contents

4  Editor's Note

KOREANS & CHRISTIANITY

5  A Brief History of Christianity in Korea
    Essay by Halla Yang

6  Christianity and the Minjung Imaginary
    Essay by Paul Yunsik Chang

10 Mormonism in Korea: A Missionary's Tale
    Essay by Scott Swaner

12 On the Pathway to Belief:
    What does God Say?
    Essay by Perry G. An

FICTION

16 The Naked Apple
    Fiction by Angela Hur

24 The Story of an Hour
    Fiction by Jay Moon

26 Letters from the dead:
    a rotten old atheist
    Fiction by Halla Yang

POETRY

32 Stupid Fish
    by Jay Mok

34 Modern Korean Poetry
    Selected Poetry from
    Korean Literature 212

PHOTO ESSAY

29 The Minjung Struggle in History
    by Paul Yunsik Chang

COVER
by Jason Cho

FEATURE

37 Daisil Kim-Gibson's Silence Broken:
    Korean Comfort Women
    Film Review by Joohee Lee

40 Impressions of Two Korean-American Films
    Film Review by Sue Hyun Kim

42 Will Korean Americans Be a Racial Bourgeoisie in the New Millennium?
    by Claire Jean Kim

48 Sarah Chang
    Simply Classic
    by Janice Yoon

PERSONAL

54 Roots
    by David Bahk

55 I was still frozen
    by Eugene D.S. Kim

56 The Fringe
    by Sang Park

ART

14 Painting
    by Young Moon

23 Drawing
    by Jean Ryoo

41 Collage
    by Jason Cho

BACK COVER
by Jane Ro
What is it about religion?

As a young Korean-American growing up in Los Angeles, I always thought that there was some innate connection between Koreans and religion, especially Christianity. It seemed like everyone I knew who was Korean was a member of some church, and the one that I was loosely associated with was called the Oriental Mission Church. I remember my first excursion to this place of worship during grade school (my mother thought going to church would prevent me from wasting away a lazy Sunday afternoon). It seemed like a wonderful place; everyone knew everyone else, and there was a real sense of brotherhood, a special religious bond, that seemed to permeate the area. Then the service began. Half the time, my attention was drawn toward the front of the congregation where zealous believers raised their arms in praise with tears rolling down their face and devoted student leaders presented long-winded prayers with 20 separate references to their “Father.” The rest of the time, I tried to ignore the section of stragglers behind me, upstanding Korean youths who would spend the whole time deriding certain goofy Bible study leaders, recounting the previous night’s tagging session, and ranking the beauty (or lack thereof) of girls in the student choir.

Sometimes, I think Koreans just don’t understand or have a clear, genuine reason as to why they attend church. It seems that most Koreans affiliate themselves with the Christian religion because of peer pressure and an overwhelming desire to belong. As a case in point, I asked a friend once why he went to church every week, and he responded, “Cuz all my friends go to church, and it’s a great place to meet respectable Korean women.” Kind of inconsistent with the primary goal of Christianity, in my opinion. However, even when I do meet those Koreans who are truly devout and sincere in their faith, it never ceases to amaze me how their warped Fundamentalist views of the Christian faith prod them to attempt to convert others when they themselves don’t have a clear grasp on the teachings and the history of the Bible. Now, I do realize that there are those who have struck a healthy balance with Christianity in their own lives: I am also not denouncing religion or ignoring the benefits its moral teachings have to offer to society. However, what I find lacking, especially with Koreans in relation to Christianity, is an openness and understanding of other thoughts and ideas that are important to one’s conception of religion. We need to be open to different faiths and non-Christian viewpoints and have a firm grasp on the history and politics surrounding the Christian religion. Once this is set, we will then be in a better position to constructively question our own religion and others, as well as engender a faith built on a stronger foundation.

My hope is that this issue of Yisei will be an aid in this journey of faith and discovery of self.

P.S. I know that there are many Koreans who are members of other religious communities and those who openly reject or doubt the existence of a higher being. However, from a purely Korean American viewpoint, I would say that Christianity is a major component of Korean American life, and thus, an important topic to consider in this magazine. In addition, the opinions expressed in this letter are solely mine and are not a reflection of the stance of the Yisei board as a whole.
A Brief History of Christianity in Korea

by Halla Yang

Christianity was first imported to Korea in the late eighteenth century by Shilhak scholars, a pragmatic school of Confucian thinkers who sought to learn Western ideas in order to improve national productivity and welfare. Envoys from China brought teaching materials written by the missionary Matteo Ricci, and Catholicism slowly spread among the intellectuals, gaining ten thousand adherents by 1801. After 1800, a series of rulers came to power who identified Catholicism with a rival political faction and thus declared Christianity to be subversive and dangerous. The perceived threat of Christianity motivated a series of persecutions – the Ulhae of 1815, the Chonghae of 1827, and the Kihae in 1839 – which brought the growth of the Christian Church to a standstill. The most severe persecution – the Persecution of 1866 – resulted in the deaths of eight thousand Catholics, about half the total of Christians then in Korea. (These martyrs were officially recognized through canonization by the Roman Catholic Church – Korea has the fourth largest number of Catholic saints in the world.)

Yet even the ruling powers had to acknowledge the educational benefits of Christian missionaries when in 1884, the life of a royal prince was saved by the Western-style medical care of Dr. Horace Allen, who had just recently arrived as the first Presbyterian missionary in Korea. Protestant missionaries were allowed to greatly expand their work in the following thirty years, and Koreans were eager to gain the medical services and Western education that the missionaries could provide. By 1910, missionaries had founded 800 schools accommodating 41,000 students, twice the number of students enrolled in Korean government schools. Hence, Christianity came to be associated with Western learning (sŏhak) and modernization.

Christianity adopted another practical role with the Japanese occupation of Korea. Many pro-independence Korean nationalists received their education and training from foreign missionaries. For example, 15 of the 33 signers of the Declaration of Independence of 1919 were Christians, though Christians constituted only 1.3 percent of the total population in Korea at the time. Furthermore, the Christian Church resisted Japanese efforts to indoctrinate Koreans into their national religion – Shinto – which called for worship of the emperor. Thus, missionaries were marked by the authorities as politically dangerous and were especially subject to brutal repression by the Japanese government.

In the aftermath of the Korean War, Christian missionaries and Western relief agencies provided food, clothing, and medical care to the Korean people, and missionaries – both Catholic and Protestant – became valued as important social service organizations. Furthermore, the Christian churches became involved in anti-government, pro-democracy movements (see Paul Chang’s article on minjung theology in this issue), and they helped the people to cope with new social stresses resulting from the rapid industrialization of Korea. Now in the United States, Korean churches provide many social and educational services to the Korean community, helping immigrants to adjust to life in a new country within a familiar framework.

SOURCES:
Christianity and the Minjung Imaginary

by Paul Yunsik Chang

Introduction:

South Korea’s minjung movement is multi-faceted, finding voice in a variety of mediums, social concerns and cultural expressions. Derived from two Chinese characters, ‘min’ (people) and ‘jung’ (masses), the notion of ‘minjung’ came to identify and inform the struggle for democracy in South Korea. As a meta-narrative, we can understand what Nancy Abelmann terms the ‘minjung imaginary’ as an interpretative framework. That is, the minjung imaginary works as a kind of worldview that provides the categories in which social reality is organized and understood. One of the basic precepts of this worldview is that history should be understood from the point of view of the minjung, or rather that the minjung are the subjects (and not victims) of history.

Christianity came to occupy a significant role in the minjung movement, and Korean theologians developed what became famous in the international theological conversation as ‘minjung theology.’ Minjung theology is in a sense a fusion or merging of Christian discourses with that of the minjung imaginary. Through minjung theology, the minjung movement claimed for itself an ontological foundation and justification for its praxis. Minjung theology has been characterized as a Korean liberation theology developed from its particular context. Considering the goals of minjung theology, this characterization is a bit unfair. For these theologians, minjung theology is more than ‘Korean’ and implicitly is nothing less than a radical re-interpretation of the Christian message. For them the minjung sentiment is itself the kerygma (the content of the early Christian gospel message as proclaimed by Jesus) and to rediscover this truth is inherently what is at stake here.

Context:

In April of 1960, the first republic of South Korea under Syngman Rhee came to an end as pressure from University students, professors, and the broader urban elite became overwhelmingly prodigious. The following governments under Yun Po-son and Chang Myon proved to be ephemeral and on May 16, 1961, General Park Chung Hee, through a military coup, took political charge of South Korea. Modern historiography about the Park era reveals a dissonance between the positive and negative aspects of the regime. During Park’s tenure (1961-1979), Korea underwent a rapid industrialization process that catapulted South Korea into the modern global economic network. Under the banner of goon dae hwea (modernization), sae ma ul oon dong (development of country side), and ja lib gyung jae (self-reliant government), Park’s economic program raised the standard of living for Koreans. But still, like most countries that experience a rapid industrialization process, it was not without its negative consequences.

Park justified his claim to political power by appealing to the need to industrialize the country. Also contributing to Park’s insistence on absolute power was the ever present
threat of communist influences from the North. The need to protect the country from external and possible internal communist elements led Park to declare the Yusin Constitution (1972) which in turn had the effect of “transform(ing) the presidency into a legal dictatorship.” This political move gave Park absolute power at the expense of a truly democratic political system in Korea. Utilizing the Korean Central Intelligence Agency, Park’s authoritarian government came to represent the “sophisticated and systematic repression” of any element within South Korea’s society that challenged his political hegemony.

Minjung Theology:

In the face of this particular political and economic situation, Christianity’s response was an amalgam unrestricted to one dominant position. At this time, we can hesitatingly define two main trends in the attitudes of Korean Christians. The majority of Christians took a conservative attitude both in praxis and theology while a minority became a conspicuous force in opposing Park’s oppressive system. Christianity’s opposition of Park’s regime crystallized in response to the Yusin Constitution and the ‘emergency decrees’ that followed. Christian resistance was not persuaded by Park’s insistence that the Yusin Constitution was necessary to guarantee national solidarity in the face of a communist threat. Rather, they saw it as a way for Park to solidify his own personal power and maintain his political hegemony.

A forerunner of minjung theology, the theological declaration made in 1973 by Christian ministers is probably the most important single catalyst in developing a theology of praxis. The declaration begins with establishing the theological motives for praxis and cites three reasons: “1. We are under God’s command that we should be faithful to his Word in concrete historical situations . . . .” 2. ‘The people in Korea are looking up to Christians and urging us to take action in the present grim situation . . . .’ and 3. ‘We stand in a historical tradition of such struggles for liberation as the independence movement by Christians against Japanese colonialism . . . .”

We see in these three motivating reasons an appeal to authority common in other Christian endeavors. More specifically, the first reason is grounded in the need to base praxis in a Biblical foundation, the ‘Word.’ The second reason has to do with Christian accountability to the neighbor, who in this case are in need of leadership to ‘take action.’ The third reason is an appeal to history and tradition. Precedence acts as a significant authority in theological debates and thus legitimates contemporary theological developments. In this case, the ministers are situating themselves in the rich history of Korean Christians’ participation in politics.

Like all systematic theological structures, minjung theology has an array of manifestations. From theology, ethics, and Biblical studies, minjung theology became an efficient hermeneutic for Korean theologians. Like the ministers who drafted the 1973 declaration, minjung theologians consider their particular efforts in accord with a long line of religiously informed activism — starting from the Donghak hyuk myun, to the March 1st independence movement of 1919, to the student revolution in April, 1960, to Kwangju, 1980, and finally to the burgeoning activism of Christians in the ’70s and ’80s. Insisting that these earlier movements were manifestations of the minjung imaginary, minjung theologians claim for themselves a tradition of active resistance.

One of the most interesting and theologically significant expressions of minjung theology is its particular understanding of the kerygmatic message of the gospels. Ahn Byung-mu, minjung New Testament scholar, argues that minjung theology’s insistence that the minjung are the “subjects of history” finds Biblical basis in the life of Jesus. With the notion of ‘minjung’ as a Biblical hermeneutic, Ahn understands the masses of people (in Greek, ochlos) surrounding Jesus’ ministry as a witness of his faithfulness to them. For Ahn, the ochlos “were the minjung of Galilee.” This reading of Jesus’ ministry leads Ahn to affirm the fundamental minjung theological position that God dwells with and prefers those marginalized oppressed groups such as the minjung. This need for a Biblical basis can not be underestimated. In face of wide criticism by the majority of Korean church
leaders, minjung theologians' concern with the Bible can be seen as a way to ground their theology in the scriptures thus giving them legitimacy. But still, what is important here is not that minjung theologians had to prove their theology to the larger Christian community but rather that their faith starts from the understanding that Jesus' own ministry was itself a minjung movement.

Although not a professional theologian per se, the Catholic poet Kim Chi-ha is one of the most articulate Christian activists. As a student protestor during the '60s, Kim Chi-ha distinguished himself as an eloquent writer and became an icon in the dissident movement. A prolific political writer, Kim inspired a generation of student protestors and for that, went to jail many times. Kim was heavily influenced by his Christian faith and drew upon it to provide him with motivation in his struggles. In his essay "The Dream of Revolutionary Religion," Kim formulates his own definition of the Christian concept of 'resurrection'. He writes,

"This is the mystery of resurrection—this is revolution.
That resurrection fashions people in God's image,
opens their eyes to their own dignity and turns their
frustration and self-hatred into eschatological hope.
This kind of resurrection changes a selfish, individualistic,
escapist anomie into a communal, united, realistic
commitment to the common good . . . This is a
revolutionary religion."

Again we see in Kim Chi Ha a move to interpret Christian rhetoric and symbols in a concrete, 'this worldly' way. For Kim and minjung theologians, the power of the Christian message lies in its ability to realize the ideals of the 'kingdom of God' in this world.

Praxis:

Motivated by such a theology, liberal Christians became champions of democracy and human rights during a time when the cause of industrialization justified labor exploitation and hysterical levels of McCarthyism silenced any criticism of the government. Like minjung theology, Christian praxis became manifest in a wide variety of social concerns. In this short essay only two moments will be addressed.

In response to the Yusin Constitution, Reverend Park Hyun-kyu held a demonstration at Namsan mountain. On April 22, 1973, Easter Sunday, Reverend Park and two younger preachers of his church gathered the congregation for service. At the service they passed out cards that read "Politicians Repent," "The Resurrection of Democracy is the Liberation of the People," and "Lord, show thy mercy to the ignorant king." Reverend Park and his cohorts were accused of trying to overthrow the government and were promptly arrested. Following the arrests, the Korean National Council of Churches and the presbytery urged the government to release the prisoners. Reverend Park and the two preachers served one to two years before being released.

