate his audience. He performed with pizzazz and just enough dignity to lend him grace.

“I just ended a seven year relationship,” he’d say, “Practically a marriage, right? After that comes a period of a renewed self-discovery. After seven years in a painful marriage of co-dependency, I lost my true self. She sponged off of me and I was emotionally drained. And now that we’re no longer together, I’ve forgotten who I was before I gave up my soul to cushion hers. This is sort of a mid-life crisis, I guess, if you want to put it simply. I’ve shouldered my family burdens my whole life. I’ve been married, I’ve even raised a kid.” (He was referring to me.) “I’ve done everything, and now I need time to re-acquaint myself with myself. After I’ve had a bit of uninhibited fun, of course,” he’d end with a grin that clinched his delivery, leading the listener to believe that debauchery was the key to salvation, and that helping Joshua would only aid them in their own paths to paradise.

That summer was short, though, and he soon got tired from all the partying. He took a year off from law school and tutored the children of wealthy Koreans in their quest for the perfect SAT score. In the winter, he broke new ground in his therapy sessions and unearthed the root of his problem. His timing was perfect, of course. He lost all hope and became a broken man with a vendetta against the world just before my last summer before college, when I was preparing to say goodbye to my family and home. Little did I know then that he would sink in me memories that would not let me say goodbye.

That summer, he assumed the role of not God the father, but of God the Son. He was no longer Creator, but now the Savior, the sacrificial lamb. He played the role to perfection, except for one thing—he did not want to redeem himself or anybody else, for that matter.

One day, while I was chatting mindlessly about what I wanted to do
with my life, my airy dreams and expectations, he launched into his usual monologue: "Lisa, you don’t know anything about this family, do you? Damn, you are so sheltered. You didn’t grow up when Dad was really crazy. Then you went off to boarding school, ran away. Mom never told you all the shit. And now you’re running off again to college. Living a life of oblivion, not caring about anybody, being a privileged bitch." Joshua said.

I felt my “survivor guilt” like a mill about my neck. I felt cheap and unworthy because I was the protected one. ‘But they should have saved Joshua, not me. He’s the one destined for greatness. They should have sent me to the ovens.’ I played these lines from some T.V. movie I’d seen over and over again in my mind. I too had a flair for melodrama.

Joshua continued, “Dad’s a crazy fucker. He really screwed up Mom and Ben and me. He’s still living in war-time Korea, thinking everything’s gonna disappear and he has to grab at everything, never trusting anybody, clawing for survival. His mind is in a perpetual war-ravaged third world country. Living with him is like going to war, even... You can measure the damage by how long we’ve been with him. Mom’s suffered the most, of course. That’s why she’s fucking dazed all the time, she’s shell-shocked, reading her stupid Korean newspapers, believing in all that crap. She’s floating around all the time. Then there’s Ben, he’s like the infantry, down there hand to hand combat in the mud with the enemy. He turned out a psycho-fucker, thinking he’s God and all that shit.” Excited by his own creativity, he’d ride on the momentum of his thoughts, shooting out his bullets of truth with some maniacal glee knowing that he’s hitting target. “I’m like the marines, I get in the fray, fight like crazy, retreat, then tear into the war again. And you, Lisa... you’re like the damn coast guard. You see the war miles away on a radar screen, little green bleeps that mean nothing to you. You’re so unbelievably lucky and you don’t even realize it. That’s why you’re the emotionally healthy one. You don’t know anything, you spoiled brat.”

I knew I was spared the soldier’s war. I didn’t feel I deserved even to be girl-scout, but his speeches didn’t exactly make me feel consoled. The off-screen horrors multiplied in my imagination. What exactly happened? What’s he talking about? How much did my family actually suffer? Must I redeem everyone’s pain because I was the lucky one who survived?

In a defensive streak, I responded, “Hey, Josh Oh-Bbah, I may not have been there the whole time, but Dad was pretty crazy when I was growing up too.”

Joshua gave me a disparaging look, as I struggled to remember my childhood which seemed so empty, strangely barren of memories. Reaching my hand into that thick swirl that I had carefully created as my past, I groped for anything solid to grab onto, but the images had lost their form and I could not feel anything but the thickness of my dreams. However, somehow, slowly, I was able to separate and re-shape the resin of my memories and draw out distinct voices. Strangely well-preserved, they had even kept their emotional pitch over the years. The voices grew louder as I tried to decipher them, to use them as artillery against my brother’s invective.