The explosive industrialization process galvanized urbanization as people from the country sides migrated to the cities in hopes of a better life. Not unlike America's own industrialization process, the early years witnessed atrocious working conditions, poor wages, and general lack of concern for laborers. In hopes to ameliorate the situation, the Methodist missionary George Ogle co-founded the Urban Industrial Mission. The purpose of the UIM is to work alongside those they are ministering to, hold Bible studies, help organize labor to better demand their rights, and generally to be with and aid the laborers in their period of hardship. Ogle's work with the UIM and his close contact with the laborers, who were absorbing the brunt of Park's economic development policy, led him to openly criticize Park's regime. One such opportunity arose with the incident of the People's Revolutionary Party (PRP). The PRP, as it turns out, was a fabrication of Park's government to frame those dissidents that opposed his government. Associating someone with the PRP was in effect accusing them of belonging to
an underground communist organization which was considered no less than treason. Accused of being members of the PRP, eight men were hanged. In 1974, Ogle and other missionaries protested the hanging and were consequently forced to leave Korea.

Despite all of their efforts, Christians were not in the end, the significant agents in bringing down Park’s regime. Ironically the catalyst came from within his own government. On October 26, 1979, Kim Jae Kyu, head of the KCIA, shot and killed Park Chung Hee, ending eighteen years of absolute reign. Following the assassination, hope for a truly democratic government was shattered as General Chun Doo Hwan forcibly assumed control of the government. In the following political period, Christians maintained their active role as a voice for democracy and subsequently were persecuted for it.

Concluding questions:

Acting both as a motivation and justification for Christian participation in the democracy movement, minjung theology is one of the most fascinating developments in Korean theology. It is difficult to gauge the fruits of its labors, but the fact that Kim Dae Jung, another Catholic icon in the democracy movement, is the current president of South Korea reveals some degree of progress. Although I will conclude this essay with a few critical questions regarding the theological system itself, this is not to downplay their efforts in the democracy movement.

Borrowing from Latin American liberation theologians, minjung theologians argue that the Christian message has in it a natural ‘preferential option for the poor (or minjung).’ These oppressed people were there in the Gospels and they are there in Korea today. This idea that God takes sides is not necessarily new. Throughout the Old Testament, YHWH is portrayed as the advocating God par excellence. He crushed those that oppressed his chosen people and even fought wars for them. The problem with this understanding of God is the inherent tension that develops from a God who is universal and advocates particular positions at the same time. Does it necessarily follow that if God is on the side of the poor/minjung, then he is not on the side of the rich (who also claim God for themselves)?

As God prefers the poor, poverty becomes a special loci for a more efficient communion with God. The poor in this sense constitute a privileged community that might have better access to or understanding of Christian truth. At the same time, minjung theology works for the emancipation and liberation from that very community. Thus we are left with the ironic question: “Why would any Christian want to be liberated from a position in which they are preferred by God?” Here lies another tension in minjung theology, namely that it works towards the liberation of the poor while at the same time advocating its preferred status.

Probably the most critical question has to do with whether or not minjung theology speaks to those they profess to be advocating. It is one thing to develop complicated systematic theological systems (and believe me they are complicated) and another to profess to be speaking for the minjung. The question here is: are the minjung (versus the theology student) reading 400 page books of systematic theological rhetoric? Do the minjung even care that their own cause has been articulated in christology, eschatology, soteriology and Biblical hermeneutics? These questions reveal the gap that separates minjung theologians, who are by their academic training intellectual elites, from the minjung themselves.

It is a bit unfair to conclude this essay with these questions without allowing for minjung theologians to respond. But maybe the response can be found in the theology itself. Minjung theology is at the end a praxis theology and must be measured in terms of what concrete actions are adherents contributed to the alleviation of those oppressed and not necessarily in its intellectual integrity. Finally, minjung theology is a reminder to those Christians comfortably living in the first world that accountability to the Gospel is still a dangerous endeavor.

4 Ibid., 361.
5 The need to qualify this statement is due to the obvious disparity between the complex reality of history and the clearly defined categoric-al structures of any heuristic...

Paul Chang is a student at the Harvard Divinity School. He will leave next fall to begin his doctoral studies in sociology at UCLA.
Mormonism in Korea: A Missionary's Tale

by Scott Swaner

Christianity's Korean past is checkered; in the present, however, Christianity is a secure and influential sociocultural force. There are tens of millions of Christians in Korea today, and some say the division of religious individuals in South Korea is about half Buddhist and half Christian. This essay is not intended as an accurate historical survey of Christianity's reception in Korea, nor as an unfailingly factual report on how Koreans view Christianity. It is a personal account of Mormonism in South Korea as this writer understands it (which is the most any self-critical individual or scholar can hope to give). Let me give a further caveat or two.

In writing this, I might ask, or you might ask—Am I qualified?—as did the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan when speaking at the École pratique des Hautes Études. He had been asked to speak about the basic principles of psychoanalysis, Freud's field, although he had been excommunicated from the Freudian school. My own experiences with South Korea began when I was a young missionary for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, more commonly known as the Mormons. I lived and proselytized in South Korea from early 1987 to mid-1989. After returning to the United States and college, I continued asking myself the same questions I had been discussing for more than two years with Koreans: What is the meaning of this life, if there is one? Where did we come from? Where will we go after we die, if anywhere? My questioning—my search for "truth"—led me away from the Mormon church, away from religion, and away from God. It led me to excommunication. Now I throw out the question of whether I am qualified to do this.

Though I'm not Korean, I was a missionary there; I did believe zealously; and I spent years of my life actively sharing what I believed with my Korean sisters and brothers. When I arrived in South Korea, I was 19 years old and highly motivated to spread the good news of Christianity. Since that time, I have continued to study Korean and Korea, in particular through its literature. What follows, then, is my own take on Christianity in South Korea, how it has been received, and its role there today.

After two months of intensive language study—hardly enough—I was sent to South Korea to begin my missionary service. I paid my own way, received no remuneration, and worked in the service of the Mormon church for two years. We were only allowed to preach in Korean, in an effort to ensure that investigators of the church were interested in the gospel and not in learning English. After some months, my language skills improved, and I was able to proselytize among friends, from door to door, and on street corners outside of train stations. Anyone who has spent
much time in one of South Korea's larger cities has seen foreign missionaries, with their short hair, white shirts, and ties, speaking Korean and handing out *Books of Mormon* for free. I was one of them.

Despite this high visibility, the Mormon church is one of the least popular Christian churches in South Korea. There are a few rebuffs heard consistently by Mormon missionaries there, and they stem from disparate cultural and social practices. When a Korean is asked "Have you ever heard of the Mormons?" The first response is often, "Mormon-kyo? Idan ijyo," or "The Mormons? Aren't they heretics?" Another common response is "Midsumnida," or "I already believe!" Or, they say "I'm a Christian," implying that Mormons are not. Today, though Christianity is widely popular among younger Koreans, the Mormon church, with its additional "scripture," the *Book of Mormon*, and its doctrine that the Trinity consists of three separate individuals, the first two with actual, distinct physical bodies, is not the Christian church of choice. The church's advocating of polygamy in the mid-1800s is also something many Koreans criticize. But Korea is just one of many countries with similar foundation myths, past marriage practices, etc.

On the other hand, the Mormon church is seen as very "Western" and it does offer free English conversation classes once a week. (The church is quick to point out that these are not proselytizing meetings.) And like most Christian churches, it offers a sense of community, a humanistic belief system, and specific answers to those difficult questions mentioned above. Further, Mormonism is its essence no different than other Christian faiths; it addresses the same human needs. Freud offers one explanation of what religion is for most of us—a "system of doctrines and promises which on the one hand explains to [us] the riddles of this world with enviable completeness, and on the other, assures [us] that a careful Providence will watch over [our] life and will compensate [us] for any frustrations [we] suffer here." Faith, factionalism, or atheism aside, we should be able to agree with this description.

Hopefully these reflections have shed some small light on the Korean phenomenon of Mormonism, in particular, and Christianity, in general, at least from a personal perspective. On a more universal level, today we see cultural differences dissolving in many ways; the so-called East-West divide, an Orientalist construction as Edward Said's shows, also appears to be increasingly fictional. As a result Mormonism/Christianity in Korea becomes increasingly normalized. As globalization ("segyehwe") continues, or as capital comes to determine more and more of peoples lives in Korea as elsewhere, religious differences also begin to fade. Perhaps the religion of the day, whether we like to admit it or not, is multi-national capitalism and consumerism. For example, I'm not sure how many Koreans read the *Bible* or the *Book of Mormon*, but I do know that most all young Koreans have beepers and cell-phones. But, then again, I might not be qualified to say.

*Scott Swaner is GSAS student in East Asian Studies.*

---

spring 99 yisei 11
On the Pathway to Belief:
What does God Say?

by Perry G. An

How have Christian Korean-American college students come to adopt their religion? What does society say? What does God say? What do society and God say concerning the pathway towards belief and conviction in Christian doctrines? One explanation for the religious pathway taken by Christian Korean-American college students involves the immigration patterns of Korean Americans in the 1970's and 80's and the communities established here as a result. Another explanation is that it is God himself—not sociological and historical factors—that dictates the religious background of individuals.

From a purely sociological standpoint, a concise hypothesis can explain how certain Korean-American college students have come to accept the doctrines of Christianity. It cannot be disputed that nearly all Korean-American college students are the children of native Koreans who immigrated to the United States in the 1970's and 80's. (Note: this is not as universal for other Asian nations today.) This pattern of immigration is thus recent, and is quite specific to the Korean-American population. Approximately one-third of the native Korean population is considered to be Christian. Thus, it is not too daring to suggest that the observed link between religion and family may explain the religious tendencies of some Korean-American college students.

But this perhaps familiar explanation is neither original nor complete. Pastor Brian S. Lee of the New Covenant Presbyterian Church in downtown Boston provides commentary that discusses the formation of Korean churches in the United States:

Korean-Americans are still within the first wave of its immigration history. I compare such an ethnic church to the overseas missions church situation. For example, when a missionary goes to a foreign country, it is expected that the missions church will be monolithic in ethnicity. Therefore, it is only a natural result of the short immigration of the Korean-Americans that most Korean-American churches are monolithic in ethnicity.

This quotation serves to illustrate the community that is forged amongst many Christian Koreans in the United States, centered around the Christian church. It is this tight community of believers, in addition to natural familial tendencies, that strongly influences second-generation Korean Americans to follow in the footsteps, even religious footsteps, of their parents.

But while we scrutinize this matter from a sociological and ethnic perspective, how about the question, “What does God say about all this?” If one believes that God
is the creator of the universe, would it not be relevant to consider his role in the lives of Korean-American Christians today and their paths taken towards a pious, Christian life? And even if one were not a believer of the Christian faith, to consider such a perspective would still broaden an understanding of the general nature of religions. Some hold the opinion that religion is man-centered, that it is because of our society that we become religious, and that God is there to provide for us, that he caters to our needs (at least for those of us that seem to be needy) and helps humankind to progress. This is, in part, true, but there are other ways to understand this as well, from a more theological and God-centered perspective.

"God is sovereign over all matters," states Pastor Lee. "He is, after all, the creator and the sustainer of all life." Again, such powerful words ring loudly in the hearts of Christians, and it is this belief that compels them to consider that it could not be merely societal influences and humankind at the root of their belief system.

Protestant Christians profess to a belief in the rejuvenation of God's people through Jesus Christ, made possible by God's grace. More simply, some Protestants believe that humankind in its natural state is spiritually dead. Their perception is that the dead cannot raise themselves by their own power since they are dead—and so it takes God to bring them back to life. This is analogous to God's working in individuals, the result of which is someone who is a Christian. Hence, this serves to elucidate the perspective that God creates the pathways that people take and he plays a role in determining their spiritual states.

From the two perspectives presented in attempts to delineate the ways in which Korean-American college students come (or have already come) to believe in the Christian faith, there may be seen a contradiction, since I have apparently set sociological factors up against divine factors. However, the intention is not to create this tension necessarily; instead, I only seek to point out on the one hand an observation, and on the other, truth. Their link is of little importance. The observation is that Korean-Americans share a similar background that allows for a commonality in the communities that are set up, which often center around the church. The truth from the perspective of Christians including myself is that God is sovereign in all matters of the universe. He stirs up the hearts of people so that they are provided with the faculty to hear him and believe in his words as presented in the Bible. Hence, these are my independent conclusions in order to understand how some Korean-American college students have come to follow Christianity, although I thoroughly expect to be further honed in my understanding of such critical, theological issues. Now, amid all this deliberation on this matter of the pathway towards belief, let's ask again: What does God say? What do you think God thinks? This perspective can be a humbling one for believers and non-believers alike.

_Perry An is a sophomore in Kirkland House concentrating in History and Science._
Condescending Attachment
Young Moon
Oil on Canvas
6' x 8'
1990

Young Moon is currently a Teaching Fellow in the Visual and Environmental Studies Department. He received his BFA at Ontario College of Art and MFA at California Institute of the Arts.
the naked apple

Fiction by Angela Hur

Sure, I used to worship the Caucasoid. The women I loved weren’t simply white, after all. Their allure went beyond skin color, because everything about them was different from the Asian women I was reared to cherish and respect as my mothers, sisters and wives.

It all started with Marcy Bronson who lived down the street from me. She was a pudgy little girl with her roll of flesh peeking over the waistband of her pink shorts. That womanly slyness was already working in her though. She’d catch me staring at that lip of skin pursed over her belt, and ever so slowly she’d draw up the edge of her shirt and flash her rounded belly at me. Her sexuality astounded my 8 year old mind. Here was this tubby little sex kitten offering to let me rub her hidden flesh and all I had to do was give her one of my legos...piece by piece.

My family had moved into her white neighborhood, and hers was the first family to welcome us with their gifts in tupperware and their big American smiles. My mother graciously accepted their lasagna and pasta salads and dutifully fed them into the sink disposal. They also offered their toddler daughter as my playmate-to-be. This gift also, my mother did not appreciate.

Marcy was the first white girl in my childhood outside of television. Even now, I can’t fully remember what she looked like. The image that memory created for her is one that looks eerily like Cindy from the Brady Bunch. I once found this childhood Aphrodite of mine in some old family photo albums and there she was, smiling her gap toothed grin up at me, belly brimming over her pants, and looking nothing like my television fantasy. Marcy had dingy brown hair and a nose cut too short above her mouth. She never bathed and always had some sort of food stuck on the sides of her mouth. But still, she was the first woman to charm me. And even now, I think of her from time to time. After all, it was she who introduced me to the world of the female Caucasoid. My mother swears that this little white girl poisoned me.

She moved to Kansas when I was in the fourth grade. She promised to write but all I got from her was a macaroni covered valentine sent three months late. I cried, and my mother told me that white people just weren’t loyal enough. I asked her what loyal meant, and she told me that it was what Korean people were to each other. That it made them stick with each other. From then on, I only played with other Korean girls, to please my mother at least. But secretly hidden in my toy box were valentines I had made for girls with names like Courtney and last names like Douglas. Every year I saved these secrets in a little shoebox. The names were differ-
ent but the message was still “Will you be my valentine?” After all, I was not one to be creative in my wooing. And besides, I never had anything to confess. I just wanted to ask. The curiosity was stronger then my desire.

When I was sixteen, we moved to L.A. and left our pleasant little white neighborhood in Illinois. As we were driving off our neighbors waved at us smiling their American smiles and yelling their American goodbyes. I waved back. My mother also waved back. She smiled for the first time since we first moved there.