"I saw him beat up mom a few times," I said. "We had to hide out at the neighbor’s house once like some kind of fugitives. I didn’t know how long we’d have had to stay there. I was terrified of him. I’ve been scarred, too.” I pleaded desperately to belong to the club, to avoid the responsibility to make some sense of their suffering through my life.

Joshua looked at me a bit skeptically, “You still don’t know anything. I was mom’s confidant. She told me everything. She loaded all her suffering on me. She
filled my mind with all these crazy things when I was growing up. She even told me never to tell you all this so you wouldn’t go crazy, but did she care what it would do to me? And then your psycho brother told me all his shit. Do you know what your brother was saying back then?”

I suddenly remembered some wisp of a dream I had long ago. I fingered through my memories, needing something to hold onto, to lessen the guilt and my brother’s jealousy. “I, too, am f*cked up,” I wanted to plead, but I had little evidence. Then the memory found the disembodied voices from that Sunday morning six years ago. These voices found other memories, and they flooded my being. I had found the center of my pain, and I revelled in it. In losing my magic gift that had preserved my sanity, I had now regained some sense of my humanity.

“You know, I was pretty young when Ben Oh-Bbah was going through his worst stages,” I started. “And at that age, kids pick up a lot of things, even though they don’t show it. I remember when Ben Oh-Bbah would say these weird things at church, calling the pastor a hypocrite and a sinner to his face, calling another girl a slut, and just pissing everyone off. One time, they called Mom at home and they told her never to let Ben come to church again. Mom had to send you and Dad to go retrieve her twenty-five year-old son who wasn’t allowed in the house of God. Yeah, I remember stuff like that. He also told me that he had this dream that God told him he was His son Jesus Christ. I used my Sunday-school theology to try to prove him wrong. Do you know what that’s like to a twelve-year-old? ... I knew we were thinking of having him committed...yeah I knew a little of what was going on.”

Joshua smiled at me for trying so hard to be grown up. His smile was a bitterly sad one though because he knew I was succeeding. In trying to prove myself in this pathetic game, I had lost. The voices surfaced to help me deal with my guilt, but in fact, they only dredged up memories that a little girl had carefully pushed away years ago. The only good to come of this was that Joshua didn’t feel alone anymore.

I cocked my head and said, “But you know, we’re just feeling sorry for ourselves. Every family is screwed up, some more so than ours. You just want to dramatize yourself into this tragic figure is all, cry out to the uncaring universe and all that shit. Yeah, half the time, we’re just acting in our own little plays. We’re not that messed up, you know. Not really.”

“You’re right,” he said grabbing my head and shaking it like he used to do when I was younger.

“You know what,” I said hoping to inject some absurd humor into our conversation. “I’m not invited to Ben Oh-Bbah’s wedding anymore.”

Joshua added, “Crazy f*cker, he’s a thirty-one year-old virgin psycho who never had a girlfriend, but he thinks he’s getting married.”

“Anyway, you know how originally he said you and Dad weren’t invited. Well, he’s added me to the ‘disowned list.’ You know I’ve heard of parents disowning kids, but never a son disowning his whole family. Well, anyhow, only mom’s going to the wedding now. He said he was hoping that I’d turn out like Mom, but instead I turned out callous and selfish like Dad and you. Basically, he’s only taking Mom up to heaven... But, I cleared things up with him. It was all over some petty misunderstanding. I’ve found favor in the eyes of God, again,” I said smiling. “I think I’m on the ‘invite-list’ again... Your soul, however, is still damned.” I delivered my lines with my bratty self-complacency. “You know, being the sister of God is a tough job. But maybe I can put in a good word for you.”

Joshua laughed for me. He was a good brother. •
photo essay

BY
SEON JOO YOON
Streets of Seoul

Seon Joo Yoon is a visiting student from Seoul National University in Seoul, Korea. She is a junior, majoring in Communications.
Fulfilled

she touched the arm of the lacquered chair
his arms surrounding her middle
even then as now a tactile lacking

the edge of the table cloth only grazing her thighs
lighter than excavating herself from the many layers
above them when they had been caught under the dark

he walked, with his strong clasping legs
leaving
he brushed by her, the table
but stopping, haltingly,
he crouched himself until his face was near
near her lips, until the nearness opened her mouth
his tongue tripped, intruded on her regrets, her
resolve

into her breath as if a draught,
he sunk himself once more
remembering whipped her tongue

retreating from him, the table
she closed
she starved
what they had fed with late entwined nights

when all she yearned for was a renovation
to be the rightly shaped missing piece
fitting in his enclave, the hollow of his chest and wants
final tenderness forced her hand to brush the elusive hollow
as if treading one last time upon what had been luxurious
but what she needed now to be barren, empty to savor.