In Los Angeles, I fully immersed myself in the Korean community at my high school. I brought home these Korean beauties for my mother and she cooed over each of them. She envisioned full-blooded Korean grandchildren around her. These pure ones replaced the children she had imagined when we were still living in white suburbia—the children with the pale skin, hair that was not black and coarse but dingy and delicate, and eyes of the dullish gleam, that were not Korean, but not fully “American,” as well. Thus, my mother encouraged my active pursuit of Korean women. She took pride, even.

But what my mother did not know was that my estrangement from the white females only increased my desire for them. It was getting ridiculous. I had the highest standards for my Korean girlfriends. But for white women, I found something attractive in all of them. You see, the face didn’t matter, the features were inconsequential, every white woman was the same to me, in that each one was desirable because she was the other. It’s dehumanizing I know, but in a way, I didn’t think I was stripping them of their identity or reducing them to just being white. No, I glorified them for who they were. Exalted them all, the ugly and the fat, the unwanted and unloved—to me they were all desirable.

My mother was so pleased that I was so willing to do the shopping, but she didn’t know that I was really betraying her and her pursuit of grandchildren of pure and undefiled blood. Joanna was the check-out girl at the local supermarket. I always maneuvered my cart so that I could have one moment with her. The first time I met her was a Monday. She swiped my box of pop-tarts and said, “You should try the blue-berry ones. They’re really good.” She smiled and the corners of her mouth lifted her plump cheeks, so that she looked like a carved pumpkin. But a cute one. She was attractive in that awkward way, the way white women can be at that age.

My eyes drifted down her chest to her nametag. “Thanks, Joanna, I’ll keep that mind.”

The next Monday, I was there again with Blueberry pop tarts in hand. She remembered me.

“I see you’ve taken my advice.” She giggled. If a Korean girl had giggled in that same way I would have dismissed her as a stupid bitch, but Joanna’s giggle just made her innocent and naïve. Her clothes were tight and tacky, bought from the clothing line of K-Mart called something like Young and Sassy, or something like that. Come to think of it, all her clothing and makeup had brand names unfamiliar to my more elitist tastes. She wore this one pink lipstick made by Wild Thang, it was the kind of pink found only on those old women who still bowl together with their friends. She had bent her head over to gather her stiff gelled curls into a ponytail, and out of her breast pocket popped out her secret tool. The lipstick case rolled onto the conveyor belt and towards me. I picked it up between my fingers. I instinctively looked on the bottom and it read Lolita. “Who’s your Humbert Humbert?” I asked not really expecting a reply.

“Huh? God, you’re so weird.”

My Korean girlfriends were strictly Lancome and Estee Lauder, which added to their perfected beauty. Joanna and her bargain basement-bought sexiness however seemed natural. Hers was an allure that seemed to have always belonged to her, not something she perfected over the years.

I never took her out on a date. She stopped working there anyway after a few more months. She had married the assistant manager, and I stopped going to that market.
What if the Serpent gave Eve a naked apple?

Now don't get the idea that I only went for chubby toddlers and lower-class shop girls. I use these two examples to show how far, how limitless my perversion was. Of course I wanted the undeniably beautiful specimens of the Caucasoid.

My mother knew none of this, or if she did she never bothered me about it. After all, she had Emily. Emily was the Korean girl I felt the closest to. She was my best friend. We had a lot in common. I guess, she was the kind of woman I wanted to marry. I would have married her too, that is if I was physically attracted to her. Objectively speaking, I could say she was very pretty, but she was too familiar, too Korean, like my mother, like my sister, if I had one. She owned no allure, no quality of the other.

I had seen her around campus a few times, but had never really spoken with her. It was my friend Nick who introduced her to me. He had told me, "Hey, you know that Emily Park girl? I swear she's your female counterpart."

"You mean she looks like me but with a vagina, thus enabling you to fulfill your homosexual attraction for me?"

"What the fuck you talking about, bitch...you're not man enough to fulfill my homosexual desires...No, look, she's Korean, she dates a lot of Koreans, but everyone knows she leans toward the Caucasian persuasion. Hence, she is you."

"What of it?"

"I don't know, I thought you two could start a support group or something."

The next week I asked her out on a date. Because I was simply curious. I wanted to know if she too was burned by a toddler romance of long ago, and if that had infected her with a long, fruitless sickness for the other.

The first hint I got that she was of a different breed was when she insisted that we meet at the restaurant.

"Look, I just don't want you to pick me up. That's all."

"What, are you ashamed of me or something?" I joked.

I found out later that she didn't want to be seen on campus with an Asian guy, lest she sent the wrong message that she was a one-race only type of gal. She didn't want to discourage her other suitors.

At the restaurant, I got to know more of her unique charm. I stood in front of the restau-
rant for twenty minutes waiting for her. Finally I went to the maître d’ to ask if a Ms. Park had left a message for me. While he was looking through his book I noticed an attractive Asian woman staring up at me from the corner of the restaurant. She waved and motioned for me to sit down next to her. Stunned by her gall and feeling like a midnight cowboy I walked over.

“You’re Andrew right? I’m Emily,” she said as she offered her hand and smiled just a bit too self-assuredly. “How could you keep a girl waiting all alone in a restaurant on a Friday night?”

I sat down and like a confused, stupid child stuttered, “I… I was w-waiting for you in front of the restaurant.”

“Oh, I’m sorry. But you didn’t really think I’d wait outside in the freezing cold did you? It’s no matter, anyhow. Now that you’re here we can finally eat.”

I couldn’t tell if she was joking around, or if she really was a bitch. After all, a lot of girls mistake impertinence for confidence thinking that being a bitch is somehow charming in that post-feminist, but pre-maternal way. I pegged her as one of those girls who think “I’m a woman, so I can treat men like shit, but I’m still jealous of friends in relationships.” But after awhile I had to change my mind. This girl was not putting on a siren-bitch act for my benefit.

Contrasted against her black hair, her pale skin and softly molded features gave her an old-fashioned air. She looked like one of those beautiful Korean women you see in the black and white pictures in your mother’s photo album. The goddess dressed in a 60s style minidress, who to your complete horror, turns out to be your aunt before the seventy pounds of weight gain and elastic waist pants.

Emily’s face was all smooth contours except for her mouth, which was cut sharp at the corners, set in a permanent lop-sided smirk. Her eyes seemed too ironic, too knowing for my taste. She would have been attractive if her personality was as soft and feminine as her looks. But as it was, her looks were just wasted on her.

Midway through dinner she said, “Andrew, I hope you don’t think I’m looking for a relationship, because I’m only dating right now…are you going to finish that?” she said pointing to my calamari.

I would have walked out on the date right then, but I paid good money for my steak and I wasn’t going to let her, a girl who so needed to display her assertiveness at the expense of social decency, ruin my dinner. And besides, I was still curious about her dating preferences.

“Is it that you don’t know what you want yet, is that why you’re only dating?” I asked.

“Free meals without emotional obligation. That’s the allure of dating. I think I know what I want in a relationship. I’m just not ready for one yet, and there’s no reason for me to rush into one just because I feel the need to constantly complain to my jealous girlfriends about my leech-like appendage of a boyfriend. By the way, you have something stuck in your teeth.”

By the time the check had arrived, I gave in to her bluntness and reciprocated with my own.

“Look, I’m not entirely interested in you, relationship or otherwise. I’m willing to pick up the check, but not without something in return. Now don’t glare at me, it’s not what you think. I just want to know why you prefer white guys over Koreans?”

“Oh my god. Is this another one of the Korean Society’s witch hunts? First wine and dine the girl, follow with the interrogation, the trial, and then the final conversion. I’m sorry, Andy, but you’d have better luck trying to save my soul if you were a Jehovah Witness.”

“On behalf of my fellow Korean brothers, I’d like to say that your indifference towards us is not something we want to change. I’m just curious is all.”

“Really?”

“Yes.”

“Well, since you did ask so politely. I like white guys because they’re undefiled.”

“Bullshit, what kind of guys do you know are undefiled?”

“Not in the sexual sense, you idiot. I mean, they’re undefiled in the sense that they
havent been put through the whole child of an immigrant experience and all that shit. I mean, everybody thinks that Koreans should date because they have this in common, but that's like having children of divorced alcoholics marry each other. Does it really make sense to have two people with the same emotional hang-ups breed together? Thereby creating inbred children with even more problems?"

"So it's not just the physical factor?"

"Well, of course that plays along with it too. The less he looks like my father, the better. That's why I go for those Nordic looking men."

"So you're basically saying that Korean men and women shouldn't date each other because they'd turn out like their parents?"

"Look, do you ever get a weird look from girls when they're first checking you out. Honestly, now."

"No...of course not. Okay, yeah, I guess I do notice a sort of judging look coming from them. But don't all women do that?"

"To a certain extent yes. When the general woman checks out a man, she asks herself, "Does this guy want my soul, or just my perky ass?" But when a Korean girl checks out a Korean guy, she first asks herself, "Are you anything like my father? Are you going to treat me like my father treated my mother?"

"No way."

"Yes, and the thing is, Korean men also have emotional problems because they either don't want to end up like their fathers and they're scared that they'll end up like them. Or they secretly want to become like them, and this scares them also."

"So if I was with a white woman, I wouldn't have to worry about this because only a Korean woman can elicit these brutal instincts from me?"

"I'm not saying that all Korean men are genetically programmed to be alcoholic wife-beaters. But our parent's generation had to endure a lot, and their extreme stress didn't exactly produce the fuzziest of feelings. It's all about the environment. But yeah, I don't think Koreans in our generation are necessarily the healthiest for each other."

"But, interracial dating is another form of ethnic suicide."

"There are plenty of Koreans breeding over there in Korea. I don't think that's really an issue."

The next night, she invited me out to dinner, her treat. She told me over the phone that she liked the way I listened to her. But that's all she let me do anyhow. Eventually, though, after a few more dates, she'd let me offer my own opinions and she'd comment on them. Our friends thought we were seriously interested in each other, but little did they know that we had simply found a friend to whom we could confess our perversions. But, it would be foolish of me to say that this was all that the friendship was based on, because I genuinely liked Laura, and yeah, cared about her too. Like I said before, if it wasn't for the fact that she looked Asian, I could have loved her.

One night, in her characteristic fashion she charged into my room, and with this dramatic entrance she launched into her diatribe of the week.

"My god, why do these white folks have such screwed up notions of Asian beauty?"

I knew I couldn't get rid of her until after her tirade, so surrendering to her, I pushed away my books and leaned back into my chair ready for yet another impromptu monologue on why Emily is fed up with the world.

"What happened, Emily? And quick, I have a test to study for."

"You know that Aryan-boy in my Gov section, the one with the hormone-induced jawline? Well, you know how we've been flirting and trading notes and everything, and he even saves a seat for me in lecture? I thought there was a real emotional bond, you know, a real connection. But guess what? Nazi-boy can't appreciate a communion of souls. He just wants some ass of the oriental kind."
"And of course, this bothers you. I understand, I'm sorry, but, ummm, what am I supposed to say here, oh yeah, Emily, you deserve better. Okay goodnight."

"No, this doesn't bother me. I don't care if he just wants some ass, what pisses me off is that he doesn't want my ass. Instead he's hooking up with Carol Chang, the wonton girl with the peasant face."

"There you go, she's a slutty girl, a charm valued above beauty."

"No, she's not wanton, she looks like a wonton, all bulgy with rolls from the chin down to her belly. I mean, I don't mind if you're a lover of yellow skin, but come on, have some taste while you're at it."

"Actually, I see what you mean. I do see a lot a white guys with unattractive Asian girls, but that's because attractive Asian girls prefer Asian guys and they can get Asian guys."

"Nope, thanks for trying but wrong again."

"Look Emily, I have a test on the Vietnam war to study for. I'm really sorry the romance with the wunderstud didn't work out, but I have to study now.

"That's it. I totally get it now. That's why white America has such a screwed up notion of Asian beauty. It's the post Vietnam war syndrome. White males had their first and intimate contact with Asian women in the brothels of Vietnam. After they came back home, they longed for their Miss Saigons and tried to relive their sexual awakenings by furthering this hick soldier's perception of the exotic, erotic Asian beauty. The thing is, these girls were stolen from the villages, and thus the coarse peasant oriental woman becomes the ideal. Haven't you noticed how all the Asian models and actresses all look alike? I'm telling you the ad and the network execs were all soldier boys who were ushered into manhood by a peasant priestess. That's it. I've figured it all out. Well, good night Andy. I have a lot of work to do tonight." And with that she left my room with a calm sense of renewed understanding.

We became best friends, and we were very happy together. That is until she started losing herself, her ideals, her pure conviction, and she fell in love with me. And there was nothing I could do to stop it. Her love was quiet and intense. She kept it so well controlled, that it had simmered into something that grew despite it being unconfessed and unfulfilled.

Why couldn't I have a relationship with Emily? Because I cared too much about her. I knew
that even though I preferred her company over anyone else's, I just wasn't attracted to her because she was Asian. If we were on a date having dinner at a nice restaurant, I'd be thinking how to sweet-talk the blonde cocktail waitress named Sheri. Or whenever we hang out and watch T.V. together, I'd be making all these comments on how cute the Irish Spring girl is or how much I want to run my fingers through the Pantene girl's hair. I couldn't put her through that, nor could I endure it if she did the same thing with me. Half the time we spent together, we both ended up checking out the white people passing us by, and I just can't deal with that.

Emily prolonged our friendship as it was for another year or so. I knew how she felt about me, but I ignored it and in turn, so did she. We both dated, and after our dates we'd reconvene to tell each other how it went. Emily had three boyfriends while she was in love with me. One Wasp, one mid-westerner, and an English exchange student. This was the girl who only dated for free meals. But I guess she needed intimacy, the kind that I couldn't give her. I, on the other hand, only dated. And with Emily by my side to reassure my mother I'd give her the pure grandchildren she wanted, I could secretly date as many white girls as I wanted. Emily, the trooper that she is, would always cover for me.

My senior year in college, this was after I had known Emily for two and a half years, I found her waiting for me in my room with the lights turned off. I opened the door, and in the dark room I could see her shadowed self, sitting in the corner. I could tell she had been crying because she was hiding her face from me behind her hair. She told me about how she had ended her relationship with the English guy. This didn't surprise me. But, I stood there next to the door not knowing what to do. After she had broken up with her other boyfriends she'd come whirling into my room relating how annoying the guy was and how she had with dramatic flair, spurned her lover away. After we'd laugh a bit, she'd whirl out of my room again and that was it. This time however, I began to worry. I stood for a while and I knew that with the hallway light behind me, she would not be able to see my face, only the dark outline of my form. I did not turn on the lights.

"Andy?"
"Yeah."
"Do you know why I broke up with Phillip?"
"No."
"I think you do," she said and she turned her face towards me, with her eyes puffy and her lips pressed against each other to prevent them from trembling.

I stepped into my room and closed the door behind me. Now in complete darkness, I knew she could not see my outline, could not see how I was looking away from her, could not see how my hands were shaking. I hoped to God that she would not say anything further.

She then walked up to me and she was so close that even in the dark I could see how her mouth was a bit raw. I guessed she had been biting them.

"Andy, why can't we..."
"Because I don't."

I then kissed her. Although the impulse was pure, this moment of purity did not last, for I wasn't kissing only Emily. All the white women of my fantasies rose up behind her face and pushed their own mouths towards mine. Marcy the child and Joanna the pop-tart girl offered their lips in place of Emily. The red-head that sells hair color on T.V. also clamored for my attention. And although I did not want them to leave, they did anyhow. And I was kissing just Emily again.

* * * * * * * * * * * * *

It's funny that people think we are the ideal couple, beautiful and happy. It's even funnier that sometimes, especially when I'm not with her, I believe it too.

---

Angela Hur is a freshman who will be living in Cabot House next year and concentrating in English.
Jean Ryoo is a freshman concentrating in Visual & Environmental Studies and Anthropology and living in Lowell House next year.
The Story of an Hour

Fiction by Jay Moon

Tonight, my father’s snoring comforted me. The harsh red digits on the alarm clock read 3:24. I laid in bed wondering why just an hour ago I could not answer my father’s question.

“What is your dream?”

I sat in silence, still groggy from when my father had awoken me from a sound, dreamless sleep.

“What do you mean?” I mumbled bitterly.

We sat in silence for a while. I tilted my head downwards so as to look pensive in thought and to not reveal that my eyelids were almost shut.

“I expected you to come to me before you left this morning. I’ve been waiting since after dinner. Tell me, why are you leaving for Harvard this morning? Why am I sending you to Harvard? I paid thirty thousand a year to send you to the best boarding school in America and I am now going to pay forty thousand so that you can go to the school you’ve wanted to go to since kindergarten and you can’t even tell me what your dream is?”

My eyes and head snapped alert and I stared into his intense eyes.

“I don’t know. Why don’t you tell me.” I answered with even more of an edge in my voice and a nasty glare.

From all the times he had woken me in the middle of the night to imbue me with his life philosophy for us only to get into yet another argument, I knew he was about to explode. Yet, no matter how many times it had happened, I could never prepare. I always flinched when it came. Even though he had stopped hitting us years ago when my younger brother, the football player, fiercely punched three holes in the wall after he saw my father spank my little sister, I could still remember waiting face-down for the first strike to come. No matter how many times it happened, I could never fully prepare myself. Like those times when I tensed in fear of the first strike, I flinched when my father yelled.

“Harvard is not necessary,” he screamed in Korean. “Work for me at the store! Do you know how important I am? Who will pay your tuition? Your mother? Work at the store!”

Then, just as flinching had always been a defensive mechanism, I said without thinking, “Fine,” knowing that by not going to Harvard I was crushing his dreams as well as the ones I had but couldn’t even define. I stood up, still looking him straight in his eyes, and left to go to sleep before tears came. I laid there in bed, staring straight up into the dark ceiling and heard silence. It was the same silence I had always heard when I laid in bed after another fight with my dad. It was the throbbing, hot kind, when blood and fury coursed through my head, making me deaf to the subtle sounds of nighttime in my house.

The same thing had happened right before I had gone to boarding school. He woke me up at two that morning. Dressed in hanbok, properly groomed and sitting cross-legged with his hands clasped in formality, he sat me down and asked me why I was spending thirty grand a year for high school. I told him that I wasn’t sure—and I sincerely wasn’t. I couldn’t tell him that it was to get away from the suffocation of family and home, even though that was what my heart was screaming at him. Later in the conversation, as he tried to coax his deeply philosophical answer out of me—he always did that, trying to get me to say the response he would have said—I angrily asked him if it wasn’t his idea in the first place. I yelled and cried, stormed to my room and, like clockwork, he came to my room a little while later. I listened to his philosophies on life, we made up, and I followed his agenda and left for Exeter at 7:45 am. This morning, it was the same.

He was always so dramatic in the way he thought and acted. Everything had to hold some kind of meaning, as if the most minute, insignificant gesture repre-
sent everything that he believed. Like the way he always wore the hanbok and sat so properly when we had our late-night talks. I know he wanted me to believe that he was some ancient Korean philosopher imparting to me, his filial student, the wisdom of his life before I left our home, his temple. I always angrily wondered why he couldn’t be more intimate as a father and just talk to me without the symbolic drama and propriety. And ever since I became old enough to hold the responsibility of being his oldest son, everything I did and said had to hold some kind of meaning for him and in only the way he wanted. He didn’t approve of my handwriting because the messiness reflected an unkempt, cluttered mind. He didn’t like the way I laughed because it was high-pitched and made me sound like a pyung-shin. He didn’t like that I breathed with my mouth open because it showed improper manners, and fundamentally, a poor upbringing. He hated the way I wore my hat backwards because it showed a backwardness of my mind and heart. At one point, he threatened to kick me out of the house if I ever wore a hat backwards again. I don’t think I ever wore a hat again.

After imagining two or three scenarios of suicide and running away, the blood had calmed to a normal flow. I expected to hear the familiar creaking and pounding of my father’s heavy footsteps in the hallway. I wanted him to open the door and so I could close my eyes and feign sleep, to show him that I didn’t bother me enough to even keep me awake in thought.

When he didn’t come, I laid there thinking about him and getting angry at myself. Last night, when I was saying bye to my high school girlfriend, I told her how disappointed I was in her because she hadn’t even changed clothes after tennis practice to come say bye to me. There I was, upset and embarrassed that I had worn the shirt she had given me for Christmas that year with those damn pin-stripped slacks I hated but she loved, and she didn’t even have the courtesy to change.

“I’m going to miss you a lot.”

“Yeah, whatever, you probably wouldn’t give a shit anyways. You don’t even care that I’m going to be remembering you in your sweaty warm-ups.”

“It doesn’t matter. Why are you always so damn dramatic?”

*Why are you always so dramatic?* I hated that she said that. I left her upset.

The clock glared 3:44. The snoring had gotten even louder and it started to annoy me. I could remember all those Monday nights when I was watching football on TV with my friends. My dad always came home from work at around 8:30 and would always come over to watch with us and ask us the same questions about how the game was played. I know my friends liked explaining it to him, but every time? It was so embarrassing to have a dad who didn’t know the difference between a two-point conversion and a touchdown. I wanted to tell him that he could learn if he ever stayed awake long enough. The worst would come when he settled into his armchair and fell asleep during the fourth quarter. It wouldn’t be so bad, but his snoring always got so unbearably embarrassing. My mom used to get angry at me for trying to wake him because he worked twelve hour days at the store even though the doctor told him it wasn’t good for his high blood pressure: *He’s high-risk for a stroke already.* So, eventually, I stopped inviting my friends. Secretly, I blamed him for messing up my friendships.

It was 4:00 sharp. I couldn’t go back to sleep, and I figured I should just stay up anyways and think away for the rest of the morning. I hadn’t noticed that the snoring had gone silent, until I heard him breathe in especially deeply and exhale with a loud gasping choke. I thought that he might have woken up, so I tried to feign sleep for when he would walk into my room. I knew he would, he always did. Like clockwork. At 4:24, an uneasy curiosity had gotten the best of me. He hadn’t come yet. I got up, hoping that he had calmed down, would let me go take that flight to Harvard which was at 7:30, and comforted myself with the thought that I would be away from home in just three hours. Maybe he expects me to come talk to him. Walking through the hallway, I could hear the creaking underfoot. He must have heard it too, because I could hear him faintly calling out for me. Indignant that he thought he won by making me come to him, I took my time, taking slow, deliberate, heavy steps so he would hear that I wasn’t in a hurry.

When I got to his room, and opened his door, he collapsed on the floor in a hanbok, the weight of his groomed hair out of place because of the severe angle of his head. His skin was jaundiced and his voice was weak.

“Son, son, son, son. I was waiting for you to come. I wanted to hear your dreams.”

I knelt to hold him in my arms. I wanted to tell him that I wasn’t going to go to Harvard, that I would take care of him like he always took care of me, but my voice was choked. Crying unstopably, I held his head in my arms and gently kissed him on his forehead. I knew he knew what I wanted to tell him because he kept on saying thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you. Sometimes, the littlest gestures can represent everything.

Jay Moon is a sophomore concentrating in sociology and living in Mather House.
Letters from the dead: a rotten old atheist

Fiction by Halla Yang

When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child. My extensive list of puerile phobias included the perennial favorites fear of death and flying in airplanes, but I also presented less common neuroses like an aversion to wearing rings — my mother had told me that Korean pickpockets would cut off my fingers to steal the golden annulets — and a fear of being hit by baseballs. My father once fed me pitches in a vain effort to better my .071 Little League batting average, but I invariably flinched when the ball came near. Finally the exasperated pitcher beamed me hard on the shoulder to teach me a lesson, breaking my clavicle in the process.

My pubescence was paralyzed by these and other mental blocks. I was afraid of tripping with my left foot, stepping on cracks, and being shot by sixth-story snipers. I had recurring dreams of being chased by fast-moving crocodiles, by pernicious Soviet secret agents, and by over-sized Mickey Mouses armed with heavy submachine guns. Sometimes I awoke from these dreams feeling an awful dread of death — perhaps my parents had died? If they were late returning from an evening party, I started making contingency plans in the event that I — a eleven year-old only child — was forced to fend for my orphaned self. I would begin by arranging a modest service at a funeral home, then I would call relatives in Korea to break the news, and lastly I would find a realtor and move into a smaller condominium, investing the proceeds from the sale of my former residence in S&P index funds. I would live off the interest until I was admitted into the college of my choice, at which point I would receive so many scholarships that I could turn a respectable profit as a professional student. Then the lights would go on downstairs and I would know that my parents had finally returned. “What are you doing up at two in the morning,” they would ask, to which I replied with a perfectly serious face, “How come you’re back so late?”

When meditations on death and the afterlife struck me cold with panic, I turned to John and Paul for comfort. Their writings soothed my apprehensions with stories of men resuscitated from the dead, blind men made to see, lepers healed, and adulterers rescued from execution. There were so many witnesses testifying to the imminent resurrection that I could confidently proclaim that whether I was cremated, mutilated, or masticated, I too would find my spot at the right hand of the Lord. I was a phobic child, but with my faith the size of a mustard seed, I could move mountains. That I had never actually managed to move one was an accident of fate — there were no mountains meriting divine intervention in my vicinity, excepting the sand castles that others had left on the beach, ill-fated Babels which I destroyed with my size 3 Nikes — this symbolized the triumph of eternal God over transient human works.

Throughout this period, my parents were preoccupied with the expansion of their business empire, a small chaebol with a pair of gas stations in the Baltimore area. Business was booming, and so I was often left in the care of my baby-sitter, a North Korean defector who had immigrated to the United States. Mr. Hwang was a forty-five year old ex-farmer who had fled his country because he had committed some petty offense against the state. He was fiercely distrustful of others, having as his phobia a dreadful fear that North Korean agents would find and kill him. (He died in mysterious circumstances when I was fifteen, but by then I had outgrown the need for a baby-sitter.) On one occasion, he came into my room and saw me studying the New Testament. With a grave expression on his face, he chimed in his broken English,
that Harvard-bound Koreans were the Divine Elect, and when a girl at a Korean nightclub refused to give me her phone number, I interpreted it as a tacit admission that she was not pure and sinless enough for me to associate with.

In the middle of my sophomore year at Harvard, as I lay on my bed suffering from photophobia, headache, and other symptoms of that malaise indecorously dubbed "hangover," I was struck by the realization that I was now almost an adult. This had its complications. My idiotic conception of God could no longer be passed off as youthful ignorance, and like an adopted child in search of his natural father, I thought it best to seek out my long-lost Father and re-introduce myself. There were so many questions I wanted to ask when I met Him, like "What did you think of The Grand Inquisitor?" and "Are you a benevolent God?" My quest to find God was a game of hide-and-seek with cosmic proportions; I commenced my search operation in what seemed like the most natural place — a church, the "House of God."

Looking in the Yellow Pages, I discovered a small army of local churches each claiming to be the genuine honest-to-god residence of the almighty Yahweh. This messy situation was simplified when my sunbae informed me that God appeared to Koreans only in Korean churches. They brought me to their church one afternoon, where I found myself communing with half the gyapos in the Boston area. Together we cried, prayed, and sang to our Father who art in heaven, but disappointingly, I felt no response from my deadbeat Dad.

"Ye were born a sinner, and ye shall die a sinner," the preacher preached. "We humans are repugnant spiders in the eyes of God, and it is fitting and proper that we be thrown into the pits of Hell for our miserable sins." I internalized the sermon with mathematical perspicuity — I am a disobedient child, but if and only if I tell Him I love Him and want to come back, I will be rescued. My relationship with God reminded me of my first girlfriend and her stepfather, who in his drunken fits would beat and insult her until she told him she loved him.

God had deliberately created me stupid, ugly and flawed so that I would crawl to Him with a declaration of love. I demanded an explanation, but I discovered that God had the free will to ignore my inquiries. I was advised to seek Him in my heart, in messy humanity, in the bellies of whales, and though I found secondary evidence of His continuing existence in the most unexpected of places — a fat homeless woman saying "God bless" when I grudged her a grubby dollar, schoolhouse graffiti proclaiming "Jesus lives!" — the voice of God never
sounded in my own ears, except occasionally by way of a morning radio program.

"Don't try to meet God," my roommate and best friend Jason warned. "He'll come to you in your moment of need, like when you're sprawled out on someone's mangy sofa, dying from a bad trip. It happened to one of my friends — before he gave up his ghost, he spoke of seeing the Lord in the sky with diamonds. It was a beautiful moment." In place of my childhood conception of God as a warm, welcoming, bearded Caucasian male with blue eyes and blond hair, he envisioned God as an ancient gnarled sage in an ivory tower, one who seldom deigned to interact with the human mess of His creation. Yet this was still compatible with the God of Christianity, he claimed, for the historical God had spoken only with specially selected prophets in ancient Israel. Jason added that in the story of doubting Thomas, Jesus taught that most blest are the believers who have no idea who God is, conclusively concluding that my own wish for theophany was symptomatic of the corruption and ego-centrism of post-ramen noodle society.

Thus, I determined that not knowing God was to my spiritual advantage. If on Judgment Day, God were to ask, "Why didn't you listen to me," it might be safest to reply, "I'm sorry, but you've never spoken to me. And I don't believe we've met, anyhow." Could God punish the ignorant for their ignorance? What if I had been born a Buddhist and lived my entire life as a devout Buddhist, piously following the eight-fold path to my eight-hundred-and-eighth incarnation? At worst, I might end up in Dante's Limbo with Homer and the other pagans, but I reasoned parabolically that the sheep who went wandering in the desert to find the truant shepherd was likely to get lost and starve.

God became irrelevant to my life, for I resolved to carry on with or without Him. I volunteered to help the poor, I became a doctor to heal the sick, and I taught my children to love their neighbors. Eventually I lost the delusional capacity to believe in a God that didn't exist in the world as I knew it — practically speaking He might as well not exist at all — and so I became an atheist, a rotten-sounding word with connotations of primitive debauchery. My friends in college had worried that godlessness would provide me with a "license to sin," but I noted with satisfaction that in many instances I was saved from sin by virtue of my atheism, for Korean Christian girls typically abstained from mating with non-believers.