June Mee Kim '01 is a Social Studies
concentrator living in Quincy House.
She is looking ahead to Law School.
family
duties

To know the reason for my father's angry ways, one must first understand his frustrating background and tough history. That doesn't mean to say that I will ever forgive him.

In Korean society, the oldest brother is responsible for taking care of the entire family, including the parents in their old age and all of the younger siblings. At the same time, the oldest brother is treated with by far the most respect of all of the siblings. Regardless of whether or not he deserves it, he gets the best food in the house during the meals, the most spending money, and the finest opportunities. Of course, he is sent to the best schools possible, because Koreans view academic success with the highest respect. But the oldest brother must also carry the enormous responsibility of the entire extended family, from helping everyone find jobs and marriage partners to organizing family birthdays and ceremonies. Also, Koreans look to their oldest brother whenever something goes wrong. Even though I'm the youngest and only daughter in my family, I know this because my father was the oldest son in his family. "Mimi," he would explain to me, "the eldest brother has family duties that must be attended to." And that was all the explanation I got for why he carried his family's heaviest burdens.

When he was growing up in Korea, his family, once very wealthy, lost all of their money in speculation. My father had to put himself through college because his parents were indigent, and so he did, taking every other year off to make enough money to finance his next year. After graduating and spending three years in the Korean army, he married my mother and they moved to America. Working as a custodian, a gas station attendant, and, eventually, a grocery store owner, he put five of his six siblings through school. I think of it now—Christ, how disgraceful—and it makes me sick, thinking of my father, a graduate from a prominent university, coming the United States to work minimum wage jobs. But for his family, he was willing to do anything, anything at all. Sometimes I think about what his life would have been like if he had not been the oldest son, or if he had not had to live a life of such hardship in order to support others. I think he would have been a very great man.

There was one sibling that he could not put through school. She was the second-oldest, and the oldest sister of the family, and she committed suicide in front of a college dormitory. I learned of this not through my father, but through a distant cousin who slipped it to me one late night after my grandmother's birthday party, thinking that I knew this family secret. After she told me, she looked and me and said, surprised, "Mimi, are you okay? You knew, of course." I must have had a weird look on my face.

"Yeah, of course." I turned away, shocked. I began to put that part of my father's personal history together with the rest of limited information I knew about his past.

* 

Although I keep my silence, I often wish I could just ask him: Father, Father, do you blame yourself for not being able send your closest sister who killed herself to college? Does your life of regrets come from all of those years of working next to uneducated laborers in the dirtier areas of New York? Do you think you could have done more
for your siblings and parents, Father?

When I am in a forgiving mood, and when I try to understand my father, those are the questions which come to mind. I think of them, even now, when I try to make sense of those mornings of my childhood when I woke up in our large house in rural New Jersey to the booming yells of my father. Of course, he would be yelling at my mother, and his yells were terribly magnified by the spacious corridors in our house. As a child, I hated waking up to that scary but familiar booming, and I often thought at first that it was from a dream, but of course it never was. My mother’s high-pitched shouts would follow, and then my father’s voice would explode back, and it seemed infinitely louder than any voice I had ever heard, even though my door was completely closed. My small body would jump involuntarily every time his voice raged back at my mother. I knew that in the room next to mine, Peter was just as afraid as I was.

On days like that, my parents would go work at our two different stores, they would come back in to fight at night as they ate a late dinner together. The argument would invariably be about family issues or how our stores were doing. One reason they might be fighting was that my mother was upset that my father was not doing more to help her sister, who had recently immigrated to America. Or maybe she was upset at my father for sending tens of thousands of dollars abroad—and away from us—to his siblings and mother in Seoul. Slowly, though, the fight would degenerate into personal attacks. Often, my father would start drinking beer or wine in between his shouting. Once, when he was drunk, he shouted at my mother,

“I can think of plenty of wives who are better than you! Plenty of women that I should have married instead.” My brother and I could hear everything from our rooms.