When I died at the age of one-hundred-and-four, most of my Christian friends had long since perished from this earth. They ascended into the company of angels, whereas I was banished to Purgatory, where I found myself in the company of my beloved baby-sitter, Mr. Hwang. Jesus lives! I have seen Lazarus in Abraham's bosom, and I have been given the awful task of warning you — the friends and memories of my youth — about the verity of the veritable, the venerable Vulgate. My letter has crossed infinites of time and space to reach your stony hearts and ears full of wax. Two times two need not equal four, nor need this letter make logical sense to you, for all that which seems stupid and nonsensical to you becomes sensible in God's almighty wisdom. Heed my words and follow Him, lest like me, you die a rotten old atheist.

1 Korean conglomerate, e.g. Hyundai, Samsung, and Lotte Group.
2 Older student. The relationship between older and younger students is very important in Korean Confucianism.
3 Koreans living abroad. Here, I mean specifically Korean-Americans.

---

Halla Yang is a junior concentrating in Physics and living in Mather House.
The largest peasant uprising in Korea's history, the Tonghak Uprising of 1894 was a seminal point for later people's movements. This small monument marks a hill in Cholla Province where thousands of peasants and farmers gathered to protest government corruption and foreign incursion.

Rice paddies of Cholla Province...a land worth fighting for.

A portrait of Chon Pong-Jun, leader of the Tonghak peasant army, hangs in his house in Kobu County.

The Minjung Struggle in History

by Paul Yunsik Chang
4 Pagoda park, downtown Seoul, where the Declaration of Independence was read on March 1st, 1919. Parading the streets shouting "taehan tongnip mansel" (Long live an independent Korea), over a million people protested Japan’s colonization of Korea (1910-1945).

5 One of the many stone murals in Pagoda park depicting the March 1st movement. This one portrays the leadership role of Yu Kwan-Sun who was imprisoned, tortured and eventually martyred by the Japanese colonial government.

6 Myeongdong Cathedral, in Seoul, became an icon in the dissident movement of the 1970-80s. Catholics and Protestants, as well as secular groups, came together here to protest the dictatorial regimes of Park Chung-Hee, and Chun Doo-Hwan. The cathedral today continues to be a locus where activists can voice their concerns, the banners here advocate labor rights.
The main rotary in the city of Kwangju where on May 18, 1980, thousands of citizens came together to challenge the legitimacy of Chun Doo-Hwan's government. A threshold in the democracy movement, Kwangju represents both the determination of these citizens as well as the price that Chun Doo-Hwan was willing to pay to stay in power.

The rotary in Kwangju today.

"The Gate of Democracy", the entrance to Mangwol Cemetery, a memorial established by a later government in honor of those who sacrificed their lives for an ideal.

One hundred thirty of the roughly two thousand people who lost their lives in Kwangju rest in the memorial... a reminder of their sacrifice.
Stupid Fish

by Jay Mok

There once was a flying fish
who loved her short trips out of the water.
She was not alone in the red muddy waters.
Some of her kind,
enjoyed the sweet moments in the air,
the sensation of light wind
stroking their scales.
But some became so infatuated with
the flight that they thought
they were closer to the birds than the fish.
They would look up in envy
swimming past their brothers and sisters,
looking up to the sky, to the birds,
admiring the appearance of their scales,
so soft and white.
She shared in this thought,
found her scales slimy and disgusting.
She would always affix her eyes to clouds,
blind to her school of flying fish,
bumping, pushing them out of her way
because in her mind, she had decided
she was more a bird than a fish.
So once in a while, a bird would soar
close to the ceiling of her water world,
and she would dart up towards it
along with the other believers.
Then burst from the water
in the path of the bird.
“Grab me, grab me.” She would exclaim.
But it would not happen,
she was not the lucky one.
Diving back in the water,
back into the liquid of her habitat.
From there, she would watch the chosen one
being carried away to the world of the birds
and wonder how that flying fish
was considered more a bird than a fish.
Then one day a torrent of birds
streaked above her red, muddy waters,
causing ripples in her fluid home.
Her eyes widened and shot to the surface,
“So many before me have already been transformed.
I must be among the chosen,” she exclaimed.
She wiggled her body, her fins,
flipping wildly for acceleration.
She had the hunger, the one thought in her head —
this time, I must be among the birds.
Exploding out of the water,
Bursting from the sheen of the surface,
her body a rock,
then suddenly surrendering to the air, her eyes shut closed by the strain of her effort. Then as she was about to exclaim “Catch me” she was violently shook from her aerial path and ripped higher into the sky. The joy in her brain pierced out opening her eyes to her lovely captor—a white bird with its wings at full extension the wind causing ruffles on its fluffy scales, its talons rapped around her body. “Thank you. Thank you,” she yelped. “No, thank you,” he replied. Wiggling with confidence and achievement, her brain felt intoxicated by her maneuver, “Now surely, I am more a bird than a fish.” Looking below, she saw her red, muddy waters, but more surprisingly, a deep vast blue below. She moved to catch a better look, but the bird only strengthened his grip, his talon piercing her scales. She stopped shifting, letting him control her. A bit of blood flowing from her wound. A small bit of pain, a small sacrifice for her future gain. They flew through the air, she glided into the winds, caressing her scales. But they felt different, dry, rough and dying. “How much longer? How much longer till I am one with the birds?” she asked. “Soon, soon my love,” the bird replied. Then suddenly she saw a bundle of sticks and a few darling birds, so young and vibrant. “This is where I shall finally be transformed,” she thought. The beauteous bird set her down in her new stick cradle, she was shivering with excitement. The youngsters cackled with the joy of her arrival. She was finally there, finally there. Half a lifetime proving to everyone, proving to herself, she was more a bird than a fish. And finally she would be transformed. “Now will I be of the birds?” she asked. “Yes, you will be of the birds,” he replied.

Jay Mok is a senior living in Eliot House concentrating in Economics.
Modern Korean Poetry

Remembering the day I gave birth to a daughter (in the story-telling rhythm of Pan-sori*)

Poem by Kim Hye-sun (1955- )
Translation by Jiwon Shin

As I open the mirror and enter, my mother is seated inside the mirror, and as I open the mirror and enter again, mother's mother is seated inside that mirror, and as I push the mirror where mother's mother sits, and cross the threshold, mother's mother's mother grins in the mirror, and as I poke my head through the grinning lips of my mother's mother's mother, inside that mirror, my mother's mother's mother is seated looking younger than me, with her back turned toward me, and as I open that mirror and enter, and enter again, yet enter once more, inside the mirror growing darker and darker all mothers of the ancestral line sit and all the mothers, they leap at me murmuring or yelping, mommy, mommy, crying out for milk with their lips puckered up, but my breasts run dry, and instead, somebody keeps blowing air into my intestines and my belly swells up larger than a balloon and so it floats and wafts here and there on the sea, and inside the mirror, it's so very wide and vast that I can't find even a straw to hold onto, and from time to time, lightning flashes through my body, and every time I dive into the sea, on the floor at the bottom of the sea, melting are the shoes of all the mothers in tranquillity, yet, lightning from a clear sky. Lights out. Darkness in heaven and earth. At that moment, the mirrors collapse before me, all at once, and as they break, they spew out one mother and many people in white, with gloved hands, remove the debris of mirrors and lift up the mother of all my mothers, blood-stained and with her eyes shut, and say, it's a princess with ten fingers!

Translator's note - originating in eighteenth century Korea, Pan-sori is a dramatic performance accompanied by singing and drum beats.
Night of Star-Counting

Poem by Yun Tong-Ju (1917-1945)
Translated by Christy Choi

The sky where seasons pass
Is replete with fall.

I feel as if I could count
All the stars of the fall without any worry.

That I cannot count
All the stars that are impressed one by one
on my heart
Is because morning comes easily,
Because there is still tomorrow night,
And because my youth has not run out yet.

One star for memory
One star for love
One star for solitude
One star for yearning
One star for poetry
One star for mother, mother,

Mother, I utter a beautiful phrase for each
star. I call out the names of children with
whom I shared desks in grammar school; the
names of such foreign girls as Pae, Kyung,
and Ock; the names of girls who have already
become mothers; the names of poor neighbor-
hood people; dove, puppy, rabbit, mule,
deer; and the names of such poets as Francis
Jammes and Rainer Maria Rilke.

They are too far away.
As the stars are faintly far,

Mother,
And you are far away in North Gando.

Longing for something or other,
I wrote my name
On the hilltop where all this plentiful
starlight has fallen
And covered it with dirt.

As for the bug crying all through the night,
It is because it grieves over the shameful
name.

But, after winter, when spring arrives even
at my star
As green grass grows out from gravetops
Grass will be abundant, as if to boast,
Even on the hilltop where my name is buried.
I Want to Sing

Poem by Chu Yohan (1900-79)
Translated by Chong Bum Kim

Just like the fish breathing in clear water,
The lark flying high in the blue sky,
And the boat sailing in fair wind,
I want to sing
Freely.

Just like the sun glistening on the white sand,
The white waves crashing against the cliffs,
And the child playing with the waves,
I want to sing
Innocently.

River Waters

Poem by Chon Sang-byung (1930-1993)
Translated by Han Sung Kim

The reason why all river waters flow into the sea
is not only because I've been crying
all day
standing on the hill.

The reason is not only because I've been blossoming
in yearning like a sunflower
all night
standing on the hill.

The reason why I've been crying like a beast
in grief standing on the hill
is not only because
all river waters flow into the sea.
Comfort women: knowing nothing about the topic I found the word to sound almost pleasant, maternal. But at best, it is a gross understatement, a euphemism masking the inhumanity and cruelty marking the identity. During World War II, the Japanese military forced captive women of various nationalities including Filipino, Taiwanese, Japanese, with the majority being Korean, to work in a brothel-system for their soldiers. Of the women who survived the years of abuse and terror working in the comfort stations, most lived with the silent shame of their pasts. Many have died in secret. But the ones that have chosen to take political action and actively seek compensation are struggling to have their grievances heard.

"Half a century has passed since the time when every day was a dreadful nightmare for me but Japan still tells lies and avoids responsibility. How can they do that in the presence of myself and many others like me, victims who are alive and kicking?" A former comfort woman for the Imperial Army of Japan, Chung Seo-Woon posed this question to the packed audience at the 1995 NGO Forum held in conjunction with the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. The grievances of surviving Korean comfort women against the Japanese government and their demands for a formal written apology and appropriate state-level compensation remain unmet. Why did it take half a century for survivors to actively pursue justice? My initial explanation was that the mentality of Asian societies, which regard these women with a mixture of sympathy, pity, and shame, prevented them from bringing the issue to the public. But after watching the film and speaking to Kim-Gibson, I learned that the value system of Asian societies was only part of the reason. There were factors of double discrimination because they were Asian and female. Prejudice clearly played a role, because out of the surviving comfort women, the Dutch women were the only ones whose grievances were brought to and resolved in court. Kim- Gibson pointed out the factor of priority. While the Japanese government denied the involvement of the army in establishing comfort stations, the Allied Forces, viewing the issue in context of the larger effects of war, pushed it aside.
With her latest work, Korean-American film director Daisil Kim-Gibson takes part in the effort to address the inhumane crimes committed by the imperial Army by telling the personal stories of comfort women in their own voices. “Silence Broken: Korean Comfort Women” documents and immortalizes the scarring experiences of surviving Korean comfort women and gives voice to Japanese officials and present-day scholars presenting their sides of the issue. The premier showing of “Silence Broken: Korean Comfort Women” was on March 20th at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, where Kim-Gibson, along with Grandmother Chung Seo Woon, former comfort woman and feature subject of Kim-Gibson’s dramatization, were present for opening and closing comments and questions.

“Silence Broken” opens with serene and pleasant images of the Korean landscape: strong-flowing streams, verdant fields of vegetation and blossoms, mountains and peaks surrounded by mist. The wailing sounds of traditional Korean folk singing are piercing, creating an air of the accumulated sorrow, han, and suppressed rage of the scarred souls of the comfort women. During the first half of “Silence Broken,” Kim-Gibson interviews the surviving women who give glimpses into their terrible memories of working literally as sex workhorses in the military camps. Many of these personal stories have common beginnings of lies and empty promises of factory jobs, ways to get family members out of jail. The extreme poverty created by the war plagued the living conditions of majority of Koreans and made any prospects of earning money nearly impossible to refuse. It was especially hard to refuse for young girls and young women who were desperate to help out their family.

It was personally uncomfortable and disturbing to watch and listen to these Korean grandmothers tell of the unspeakable abuse they endured as young women taken from their homes, transported like goods, having their bodies become mere objects of “comfort” and sexual relief for Japanese soldiers. But pity is the last thing that these women want to evoke in the public. It is useless, for their sorrow has been branded into them. What they want is to gain some kind of quiescence from the horrors they’d endured, to have their issues be acknowledged without skepticism of its validity, to show that they have no need to keep silent or be ashamed.

“Silence Broken” does not focus as much as on the past experiences of these women during the war years, but on the women themselves. Her presence in the film is suppressed and she allows the voices of the former comfort women to guide her and the audience through their disturbing pasts and their present struggles to find some sort of quiescence in their lives. For some, it also meant having to sacrifice family support and facing criticism and blame for bringing dishonor upon themselves for revealing such a “shameful” past.

In the second half of her film, Kim-Gibson recreated the personal story of one of the survivors, Grandmother Seo Woon Chung. I found that the dramatization gave the viewer a chance to take a breath from the intense, somewhat disorienting and emotionally taxing nature of the first half of the film, which was primarily the women’s personal testimonies and interview segments with Japanese officials.

But I also found the language transition from Korean to English to be a bit awkward. Director Kim-Gibson, during the question and answer segment after the film, explained that her decision to have the actors and actresses speak in English was the result of several factors. She wanted to allow the non-Korean speakers to get a chance to watch the film without having to focus on reading
subtitles. Although she admitted that she remains a bit uncertain about the effectiveness of her intentions, Kim-Gibson said that she finds it senseless to worry over what’s already been done.

What made a lasting impression on me were the women’s inner strength, their bold willingness to speak of matters that are considered taboo by Korean society, and their unwavering stance in their cause to receive due compensation from the Japanese government. Private funds, monetary compensation, or half-hearted verbal apologies are not what they want, for these cannot possibly compensate for their loss of human dignity and chastity, which they valued more precious than life itself. They want the Japanese government to face up to the wrongdoings of their army and to help them bring a sense of closure to their struggles.

In her director’s statement, Daisil Kim-Gibson discusses the personal impact of talking to the women about their experiences and her struggle to capture on film the humanity of these women:

Since I was drawn into the lives of these women whom I call grandmas, following the Korean custom for women old enough to have grandchildren, my life has not been the same. Old enough to be called “grandma” myself, born in North Korea when Japan ruled our country, the stories of these women frequently made me a captive of unruly and turbulent feelings that led me into a psychic region beyond my mind’s eye and shook me with such fury and sorrow that I shuddered. That’s why it has been an extra struggle to make this film... In making this film, I often felt my entire personal history becoming entangled with the history of my land of birth, coupled with that of mankind. In rare moments when my self was stretched beyond the focal point of my consciousness, my ego, I felt I have a vision, not of mine but of an unborn work to which I was to give birth. Yet, those were fleeting moments that disappeared sooner than they came. Clearly, then, in one sense the completed work is as shallow as I am but I hope it is more. I rely on the power of the collective voices of the women who tell their stories and all those who suffered the insufferable, living or dead. If there is even an echo of those voices, the film will have a power surpassing the maker. By the time I moved to the dramatized scenes, it no longer became important for me to keep track of who said what. I began to feel the power of their stories as a common experience, their collective story becoming aglow with pain that touched my heart (Kim-Gibson “Silence Broken - Director’s Statement”).

Kim-Gibson succeeds in her efforts to flesh out a historical event and to reach over generation gaps. She wants the comfort women to be more than faded figures of a period in Korean history which people of later generations may be unfamiliar with or indifferent towards. The humanity of these women drew me in and it was impossible to objectively treat their experiences as a historical event. Although there was no way I could relate to the difficulties faced by these women, the film allowed for the audience to empathize with them and to share in the common experience of human suffering. But Kim-Gibson extends her aim of public empathy to the larger issues of humanity and political and social action, ending her closing remarks with: “Add your voice to theirs [the comfort women] to bring the silenced past into the present and to a future that should never repeat the unspeakable crimes against ourselves, humanity.”

Joohee Lee is a freshman concentrating in Biology and living in Cabot House.
What does it really mean to be a Korean who has grown up in the United States? It's a confusing thing, and not a concept that could or should be labeled automatically as either good or bad. On one hand, I feel very content, no utterly happy, to be here. This country is my home, the only home that I have known, and the only home that I feel contains my own tiny bit of personal past. Yet, one hesitates when thinking about this—why? I suppose it is because I realize that there is an aspect of Korean culture that I will never be able to understand by reading or even visiting. This "loss of (potential) history" is certainly striking.

Recently, I went to the MFA to watch two short films that asked the same types of questions. Both films looked at what it means to have such "potential" memories in one's own past. In Greg Pak's Oscar-winning "Fighting Grandpa," he cleverly shows the entire spectrum of the infrastructure within a Korean family by weaving together a story that circles around a reticent and even hostile grandfather. Through his interviews with the wife, children, and friends, Pak is able to paint a picture of a very typical Korean man of the 1950s: silent, stubborn, and oftentimes cold. Yet, Pak does not illustrate a family that is desolate and lonely, but in fact reveals a poignantly strong one—a family held together by both personal pain and personal joy. The hardships of living in a different cultures seem, in the eyes of Pak, to be the factors that create a close and caring family as well. This film's beauty lies in its simplicity; somehow, the quiet story of a not-so-perfect family living in the America made wonderful, personal, tender sense to me.

"Olivia's Story," directed by Charles Burnett and produced by Daisil Kim-Gibson, also explores the importance and vitality of a Korean family living in America. Olivia's family is a strong one—there is a sense of balance between the two contrasting cultures that must coexist together within two generations. The young children and their "American" ideals complement the fond and personal memories of the elders. The film reveals the possibilities of such a union; not only are the two cultures integrated but these two cultures serve to bring the two generations together as well. Ultimately, "Olivia's Story" asserts the idea that the acceptance of a culture, whichever one it may be, comes from the understanding of it.

Both films used the portrait of a Korean family to show the uniquely complex and fascinating process of what it means to be a Korea-American. Watching these films made me realize how satisfying it is to be part of both cultures—and that neither one has to be denied for the sake of the other. ■

*Sue Hyun Kim is a freshman concentrating in History and Science living in Adams House.*
Jason Cho is sophomore living in Kirkland House concentrating in Visual & Environmental Studies and East Asian Studies.
Will Korean Americans Be A Racial Bourgeoisie in the New Millennium?

by Claire Jean Kim, Professor at UCI.

Earlier this year, poet Amy Uyematsu gave a reading of some of her work as part of the Asian American Studies Noontime Speaker Series at the University of California, Irvine. I knew Uyematsu as the author of “The Emergence of Yellow Power in America” (1969), an impassioned essay that articulated the philosophy of the then-nascent Asian American movement and emphasized its connection to the Black Power movement of the time. When Uyematsu solicited requests at the poetry reading, I asked that she read a poem that I knew, entitled, “This Shame Called Joy.” The poem explores the poet’s emotions about the killing of Latasha Harlins, a fifteen-year-old Black girl, by Soon Ja Du, a Korean American store owner, over a carton of orange juice in a Los Angeles store: “This lust I cultivate for the ordinary, the juice of an orange tasting more exquisite/than I ever remember/cannot be separated from the brutal/death of a child who only wanted/to drink from the same fruit.” Soon Ja Du claimed that she had shot Latasha Harlins in self-defense after the girl had attacked her, but the store video...

울해 초 UC 아버인에서 열린 아시아계 미국인 연구 연설 시리즈 중 일부로 시인 에이미 우에마츠가 자신의 작품을 낭독하는 자리가 있었다. 나는 우에마츠를 1960년대 일어나기 시작한 아시아계 미국인 운동의 사상과, 이 운동과 그 당시의 흑인 파워 운동과의 연계성을 강조한 경향 까지는의 수필, “미국에서 출현한 황색 파워”(1969)의 저자로 기억하고 있었다. 우에마츠가 관중의 부탁을 요청했을 때 나는 내가 전부터 알고 있던 시, “기쁨이란 불리는 처치”을 읽어주기를 요청했다. 이 시는 한국계 미국인 가계주인 두손자 씨가 L.A.의 상점에서 15세의 흑인 소녀 라티사 할린스와 오렌지 주스 한 병을 두고 싸워버린 끝에 이 소녀를 살해한 사건에 대한 시인의 감정을 담은 것이었다. “내가 봉변을 위해 가꾸는 욕망/ 내 기억 속에 있는 어떤 오렌지 줄보다 참혹한/ 오직 그 열매로 목마름을 채우고 살아하던 아이의 처절한 죽음.” 두손자 라티사 할린스의 공격으로부터...
tape showed that she had shot Latasha in the back of the head as the girl walked away from their brief altercation over some orange juice. Sounding the model minority trope, Judge Joyce Karlin, a White woman, reasoned that Soon Ja Du was not a threat to others and gave her a sentence of probation. The entire incident outraged the Black community in Los Angeles and helped to pave the way for the Los Angeles rebellion of 1992, or what Korean Americans call Sa-I-Gu. After Uyematsu read the poem, it became clear that certain students, in particular, Korean American students, objected to it. They felt that the poem blamed the Korean American woman for what had happened and didn’t acknowledge “that she was just as much a victim as the Black girl.”

These Korean American students chose to engage in a reflexive assertion of Korean American solidarity rather than confronting the real facts surrounding the killing. They saw the incident entirely through Soon Ja Du’s eyes: as a Korean American merchant working in a Black neighborhood in America, she had experienced both White racism and Black racism, she was terrified of being killed by a robber, she was alone and vulnerable in the store, etc. They denied Latasha Harlins’ perspective to the point where they saw any expression of sorrow over her death as a denial of Korean American hardships in this White-dominated society. It was as if Soon Ja Du could not be a wrongdoer since she was herself a victim. Or perhaps her status as victim nullified whatever wrong she had committed. Thus the students took sides and closed group ranks. This is how many Korean Americans interpret Black-Korean conflict more generally. They usually see Black collective action against Korean American merchants—even nonviolent boycotts—as racial scapegoating, or the irrational and unfair venting of Black frustrations upon innocent immigrants who happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. By this hegemonic interpretation, one side is right, the other is wrong, and there are no shades of grey.

It is, of course, perfectly understandable that we Korean Americans feel sympathy for Soon Ja Du and other Korean American merchants involved in such conflicts. Nationalistic pride tells us that she is one of our own. In addition, we know her story on a human level, almost as if it were our own. Choosing sides and exercising reflexive group solidarity is easier, in any case, than attempting to understand complex social realities that raise profound normative dilemmas for Korean Americans and all Americans. But does reflexive soli-
darity and the refusal to recognize the killing of a fifteen-year old girl as a tragedy in and of itself come at a cost? What are the broader implications of such a position? As the keynote speaker at the first National Korean American Studies Conference held in Los Angeles in 1997 to commemorate the fifth anniversary of Sa-I-Gu, Professor Elaine Kim, chair of the Comparative Ethnic Studies Department at University of California, Berkeley, warned: “If we don’t watch out, we may find ourselves one day schooled, credentialled, and trapped in the old ‘buffer zone’ or ‘middleman’ position” between Whites and other groups of color.” Legal scholar Mari Matsuda made a similar point in a speech to the Asian Law Caucus in 1990, when she urged Asian Americans not to let themselves become “a racial bourgeoisie.” What both scholars remind us of is that Asian Americans—and especially Korean Americans, who are often on the frontline of racial confrontations—are at a crossroads and have a momentous choice to make. There is every indication that the new millennium will usher in not a harmonious multicultural society in the U.S. but a society ravaged by deepening racial and economic fault lines. In this context, we Korean Americans can embrace the role of racial bourgeoisie and play it for all it is worth, defending what we see as our immediate collective interests without regard for anything else and stabilizing racial inequities to the ultimate benefit of Whites. Or, we can repudiate the role of racial bourgeoisie and enlarge our struggle against anti-Korean racism into a struggle for racial justice for all. As much as we might wish to, we cannot simply do our own thing and stay “neutral.” We are irretrievably caught up in the American racial drama, and the only question is what we will choose to do in these circumstances. We did not ask to be put in this difficult position, but it is always and everywhere the fate of subordinated groups to have the terms of their participation in society dictated by the powerful.

Both ethical considerations and long-term self-interest dictate that we choose the second path. That is, it is both right and expedient for Korean Americans to repudiate the role of racial bourgeoisie. Doing so would entail, among other things, two important and related commitments. The first commitment would be to transcending reflexive solidarity and acknowledging and understanding the suffering of other groups of color, especially Blacks. Our experiences of racial oppression in the U.S. do not trump the experiences of others; nor does recognizing the suffering of others in any way invali-
date our own. Racial oppression is not a zero-sum game: to say that Blacks are oppressed is not to say that Korean Americans are not. I first got interested in studying Black-Korean conflict because I felt deep sympathy for the Korean American merchants involved. I will never forget the anger I felt when I saw two young Black girls making fun of a Korean American vendor on a sidewalk in Washington, D.C., saying “Two dolla! Two dolla!” It was only as I began interviewing Black activists involved in Black-Korean conflict in New York City that I realized that there was another urgent and painful narrative of oppression entwined in these conflicts—a Black narrative that stretches back over three hundred years to before the founding of the nation. This experience of really listening to what Black people were saying about Black-Korean conflict revolutionized how I thought and felt about the subject. In one of my classes at University of California, Irvine, entitled, “Comparative Minority Politics,” I regularly show the film, Sa-I-Gu, which recount the stories and voices of Korean American women shopkeepers who suffered great losses during the Los Angeles rebellion. My students (many of whom are Asian American and Korean American, in particular) are always deeply moved by this film. After I turn off the video machine, I ask them to imagine a companion film documenting the Black suffering that led up to the events of April 1992. By the time class ends, many of the students have exchanged their initial moral certainty for the more honest, albeit uncomfortable, emotions of confusion, bewilderment, and uncertainty. They are no longer sure who is right, who is wrong, or how these determinations can be made. Recognizing the suffering of others on a human level is a painful process, but it is liberating as well.

The second commitment associated with repudiating the role of racial bourgeoisie is even more challenging. It is an intellectual and political commitment to understanding where Korean Americans fit into the American racial order and how they have been positioned relative to other groups. Throughout American history, Whites have racialized people of color, or constructed them as distinct racial groups with specific intrinsic traits, and positioned them relative to one another in a racial hierarchy. Like other Asian Americans, Korean Americans have been positioned between White and Black, and their opportunities, privileges, and burdens have followed from this location within the American racial order. In other words, Korean Americans experience
a milder form of racial oppression than Blacks do and even benefit in certain ways from their intermediate position within the racial order. We know this difference intuitively: Korean Americans are brutalized by the police, discriminated against in the job market, subjected to racially motivated taunting and violence—but all of these occurrences are more systematic, comprehensive, and intense among Blacks, who are also subjected to myriad forms of domination that Korean Americans largely escape. Thus it is not enough to say “We minorities are all oppressed,” because we are oppressed in different ways and to different degrees. It is not enough to say “Korean Americans don’t intend to oppress Blacks or benefit from their marginalization,” because we are dealing here with social structural realities that go beyond what any particular group or individual intends. It is not enough to say “Let’s all get along and promote racial harmony and goodwill,” because the sources of Black-Korean conflict lie more in the dynamics of the American racial order than they do in cultural misunderstanding or intolerance. As Korean Americans, we
must acknowledge where we fit into the American racial order, and how we benefit from our intermediate status even as we suffer from it as well. It is hard for us to do this not only because we are reluctant to admit to benefiting from the oppression of those on the bottom but because we are reluctant to admit that we can, as an intermediate group, never fully enjoy the privileges of those on the top. The American Dream runs strong and deep within the Korean American community, and so it is hard for us to accept Derrick Bell's admonition about "the permanence of racism" and its relevance to us. It will take some work before we can move from seeing ourselves as a culturally gifted people capable of overcoming all hurdles to an intermediate group caught between a glass ceiling above, and a glass floor below.

Giving up on the American Dream as it has been sold to us does not mean giving up on dreams altogether. Mindful of the tenacity of racism, we can still envision and work toward creating a society characterized by greater racial justice for all, including ourselves. It is both our right and our obligation as Americans to fight this fight. We are not just Koreans in America but Korean Americans, embedded in this nation's narrative and implicated in its present and future. As the percentage of native-born Korean Americans grows, and as Korean Americans diversify in occupational terms, the possibilities for leaving behind the role of racial bourgeois look promising. We have many proud traditions of resistance to draw upon, including Korean resistance to Japanese colonialism and American quasi-colonialism, and Asian American and Black traditions of resistance to White domination within the U.S. Entering the new millennium, we must decide: will we be a racial bourgeois or a positive force for change? The choice is ours, and the stakes are high.

1 This is an excerpt from the poem, the full text of which can be found in Los Angeles—Struggles toward Multietnic Community, eds. Edward Chang and Russell Leong (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 165-166.
4 Distributed by CrossCurrent Media, this 1993 film was produced by Christine Choy, Elaine Kim, and Dai Sil Kim-Gibson; written and directed by Dai Sil Kim-Gibson; and co-directed by Christine Choy.
5 For elaboration of this argument, see Claire Jean Kim, Bitter Fruit: The Politics of Black-Korean Conflict (New Haven: Yale University Press, forthcoming).
by Janice Yoon

“S tand next to your un-nee [older sister] so we can take a picture,” said the mother, in Korean. The little girl scooched her way next to the young lady in a flowy red dress and the father snapped away.