“Oh yeah,” she would shout back, “Name one! Who would work so hard, do all of the housework, and take care of the kids so well?”

“What about Mrs. Paik?” Mr. and Mrs. Paik were old family friends.

“Her? How can you even bring that woman up? She’s so fragile and she doesn’t know how to work. Do you know that she feeds her children Kentucky Fried Chicken three times a week because she is too lazy to cook?”

“Mrs. Lee, then.” She was another family friend, someone we all saw every Sunday at church.

“That woman! All that stupid woman can talk about is God. Do you think that a holy woman like that would put up with you, you drunken alcoholic?” Then my mother would get into a criticism of my father’s drinking.

“How can you, a disgraceful alcoholic, show your face as an elder and founding member of our church? That’s a travesty. That’s a joke.”

“What did you say, you disrespectful trump?” In a rage, my father would raise his hand.

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I have always favored my mother over my father. During the times when I felt the most pressure in my life—when I almost got my first B in high school, when I was deciding whether to go to Harvard or Julliard, when I had gotten sick from over-extending myself in college—I blamed my father for putting such an enormous amount of pressure on me to fulfill what he had fallen short of. He had always pushed me to be an outstanding academic success and to study medicine. It was my mother who had been there to comfort me and let me know that she would love me in times of failure. With my father, I felt like every shortcoming of mine meant that I was letting him down, and he rarely gave me reason to feel otherwise. My family would have fallen apart without the softness of my mother, who cushioned Peter and me against the harshness of my father’s upbringing.

In my family, my mother and I are the closest friends. She and I often have long talks about our family and about our lives, and she has told me parts of her past about which my brother never thought to inquire. She tells me about how she met my father, how our grandfather favored her the most of all my aunts, and how she felt that her children were the only good things to come out of her decision to come to America. I try to make sure that she feels appreciated in our family, and I do this by having long talks with her, talks that I never have with my father or my older brother.

In fourth grade, when I took required health classes, we learned about sex, contraception, emotional problems, and taking care of our bodies. We also heard speakers give seminars on domestic violence. I remember watching a video of a family where the father beat up the mother and the kids in the family, and the main character, a Caucasian girl, was silent through most of the movie. Her teacher noticed the bruises on her body, and the final scene in the movie was the father being taken away by police officers. As I watched, I was terrified. My father has never laid a hand on me—I am his precious daughter and his future—but after that video I wondered if I should have gone and turned him in for what he did to my mother. What would our family do without him? I wondered. At night, I thought of myself as a coward because I did not call the police.

But even then, I realized that my family was different than those people that I watched on video. We were Korean, and we sure were not going to
expose our problems to the rest of society as if we had no shame. This was an idea that had trickled down to me like some sort of unspoken tradition, and it always kept me from being open to others about what happened inside the walls of our house.

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After huge fights between my parents, they knew that we had heard everything. My father would come into my room very late at night, in the quiet between shouting sessions, and tell me not to worry at all about our fighting, not to let it interfere with my life and studying one bit. Then he would go out and yell profanities to my mother and maybe beat her some more.

On the other hand, after shouting bouts, my mother would get mad at us all of the sudden. She would be especially mad if she had been hit. Peter or I would go into her room to comb our hair in front of the mirror or use the bathroom, and she would lash out at us, “Why didn’t you stop that bastard from shouting at me? You call yourself a son? You call yourself a daughter? Why are you always on his side?” It must have been hard for her to be the one to have to stand up to my father all of the time, and this was her way of taking it out on us.

“Sorry, Mom,” I would say. I was so young and scared back then, and even though she wasn’t making any sense when she said that my older brother and I took sides, I still felt ashamed about it.

During the worst fights, my mother would sob loudly, and it was not to be dramatic because she is not that kind of person. Her sobbing was the guttural sound of real, profound physical and emotional anguish. It was not at all like the sound a person might make after watching a sad movie. No, it was more like the terrified, involuntary sobbing that one would make immediately after hearing about the death of a loved one. The sound of my mother crying like that is the most terrifying sound I have ever heard.

If I think back, I can still remember exactly how her deep wailing penetrated the entire house through the locked door of my parents’ bedroom. She would run there sometimes to escape my father when he was in a rage about some personal insult that she had hurled at him in the heat of a fight. The next sound I would expect was my father’s stentorous demands for my mother to unlock the door.