After a brief conversation in Korean, the young lady hugged the little girl goodbye. Next up was a lanky Asian teen-age boy dressed in a sporty shirt and khakis, hair spiked. As he sheepishly handed her his program for an autograph, the lady in red asked, “what school do you go to? Do you play an instrument?”

The end of that friendly conversation signaled my friend’s and my turn to meet Sarah Chang. With a warm handshake, she said, “Hi, what are your names?” And as she signed our programs with a flourish, she asked, “What school do you go to?”

“We go to Harvard.”

She suddenly stopped and looked at us. “Wow. Harvard. Your parents must be so proud.”

I couldn’t help but laugh. This was coming from the mouth of who?

The Caucasian couple in their forties behind us watched the three of us laugh and talk. They commented, “I think we’re the oldest ones in this line.” They were proven wrong as a Korean grandfatherly type stopped by and congratulated Sarah on a wonderful performance. She broke loose laughing and thanking him in impeccable Korean.

The backstage door to Symphony Hall was wide-open throughout the entire duration of the intermission. As my friend and I walked away, we were pleasantly surprised by how approachable Sarah was. And how easily one could forget how young she is.

At eighteen, the once child-prodigy-now-world-renowned-violin-virtuoso is barely an adult. However, as her Boston Symphony performance in early March proved, her intoxicating musicality and widespread appeal only seems to get better with age.

On-Stage Sarah

With the harkening notes of the orchestra, Sarah raises her head up and stares off into the balconies. In her red dress, she stands statuesque and motionless except for her fingers preparing for their entrance.

“I think very little else except what I need to do that second,” Sarah describes those first moments on stage. “I’m usually following the orchestral line. With a 100-member orchestra and a conductor, we’re not machines. As human beings, we can’t play a piece exactly the same way, twice. So, if they play something differently than before, I have to adjust to that. It’s not just me up there. Every single note that the orchestra plays is a part of the piece, and I have to get in sync with that.”

Meanwhile, the audience is about to get blown away. Once Sarah begins, her fingers
flutter and fly. Her piece for the evening – Strauss’ Violin Concerto in D minor, Opus 8 – a timely and symbolic choice in some ways, as Strauss wrote this piece at seventeen years of age, close to Sarah’s age now.

The piece, which Sarah describes as “kind of raw, in a way” as it is one of Strauss’s earliest works, still is a rich concerto that well-displays Sarah’s versatility as a young yet experienced artist. There are moments when she closes her eyes and sways, lost in the lyrical outpouring of notes and emotion. When the music transitions into its playful bantering passages, Sarah opens her eyes and flashes a smile.

Sarah provides a performance of musical brilliance and surprising maturity. She communicates with the conductor through her music accompanied with her laughing eyes and coy smiles. When she’s on stage, Sarah is full of vivacity. Intensity. Strength. Her poise commands confidence.

Interestingly, her first television appearance was at the age of five on BBC as a gymnast. She started the violin at the age of four, but her playing was continually interrupted by gymnastic injuries. At that point, one of them had to go.

Sarah chose the violin and she took off – when she was six, Sarah was at New York’s Juilliard School of Music under the wing of Dorothy DeLay, the famed teacher Itzhak Perlman and Midori. At eight, she played for Zubin Mehta and Riccardo Muti, leading to engagements with the New York Philharmonic and the Philadelphia Orchestra. When she was nine, she made her first recording.

However, when Sarah turned twelve, her identity met a potential crisis point, which she describes as “that awkward, icky stage” when she wasn’t the “itty bitty girl in the pink dress” with a quarter-size violin playing grown-up pieces, but not a full-fledged artist.

“You know, it’s that time when you’re not a kid, but not a teen. You have nowhere to shop because the clothes sizes don’t fit,” Sarah explains. “At that point, we all got together and decided to take things gradually. We talked about CD covers to the dresses on stage. We modified my look and decided to go with the flow, with the times.”

In today’s world of child prodigies that spark and disappear, the decision to take it slow was a wise one. Sarah herself attributes her longevity to the “really, really good support” she has received from her parents, as well as her management. “They were not overly pushy, and they never asked for too much. It wasn’t crucial to get that record label – they were focused on longevity – they’re a huge blessing,” she said.

It was when she turned seventeen when people finally began to regard Sarah as an “adult performer,” as a 1997 Wall Street Journal article put it. According to Sarah, this transition has actually been “such a relief.”

“It’s great to be respected as a violinist, to have other musicians like to work with you, playing chamber music and in ensembles, because they like your work and respect your musicianship,” she says.

But along with the transition in the music world as an adult artist comes increased scrutiny from critics and the public. For instance, some say her interpretations are sometimes not deep enough. Others say, true, but it will come as she gets, well, older.

Sarah takes these criticisms graciously – the road toward perfection is on-going. “I don’t think anyone should be saying, ‘I’m here and I’m done,’” she says. “That’s sad – there’s always something more to strive for.”

Another “Icky” Stage – Being Eighteen

Off-stage without her violin, Sarah Chang is your typical teen-ager – a senior at a high school in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, looking forward to graduation.

So, what exactly does she do in her spare time?

“Oh,” she says, thinking for a moment.

“I try to enjoy what little life I have,” Sarah responds, laughing. “Most people think that
I had no childhood — no life — just practicing all day and performing in concerts. But you can’t live like that — I can’t live like that, especially with my personality.”

She just got her spanking new driver’s license a couple months ago and has been driving her little brother Michael, 11, around. She also likes to hang out with friends, shop for clothes, and cute accessories. She listens to pop and rock music, including the diva Celine Dion and the croonings of Boyz II Men.

“I’m a normal person — this is the only life I’ve ever known,” she says. “I went to a normal school, with normal kids. My parents are very supportive.

“Having a little brother who whacks me in the head if I need it always helps,” she adds, with a grin.

She also loves watching movies starring beauties (and role models) such as Audrey Hepburn: “I love her movies — she’s so graceful,” she sighs. There’s also Sophia Lauren, whom Sarah got to meet at a benefit concert. Grace Kelly is another classic beauty who she adores “and is a fellow Philadelphian,” Sarah points out, being a native Philadelphian herself. “I passed by her house every day after school. When I went to Monte Carlo I got to meet the family and the Prince — they’re wonderful people.”

Okay, so, her life has some eccentricities, such as being able to meet the royal family of Monaco, thanks to world-fame as a teen violin virtuosa.

She also has to fax and email her homework assignments when she is on tour during the school year. Not a while back she got a phone call while in Munich: “I got the phone and it was someone from the school administration. She said, ‘Sarah, what’s your cap size? We need your cap size for your [graduation] gown.”

Unfortunately, she’ll have to miss some high school rituals. Like prom. And graduation. She says she doesn’t mind missing her senior prom because she went to one a couple years ago. “Besides, I dress up every single week, do the makeup thing, the hair thing — and I know what guys look like in tuxes,” she says playfully. “I’m more upset about not going to graduation.”

The fact that she has stayed in school she says was because of her parents. In teaching work ethic and the importance of school, “My parents did have a lot of say in that aspect — they’re Korean to the bone.”

According to her mother, Myong, Sarah’s concert schedules were tight during her high school years because of the work she had to do. Many times, Sarah had to return immediately after concerts, so she could not go sight-seeing. Mrs. Chang says Sarah would bemoan that she knew what a lot of airports, restaurants, hotels, and backdoors of concert halls looked like, but not enough of the rest of the places she went to.
No doubt, the challenges of keeping up in school were difficult for Sarah as for any other teen. "It was extra hard in high school when the workload exploded. Last year, I had to study for my SATs," she says. "The simple fact that I'm graduating means a lot to me."

Her parents, who are musical themselves — her father a violinist and her mother a composer, interestingly held a lot of things back; they stalled projects and concerts. School was important. Having a "normal" life was important. She only tours a couple months during the school year.

But they have also given her a lot of freedom and support for the choices she is able to make. They always encourage her to get out of the house and spend time with her friends. Music is Sarah's choice.

Sarah's mother says because she knew how difficult it was to survive in the music world, she did not necessarily want Sarah to enter it.

"Music isn't easy at all," Mrs. Chang says, in Korean. "You need to be physically strong and you need a lot of endurance. I always told Sarah that if she didn't want to do it any more, then we could stop."

"I hope that if she continues to pursue a musician's life, I hope she does it because she enjoys it — then she will be successful," her mother adds. "I don't like the word yul-shim-hee [working hard]. I don't want her to do it if she's tired and she doesn't like it. But if she loves it, and if she's happy, then that's great. That's most important."

It's a good thing that she has a lot of support because as Sarah puts it, "I'm at that icky stage when I'm faced with choices. I want to do more with my life. College — I really want to do this thing, because if I don't do it now, I'll never get another chance to do it again."

**Not Just a Violin at Her Fingertips**

At this point, Sarah has the whole world, quite literally, open to her. Rumor has it that she got into Harvard; however, where she'll end up is up to her.

"Let's just say I applied to schools here and in Europe — London, Germany — and they're not all music colleges," she says. "Now I have to make up my mind about which continent I want to be in — I've been in the States forever — went to high school and Juilliard here. I think I might want to spend a few years in Europe. I love Europe — I love the history, the culture, the languages ..."

What she'll major in also remains a mystery. Sarah says that many of her good friends who went to Juilliard and were good at what they did in music ended up switching majors — some just wanted to do something else. Others did not want to face the competition in the music world. Will she follow suit?

"Well, it might be nice to get a breath of fresh air and do something else," she answers.

One thing remains clear — Sarah wants to pursue a music career.

As of now, she has the "luxury" of knowing what her life looks like until about 2002. Her European tours must be scheduled two years in advance. She decides her concert schedules because "the stuff that I'm deciding now will affect my life when I'm twenty-two or twenty-three years old — and I think I should have a say in that. My life is mapped out, and in that there is a great amount of stability — it's just that now I have to fit the rest of my life around it."

It's not every day that by the time one's eighteen, one has a record contract, a global concert circuit and an established name in the music world. And she knows it. "My life was pretty much set up. In my case, I skipped the competition process and everything fell perfectly into place."

She never entered any competitions — nor does she believe in the validity of them. She looks at friends who have to face the competition and "hates what it does to them."

"So many people have worked so hard, if not harder and my heart goes out to those people who go into competitions," she laments. "I don't agree with the fact that you can pick one winner — I don't like labels, especially in music. It's self-interpretation. How can you rank
that?"

But she was able to avoid all that. It's one of those benefits of starting out young as a child prodigy. It seems that she's also been able to evade stage fright. "Because I started at an early age I've always been comfortable on stage - I never really got nervous," she says.

Over the last few years, it has gotten easier. Now, she likes to look into the audience for people she knows - though a daunting task indeed when searching in a sea of 3,000 people.

Her mother puts it pretty objectively: "She is a lucky girl. She has talent, but she also had many chances." With this in mind, she encourages Sarah to never take for granted her situation and do well in what she does, because success does not automatically come with chances, but because it is earned.

For the 1998-99 season, Sarah has an especially active season in Europe, appearing with maestros including Valery Gergiev and the London Philharmonic, Sir Colin Davis and the London Symphony Orchestra. Along with touring various European countries, she plans to stop in Korea and Israel as well. In the United States, her engagements include the New York Philharmonic, the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, and the Hollywood Bowl. She is also recording Strauss sonatas and concertos in Germany with maestro Wolfgang Sawallisch.

On days of concerts, Sarah avoids doing major work, as well as eating dinner. "I usually eat lunch, and no dinner. I can't play on a full stomach." She'll rehearse in the morning, take a nap, and not do much after. She usually has a lot of water and fruit stockpiled backstage.

Sarah used to have a routine when she was young, but after awhile, doing the same routine as a little kid got a little tiring. She warns, "I also think there is a danger falling into routine - especially when your flights get delayed and you have to go directly to the concert hall - having a routine can throw you off track."

Yet there are some downsides to this life of glitz, glamour meeting famous people and seeing the world. Like having to play on your birthdays, for instance. It really used to bother her when she was young.

"Now it's okay - people always make a big fuss - I'm really spoiled," she said, laughing. One of her most memorable moments so far in her music career was when the Montreal Symphony played Happy Birthday and the audience sang along. "It really meant a lot to me," she says.

Keeping in touch with friends "that I don't see for a long time" is really tough, too. "I make it a point in opening up a few hours to just hang out with them - it's really important to me," she says. While she's running the concert circuit, her phone bills get pretty high. But then again, for Sarah, it isn't much of a price to pay for such valuable friendships.

What keeps her going is the excitement that only grows with time, as she continues to perform and live the concert life. Says Sarah: "People say that the airplane and hotel life is tough and tiring, but it's all part of the package. I love being on stage performing and
playing for the audience – all else is secondary.”

Her energy and zest for music overflows into her life. However, what is most striking about Sarah Chang is her thoughtfulness and level-headedness about the way she approaches her life to the point where it’s easy to forget you’re talking to someone barely legal. “I’m very fortunate in having a concert/record career that’s to die for at such a young age – but success shouldn’t be pinpointed on the number of record sales or orchestra appearances,” she carefully points out. “Personally, it’s important to feel happy – I’m blessed to be quite near that.”

Life at home involves going to school and practicing three to four hours a day after school and doing homework. That’s it. “When I’m on tour, I have more time, but I actually do most of the practicing at home,” she says. “I can focus better. Like when I’m in Europe, I usually want to spend my time shopping and sight-seeing.”

But is three to four hours really enough? “I do what is absolutely necessary,” Sarah says. “When I have five concerts in three weeks and overloaded with other work, I bear down to the real essentials.

“Ultimately what motivates me is knowing that the person on stage is going to be me. It’s not going to be my agent, it’s not going to be my parents. Ultimately, it will be my own fingers, my own head, myself up there – so, I do what I can.”

**Keeping it Simple, Sarah**

Hitting the eighteen-year old milestone for many means independence from parents. For Sarah, she’s in no rush to “take over everything.” She doesn’t want to and there’s no need to. Her parents give her all the freedom she wants in choosing concert venues, who to perform with and what to play. Besides – “Music is a very grown up business.”

Meanwhile, she’s going to continue what she’s been doing for almost all her life – making music. And she’ll probably do it for the rest of her life: “The greatest thing about music is that I can be doing this in my sixties – there’s no retirement age.”

She loves what she does and it shows. Perhaps that’s why she has such wide appeal across the world.

“It’s scary to think that kids look up to you as a role model when you barely turned eighteen,” she says. “Little children come up to me holding their little instruments and they buy my CDs – it’s all very sweet. I think it’s essential that there are people to look up to.”

She personally admires Jascha Heifetz and David Oistrakh, who both revolutionized violin solo performance. In a classical music world that is getting more gimmicky and reverting to marketing tactics to attract more audiences, her conservative taste is surprising and refreshing.

“Heifetz and Oistrakh come from the old school of music – and I think that’s the way it should be – simplicity is the best,” Sarah says. “There are so many musicians today that play wonderfully but are covering it up with all this – fluff – marketing, they’re unnecessarily wild and they dress a certain way. Keeping it simple is the best thing to do for yourself.”