“GODAMMIT, you good-for-nothing woman!” he would yell, and eventually my mother would have to open it, if just to save another door from having to be destroyed by force.

Sometimes, if she was quick enough, my mother would be able to grab the car keys, which we kept on the counter next to the glass bottles of liquor in my father’s alcohol cabinet, and drive off. She would go shopping somewhere, or just driving—never to her sister’s house, which was just 5 minutes away. After a few hours, my mother always returned home, even if she knew it meant getting beat more. Or maybe my father would have sobered up by then, if she was lucky.

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They did not fight all the time. During the times of peace, we were a normal family, and we functioned quite well. If there is one thing I can say about my father, it is that he provided for his children and his wife. He bought me all of the books that I ever wanted to read, all of the toys that I asked for if I bugged him enough. When my brother turned 16, my father bought him a beautiful, expensive BMW, in which he would drive with me to school. I didn’t understand why he bought such an extravagant car for Peter when he had been driving around in the same gray van for almost ten years. “It’s good enough for me,” was what he said in a gruff tone when I asked him
about it. “An old man like me doesn’t need to drive around in a fancy Benz.” He spoiled my mother with nice jewelry and designer clothing, especially on her birthdays. When my father came home from New York, he was always bringing home steaks or other good food from the best food stores.

“Look at the delicious meat that I bought for the family,” he would boast when he came through the door. Later, after my mother had cooked it, my parents would always give the biggest servings to Peter because, of course, he was the oldest son. We would feast together at home on a special meal of steak at least once a week, or else we would go out to a nice restaurant on the weekend.

Sometimes at night, I would open my eyes in bed and see my father kneeling down and praying for me in the bluish moonlight that shone through my window. I knew he was praying for my health and my success, just as he did every night. During those moments his face looked so soft and humble, so full of obvious love that it made me smile with security. When he looked up, I would close my eyes and pretend that I was sleeping.

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During the day, my parents waited on customers behind the counters of their stores. They always said to us, “We work hard, with our hands, but you two must do your share by working hard with your minds.” My father would often show me the calluses on his hands from lifting boxes, and he would spend time on evenings taking the splinters from wooden crates out of his hands with a needle.

“This is why we are always telling you to study, so you won’t have to live such a hard life as us.” This point they drove into our heads over and over again. Peter and I were not going to live a life of labor after our education, and that was it. Maybe it was because my parents were so regretful, or so tired from work all of the time that they fought so awfully when they did.

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I came home once from a summer camp in 7th grade, and there my mom was with a cast around her arm. She had fallen—that’s what she told everybody, including me, and that’s what everyone outside the family had thought. She said she was reaching down from her chair in the office to pick up a piece of paper, and she had lost her balance and fallen hard. This was during the time when my parents had almost divorced.

It was only when my mother was angry at my father that I learned what had really happened. In one of their arguments, he had yelled,

“You’d better shut your mouth if you know what’s good for you.”

She waved her cast at him, and shouted back,

“What? Are you going to do this again?” For a long time, that shut my father up. When the cast came off, my mother’s arm was skinny and white, and there was a long scar where the doctors had gone in to readjust the bone after the fall. After a few months, my mother’s arm healed and looked almost normal. But even today, the scar, which is dark brown against my mother’s fair skin, is still very visible, a reminder that what had occurred would always be a part of her, no matter how much she tried to cover it up with long sleeves. Her arm functions as well as it ever has, but the scar... it will not go away.

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A week or so after fighting, my parents would say that the reason that they fought was because of stress. My mother would take Peter and me aside and explain that she and my father had been under a lot of pressure. As a child, I wondered if that was the way people were to each other when times became difficult, and if fighting so viciously was acceptable behavior of parents.
But now, Mother, I look at the dark scar under your shiny gold bracelet and I want to ask you: Why did you let him do that to you? When you drove off, why did you ever come back to him? Why, Mother, were you so willing to label those times you got battered as mere times of stress that can just be brushed aside after a week or a month? Why Mother? Why?

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I knew from that day, that upside-down day, that things would never be the same between my older brother Pete and me again. I was only fourteen, and he was sixteen, but I knew.

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My brother Peter was treated with respect because of the fact that he was older than I am. During our childhood, he was always introduced as “the oldest brother” to friends of the family. All of the other ladies at church referred to my mom as “Peter’s mother” and never as “Mimi’s mother.” When the two of us were given gifts for Christmas or birthdays, Peter always received the bigger toy, the nicer pencil set, or the larger amount of money. He would also be given more responsibility because of those two extra years of life that he had lived, and he was often called on when we were toddlers to look after me.

But as we grow older, I’ve noticed that Peter often doesn’t look after me the way that the oldest brother should look after his kid sister. Sometimes I have to be the assertive one, the one who takes care of things—even small things—in the family. When my family orders pizza for dinner I am the one who picks up the phone and orders. Or when my father needs someone to write business letters in English, he usually comes to me now; Peter screwed up once because he did not listen to what my father had told him. Another time, he spilled coffee all over the letter after he had finished with it and had to do it over again. When Peter and I play our cello and violin duet together, I am the one who gets more praise from the audience, and the extra pat on the back from our parents. Now, when my parents tell us that we will have to support each other in the future, I feel that they are directing the comment mostly at me.

Peter is the quiet type of person who doesn’t really speak up in groups. He takes care of his own business very capably, and does well in his studies, music, and life. But I don’t think he has many very close friends. In his free time, he reads, watches TV, and sleeps, rather than hanging out with buddies of his. I know he’ll be a really successful, rich person because of his brain and his diligence, but sometimes I wish that he had spent a little more time with friends or with me when I needed some guidance with my violin or my English homework.

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When Peter and I were young school, my parents would occasionally get into their shouting matches in the living room, and the two of us would cringe into a corner of our large couch, trying to look invisible as our parents shouted cruel verbal profanities. It was those times that made me hate the stink of alcohol on my father’s breath, which I always smelled during the worst of my parents’ fights.

Peter and I could usually tell when the fights would get really bad because we knew when my father was getting so infuriated and drunk that he would lose coherency and just be in a rage. We couldn’t understand what drove my mother to keep insulting him, when we all knew what would follow as a result of doing so. Maybe it was her own frustrations, which she did not often voice to us, that did not allow her to back down all of those times.
The worst fight ever happened when we were in high school. Peter and I were both home, doing our homework, when we heard the shouts booming in the hallway. I tried to concentrate on my math assignment and to just pretend that nothing was happening, but my father's bellows and my mother's screeching shouts just got louder and louder. No matter what, I could hear every word that was being yelled by my parents. I could also tell that my father was completely drunk, and that the pauses in the argument were times that he was stopping to pour himself another drink.

At some point, my mother started crying and yelling at the same time, calling my father a son of a bitch over again. I knew that she was trying to defend herself any way that she could when I heard the sharp sound of the breaking dishes and cups that were being thrown towards my father. Then I heard my father's hand strike her, a dull, repeated thudding sound. Silence. A burst of sobbing and profanities from my mother.

"You aren't going to shut up?" my father asked, in disbelief. "Are you going to yell at me again?"

"You son of a bitch, how can you call yourself a church elder and beat a woman like this. You dirty son of a bitch. I'm going to call the police."

"Put that fucking phone down," my father yelled, and I knew that he was taking it away from her. There was a silence, and probably a struggle, and in between sobs, my mother cried out,

"Are you going to hit me again, you bastard?" I heard the thud, thud of my father striking her. "You bastard, you son of a bitch," she cried. There was more silence. "Go ahead, pour yourself another drink, you son of a bitch. All you can do is drink and insult people. You call yourself a hus-

band!"

"Why are you asking for more? You won't shut up?" Then I heard shrieks of pain from my mother, and my father said, "You scratched me you bitch!" My mother shrieked again, and then yelled,

"My hair, stop it, you son of a bitch." Then her loud sobs filled the hallways of my house, louder than before. "Help, me, Peter, come out and see what your father is doing to me." I walked out into the hallway, and Peter was there as well.

"Don't bring the children into this!" my father yelled.

"Help! Help me, you kids! Oh God. Oh Jesus Christ help me." We walked timidly out, down the long hallway and into the family room of our house, and I saw my mother first, crouched down on her knees. Her face was flushed red, her eyes were swollen, and she had lost her glasses. She looked more like an animal than a human—my own mother. "God, look what he's done! You bastards, come here and help me." We stepped forward, and that was when I noticed that she was holding a clump of her own hair in her hands. She reached into her head of hair, and more fell out, revealing a red part of the back of her scalp where my father had pulled it while beating her. She turned to my father.