Her mother hopes that as Sarah is able to meet people from many countries of all ages, that “she will make many people happy through her music.” In addition, her mentors tell her, “You can listen and you can pick and choose, but you decide what you want to do. Never mind all the fluff – try to be an honest musician.”

And what does it mean, for Sarah Chang, to be an honest musician? “It means you can have fun. You can get excited about glamour of the music world, but at the core of your being music has to be there – the technique and interpretation has to be there.”

It’s that simple.

---

*Janice Yoon is a sophomore in Cabot House concentrating in Social Studies.*
I have a face my grandparents would be proud of. These sharp Korean eyes and prominently protruding cheekbones hark back to the days of my Mongolian ancestor nomads on the endless steppe of the known world, Asia. From my face, I can remember and visualize stories of fierce hawk-like warriors and stern horse breakers galloping through rocky cliffs and wind-blown plains. My face contains all the bones, horns, hides, plunder, fire, iron, leather, wind, blood, wood, sinew, horses and dogs of steppe life, and ferocity of the pack. Much like my ancestors, my face will grow more unique with every curve and line added with every year, like the aged beauty of a rugged mountain or gnarled tree that weathers beneath the quakes and rains and winds of life. My face, in all of its ferocity, timidity, and purity reflects the strength of the ghi that my ancestors had flowing through their veins, and I am proud.

David Bahk is a junior in Kirkland House concentrating in Biochemistry.
It was October 15, 1998. I was involved in a faculty retreat as a visiting professor. We rode to Porter, Indiana. We came together to the conference room for an opening meeting before checking in at a very remote and cozy hotel called Spring House Inn. Before the formal session, we had time to give our impressions and opinions of that retreat. It was my turn. I was going to say ‘Hi’ very individually. I said, “Let me identify you by name.” I called the names one by one. “Bill, Susan, Ted, Dow, Lee, J...” J was a stranger to me. There were three groups for me. I was familiar with the first group. I already knew their names. The second one was a totally unfamiliar group. So I asked a neighbor to give me their names and wrote them down on the paper to cheat. The third one was a confusing group. They were three in number. They were the same age, I found out later, and they had the same type of beard. Every one of them was tall and fat. All three of them were European-Americans. I had done my best to remember each of them separately and correctly, but I forgot all except one. He was Bill, the dean of the academy. As for the other two, I called the first one George. He said, “No.” I tried again, using what I thought was his last name, “You are Claerns.” He said, “No.” I said, “I got it. You are Bob.” He said, “That’s right. I’m Robert Moore.” I apologized to him for my mistake, “Sorry, Bob.” He said, “No. No. It’s not your fault. Everybody mistakes one of us for another, Bill, George and me.” Anyway, I got a big hand when I finished naming the last person with no more mistakes.

After dinner, we were grouping for fellowship and talking freely. There, my naming was brought into the conversation. They said that it was a very friendly and difficult gesture. J came to me and sat down nearby. She expressed her thanks to me for having remembered her name. She was an African-American. She seemed to be so sharp and intelligent as well as very kind and sociable. She had a Ph. D. from one of the highest ranked schools in the United States. We had a friendly conversation about our concerns. Then she looked a little bit tired. Finally, she got up to say good night, but she seemed to be waiting for something. I noticed that she expected me to give her a hug. But I was frozen. I couldn’t even have said, “Have a good night!” Fortunately a senior professor saved her from embarrassment by hugging her instead of me. I think that this was obviously a social mistake on my part. I have never gotten used to hugging another person in a public place.

On January 12, 1999, I had a presentation on the studies of social movements. I had two respondents. Their responses were very critical, and I explained my points further. My explanation centered on my opinion of violence. And then I got the questions and comments from the floor which led into a big discussion. J was there on the floor. She was going to debate on the topic of violence. Her point was so complicated. She did not agree with my opinion on violence because my point is nonviolence, but we had a time limitation. After closing the symposium, I met her and made an appointment to extend our discussion.

I visited her office on the day of appointment. After some talking on daily life we returned to the discussion about violence. She is a feminist, and she comes under the crucial influence of Malcolm X. I asked her why Malcolm X. She gave me several answers, but I have noticed that her inclination to violence came from her own experience, her own life.

She has two tragic pains. One of them came from her mother’s death. She was killed by a man who loved her in vain. Another pain is physical in nature. Her heart is not good, so she had surgery. I think that her heart problem has come from inner wounds resulting from her mother’s tragic death. She thinks all the social factors which give her pains are violence. Therefore, her definition of violence is very broad. Oppression, exploitation, discrimination, isolation and even bad thoughts are violence for her. As a result, her mind seems to be filled up with the consciousness of defensive violence. I think that her view of defensive violence as a necessity for survival is what drew her toward Malcolm X.

We had been talking for more than two hours, and I thought that it was time to leave. So I prepared to finish the discussion and got up to say good-bye. She also seemed to wait for something. I knew this scenario well. Again I was still frozen. It was the second time I made this social mistake with the same person. But I am hugging her wounded inner heart and her wounded physical heart again and again.

Eugene Kim is a visiting scholar at Harvard Divinity School from Kangnam University.
The Fringe

by Sang Park

Birth was but a sleep and a forgetting. Now I am leaving again. It’s horrifying what I can see from here, this thin fringe at the foot of the precipice above the great yonder. Hell, if I learned one thing well since I left in 1991, it is how to become cynical as hell and view the world through shit-colored glasses. And play a helluva hypocrite.

June 199x:
Still giddy from the rush of self-importance and smugness following graduation from the famed Habadû Tebak, I had the luxury of a summer of unemployment to reflect upon the conclusion of this apparent epoch of my life. I arrived at the following conclusion: I, like myriad peers around me, have just wasted our four years at this so-called liberal arts institution mired in the pre-professional expectations of our community and of our parents.

risk-averse “Koreans”
Habadû is the goose that lays the golden egg of security. “With a Habadû degree you will never go hungry,” I recall a Q-House junior commenting nonchalantly to the freshman Sang Park over waffles. Habadû should in theory function as an insurance, or a financial “option”: if the market of my life takes a plunge in the future, I should at least be able to fall back on my degree by exercising this put option. So we should see at Harvard a seething pool of the best and the brightest that challenges the norm, strives for the innovative, creative ventures? Pre-professionals, you may notice, still seem to represent a significant part of the population here. Instead of treading unfamiliar territory, many Habadû students cannot shake their old habits. It is true; Harvard attracts risk-averse people. We congregate in the obsessively- and compulsively-kept greens of the Yard to imbibe the Prestige emanated by the mythic elysium of Habadû and that magical crimson seal we have tattooed to the rear of mommy’s car. Not enough of us really give a flying adong about enriching our minds, at least not all the time. The time spent learning, incidentally, decreases exponentially as one nears that festive day in June.

Koreans share humanity’s love for brand names, to put it mildly. “May I please have an A.B. from Harvard...uh, perhaps a J.D. from Yale, and for dessert, a couple of Ph.D.’s...?” We wear degrees like Euro-clubbing gear. Flashback: I recall vividly the heyday of the “Gesû chôngbaji” (that would be “Guess?” brand jeans) fad in Seoul a couple of years ago – fads such as these are as periodic as the monsoon in Korea – during which one would fork over three times its retail cost without a flinch, just to wear that god-awful looking, upside-down-triangle label on their ass. The other half of the population probably purchased the fake labels in Yitaewon. The result? A nation of people with the Guess? insignia on their asses. It’s over-the-counter prestige of nauseating sorts. Given such similarly inelastic demand for Habadû degrees, then, the administration should differentiate price and charge Koreans a couple of thousand dollars more. I bet we’d still buy it. Hell, I know I would.

One finds disproportionately many second-generation Korean-Americans and “1.5 generation” Koreans – like Sang Park – in this crowd of prestige fetishists. We find security in the padded resumes, the immaculate transcripts, and the Kim-Lee-Park’s.
We acquaint ourselves early-and-often with the musty rooms of OCS, and frequent the offices of our pre-professional advisers. The such-and-such senior who landed a Goldman, the so-and-so who began an MD-PhD at Yale med, and the droves of the humanities herd that flock to the Law school every year are difficult to ignore. Prestige of Habadû will hopefully open doors to further prestige. And money, power, security, and maybe a cottage at the Vineyard, too.

\( E(Rm) \) \( \cdot \) \( Rf \): the market price of risk

This one is for the pre-business lemmings; I am gonna get technical here and put my liberal arts education to use. If you recall from your capital markets course, increasing the risk of your portfolio can earn an additional expected return. And yet, why are Korean and Korean-American students so concerned with security in their lives? Could it be our nouveaux-riche mentality, or our tattered middle class values? Perhaps. As any verbose humanities graduate student would, I tend to blame it all on “culture,” the culture of our parents in particular.

The age-earnings profile

Our parents are Korea’s lost generation. Spent their fetal stage during the colonial era and their childhood amidst the Korean War, and continued their fickle existence throughout the coup, the military regime, democratization, rise in living standards, lots of soju, et cetera. Then enter the so-called IMF – popularly known in Korea as “TM Fucked” – Crisis. And freaked, they were. Many of this generation were laid-off or forced into uncompensated retirement en masse by the only employer they’ve known. Other more fortunate ones have nevertheless witnessed general depression in the economy, and in spirits. They stand in the uncomfortable threshold between Korea’s LDC past, and its industrialized OECD wannabe future.\(^1\) Similarly, those that immigrated to the U.S. had to face their own share of uncertainty, I imagine. Hell, they sacrificed their whole life for you, you little turd! For many of them, therefore, saving for one’s own retirement seemed too distant a goal, perhaps more burdensome than their true blue American counterparts. Their parents – that would be our hal-moneys and hal-ravages – formed the aging population that demanded sustenance, while their Americanized children enrolled in ever-expensive tertiary educational institutions. Even if money weren’t an issue, the intangibles – like prestige – also matter.

Sure paternal and maternal love exist, but parents are also (somewhat) rational decision-makers as well as the products of their “biological” instincts. They invest in their children’s education and implicitly expect returns during your enrollment at the college, for instance, in increased social prestige and a sense of personal satisfaction for having been such a successful parent. But the real payment begins after they retire. Traditionally, it is claimed in Korea, the eldest son provides for one’s parents in their old age. After all, it coincides conveniently with the supposed neo-Confucian veneration for elders, the three “cardinal” relationships, and any other justification that strikes your EAS fancy. They confound your Habadû degree with a Harvard education. You will use your subsequent earnings, it is expected, to at least partially if not wholly support them in their old age, provide for their PGA fantasies, their antique collection, or at least buy them a Mercedes or two. Private pension funds, for instance, were unheard of in Korea until the 1980’s (I believe), and government’s social security system remains nominal at best. One’s children are expected to remain “dependents” regardless of their age, until they begin earning wages, at which point the dependency relationship abruptly reverses its direction and the investments are repaid to its creditor – namely, your parents.

For this reason, their eldest son’s – and, to a lesser extent, their daughter’s – Habadû acceptance letter brings visceral pleasure in your biological creators. You all probably remember the tears of ecstasy flowing down your mommy’s and daddy’s cheeks. In their mind, the untarnished prestige of Habadû exceeds even that of that world-class intellectual and research institution Seoul National University (roommate murder-suicides, date rapes, and gigantic classes “led” by TIPs, notwithstanding). They couldn’t care less about what you learn. Despite the proverbial “you should study what you find interesting,” the uncomfortable silence that follows your enthusiastic declaration that you wish to become a Pol’kn Myth major and study Belizean aborigine foundation myths all your life hints that something is amiss, at least unconsciously. It’s because they love you.
Regardless of your parents’ expectations, the merits of professionalism should not be new to you by now if you are Korean at Habadû. Surely you’ve heard the “minorities need a professional degree to survive in the U.S.” argument, or “what do you plan to do with that degree?” question. Respectability, prestige, security—these are inseparable in your parents’ minds as they plan out your future. Hell, “it is what is best for you!” And yet, their future is so inextricably tied to your Habadû experience, and your @post.harvard.edu future. Academic disciplines become reduced to a means to a financial end. Economics becomes reduced to “finance,” and biochemistry a ticket to medical school. East Asian Studies? See you at B.U. for the LSATs in October!

I wonder what proportion of law students, budding doctors, and the rest of the undercompensated, indentured labor force residing in Manhattan—also known as banking analysts—were not gradually conditioned, if not directly goaded, in some fashion by their parents to restrict their options even before they had a chance to explore others. The tale of the yisei Stanford Med grad, who upon completion of his program presented his crisp M.D. to his parents then subsequently took up painting in Southern California should elicit disgust if anything. This, however, is also the contemporary fable of the “good” daughter or son.

“Here is life, an experiment to a great extent untried by me;...”

I was once quite moved by these words; it was my motto throughout high school during my less cynical days. The truth in Thoreau’s timeless words are denied to many Korean and Korean-American Habadû students. Instead of an “experiment,” we are presented with a hand full of attractive options that promise a good living, a steady cash flow, acceptability, prestige, and even a pretty-skinny-trophy wife and kids that can proudly wear your education. And so continues the legacy. We risk becoming an item in our parents’ life’s resume, another long-term investment on their part. Far from being “untried,” our lives converge towards the most ordinary, the most conventional, the path most traveled. More often than not, however, security stifles creativity. There is nothing a priori wrong with a secure job, but your parents shouldn’t be the prime decision-maker in asserting security in your life. You cannot dwell on antiquated expectations of your parents, because of the risk that you will bequeath the same dilemma to your progeny.

Our “Korean parents” are robbing us of the right to gamble with our lives. They begat us and nurtured us, but it’s time to sever the umbilical cord. They should stop living vicariously through your life. You’re not a host, and they not your parasite. You are a bed-wetting pre-pubescent no longer, so confront your progenitor, your progenitress. Tell them they had their chance, yet they were foolish. Their shot at immortality, squandered. Now you want yours. If you still believe you want to be a securities lawyer or a doctor, then kudos to you. Go ahead and make that x million for you and your favorite client, or let your patients live the y extra years while in cancer relapse (hell, they lose a few organs along the way and all eventually die an excruciating, muffled death anyway, but it’s worth it). Whatever chokes your chicken of happiness. Whatever feeds your ego. But don’t let others bully you into gradually believing things that you wouldn’t otherwise. No one is gonna congratulate you for being that good, provident, subservient child after you are gone; they’re a dime a dozen and even cheaper in Korea. So, be selfish (be true to yourself). Be heartless (be a reductionist). Be calculating (that’s what rational decision-making is all about). Maximize (your intake). Minimize (shed emotional baggage). And bask, thou, over whom thy Immortality broods like the Day! Bask in your infinite greatness, you hell-bent turd! And please lend a hand when you too reach the fringe; I think I am now falling.

1 LDC stands for “less developed country,” and OECD stands for the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. I feel intellectually superior, because I can spew these terms with ease.

Sang Park is Harvard graduate in Economics. He is currently a GSAS student in East Asian Studies.
yisei spring 99