"You call yourself a man? You want respect?"

"That's enough. That's enough," he said, raising his voice. "Woman, don't you know when to shut the hell up?" He reached for her, grabbed her by her shirt, and raised his hand, striking her. I saw my mother's head jerk back with each blow of my father's palm on her face and head. It was my mother's head.

Peter and I had been brushed aside by my father, and I looked at my older brother, waiting for him to stop my father. We both said, quietly, "Stop, Father." We looked into each other's eyes, and then downward with shame. I stared at him for a few seconds, and I stepped forward. He stood there, looking at me and making no effort to come forward.

I was the one—me—who stepped behind my father, grabbed his arms from behind, and pulled him away from my hurting mother. He did not want to be pulled away, and was swinging at her with his arms, even as I mustered all of my strength to wrestle with him. I held his right arm, but once I wasn't able to hold it back and I felt the impact of his hand on my mother's head. I winced, and then pulled him off. The whole while, I was waiting for help from Peter that never came. When I had pulled my father a room's distance away, Peter finally stepped forward, scared. Maybe he was almost as scared as I was. I looked down at my mother, who was twisted in pain on the floor of our family room, holding strands of her long hair in her fingers. My father, who was bleeding himself from scratch marks on his lower neck, was still yelling profanities at her as I held him back from attacking her again.

Even now, when I think about that fight, I want to say to my brother: Peter, where were you? You call yourself the oldest brother, but why did you make a freshman girl have to step up and pull away our drunken father? Is this your way of taking responsibility for the family? Why didn't you help me as I tasted the salt of tears that I did not even know were streaming down my own face? Why didn't you step in when I was pulling our father back, smelling the nasty fucking stench of his breath as he lunged forward at me, the only thing that was keeping him from tearing our mother apart?
Not long ago, I spent time in the United States primarily as a student. I learned a great deal in my discipline and even had the chance to see Yosemite, the Grand Canyon, and New England foliage. A very beautiful country, this America. But when I was asked to write down some of my own thoughts and feelings at the end of my stay, I laughed to wonder, "Who really wants to know what I think and feel? I certainly don't care about what anybody else thinks or feels." Clearly, a culture gap. But perseverance prevailed as persuasion, and my pen touches paper. The translator of this text is a friend of mine, a Korean-American, who is free to distribute it on the condition of my anonymity.

I will not say very much about my own country, but you will likely see an image of it if you can get a sense beyond words. There is one thing that I do want to mention about the DPRK. At home, we have something called the spy hunter. I've met one upon a strange confluence of events, and from my understanding, these guys are the only visible surface of a secret amphitheater of organizations, warring and conspiring to manipulate the course of Chosun history. Altogether petty in some ways, their existence necessarily comes into subtle consideration at all times because you never know who is watching. In much the same way as your advancements in technology, our developments have created an underlying noise which invades privacy and alters behavior.

My experience in foreign countries opens my eyes to the beauties of other cultures. What is almost unique about America is that there are so many different kinds of people. If there are only two kinds of people, the potential for oppression and violence is very high. But if there are five or twenty different kinds, the whole people gain power. It is good for everyone. I wouldn't concern myself with self-segregation phenomena; just be polite to people.

I've heard recordings of speeches by Malcolm X, also known as El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz. It seems to me that 20th century American history centers on this man, considering not only his words but also the fact that he was killed by his own. In a few poignant parallels, this man did for the Nation of Islam essentially what Jesus did for the children of Israel. And his death places him in relation to the whole of American society as the crucifixion of the latter places him in relation to the Greco-Roman bloom. I would like you to consider the possibility that your Generation X is actually named after this man — an aftereffect akin in kind but not in degree to the fact that you tell time by the approximate birthyear of Jesus. There is no such thing as convention insofar as it is detached from yourself. You do or say something, it marks your brain, you believe it.

The same kind of argument can be made with regard to Kurt Cobain and others. These people, and not Bill Gates or Michael Jordan, are the gems of American humanity because they are lambs.

I've been back home for some time now. I took a walkman and a few tapes back with me as well as a Yankees hat for my brother. As much as I treasure my memories of America and look forward to any opportunity of returning, I wouldn't say that I miss it. The land of fat, where money and information flow like milk and honey, is too rich. It is like an indiscreeet drug. If you need it, you need it. But it's far better to be off it.