

yisei

2004





from the editors

Everyone's had enough with "seoul"-searching. We've gone through the revolving doors of cultural identity crises and we have come out the other side having lost the huge racial chips on our shoulders. Back in September at our intro meeting, we found ourselves alone in the room, munching on the Milano cookies we'd bought as refreshments for potential recruits. An intro meeting attended by absolutely no one is as discouraging as it gets. And truth be told, there were many points this past year when we were doubtful whether this issue would ever materialize.

As we mustered up the submissions for this issue by asking friends and friends of friends, we were unable to focus our articles around a culturally relevant theme as we traditionally do. We found ourselves wondering, "Had Yisei outgrown its role as a magazine that documents a cohesive 'Korean-American experience'? And what did this mean for the future of the magazine? Will the magazine die out after we graduate?"

Sitting here in the computer lab at 4 A.M. putting the finishing touches on the issue, we realize in our admittedly sleep-deprived delirium that we need not have worried. The collection we present in this issue finds its strength in its freedom from a theme; contributors express themselves outside the confines of a prescribed Koreanness. Whether or not this is indicative of the future direction of the magazine, for now, we can breathe a sigh of relief that Yisei is not actually dying. It's just evolving.

Joo-Hee Chung Jane Y. Kim

Joo-Hee Chung '05 and Jane Y. Kim '05
Editors-in-Chief

About Yisei:

Since 1988, Yisei, which means “second-generation” in the Korean language, has been dedicated to serving as a forum in which Korean and other Asian students at the College can share their experiences, opinions, and literary talents. Yisei is proud to represent Harvard’s Asian-American community as its only student-written literary publication and to present the ever so human, eclectic, and powerful voice of its contributors – often those who find their own uniqueness within the greater phenomenon of the shared Asian-American identity.

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A Strange Love,

or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the H-Bomb

Eunice Si Yi

At some point in mid-December of 1999, I realized that I was supposed to be obsessing over the size of the mail I was getting. I found myself an unwitting proponent of the aphorism “Bigger is better,” as a big envelope supposedly signaled the advent of eternal and guaranteed bliss, while a small one temporarily marked my descent into an existence comprised at best of bitter disappointment. But getting dropped off at my apartment after fencing practice and habitually picking up the rubber-banded assortment of bills and catalogs in the mail rack that dark night in the suburbs of Chicago, I was much too tired to recognize the potential significance of my ritual. As I unwrapped myself and the mail, though, some of the appropriate feelings rushed into me. The off-white envelope from Cambridge, MA, big enough so that its contents would not have to be folded, informed me even before I opened it that starting the fall of 2000 I was being offered the opportunity to attend the world’s most prestigious undergraduate institution: Harvard University.

“Harvard! *Oori ddal!*” my mom exclaimed when I called to tell her, which, of course, was the first thing any good Korean daughter would have done. Her excitement readily carried over the din of the dry cleaning machines in the background. At 11 P.M. that night, my family gathered around the dinner table resplendent with my favorite side dishes, and it didn’t occur to me then that the gift I had been given was much more complex and wonderful than I could have ever imagined.

One of the thousand members of the graduating class of the year 2000 at New Trier High School in the northern suburbs of Chicago, I worked hard in high school, at least enough to make up for my lack of raw intelligence. Indeed, I was neither valedictorian nor class president, and the smartest members of my class, many of whom did not even apply to Harvard, chose to attend the University of Chicago,

Princeton, Stanford, and Yale. Granted, I had my share of activities; I was captain of the fencing team, played in the orchestra, and was active in my church youth group. A lot of my time, however, was spent watching my sister, who was born my freshman year of high school, and hanging out with friends; to this day, my mom always loves telling people how I never failed to go out on the weekends. Moreover, like most first-generation immigrants, I had no Ivy League legacy, and getting into Harvard was thus by no means even likely. Nevertheless, I worked diligently on my essay, which I wrote about my sister, and secured strong recommendations from teachers I admired. When I got

often quashed by alcohol-drenched parties in cramped dorm rooms.

Superficial pros and cons aside, the faculty is reputable, and the famously hefty endowment funds state-of-the-art facilities. The most notable thing about Harvard, however, was spelled out my freshman year when I met then-president Neil Rudenstine. When asked what he considered the best thing about Harvard, he unhesitatingly responded, and it has echoed throughout my nearly 4 years here: “The students.” Gradually, I have grown to concur.

It was indeed a gradual process. Before I stepped foot on the campus, I was warned by my high school

“ . . . more than a few times in my first two years here, I thought for sure that Harvard was the loneliest place on earth; with everyone looking out for himself, was anyone looking out for others?”

in Early Action, I happily recognized that I was one of the few winners in this round of the crap shoot, and it was an easy decision to withdraw my applications from all other schools and tell Byerly Hall that I would indeed matriculate the following fall.

Beyond the name, Harvard offered me a generous need-based scholarship, an absolute blessing given my family’s struggling financial situation. Other perks include its location in Cambridge and the adjacent city of Boston, which has been to me the only city to rival my hometown for its character, dynamism, and beauty. Granted, as with any university, there’s much room for improvement: recreational facilities are notoriously lacking, the depressingly short winter break is immediately followed by final exams, and potential opportunities for creative entertainment are

AP History teacher that I would be unhappy with the cutthroat competition that fuels Harvard. I actually found that there is not so much competition as rampant opportunism. With no shortage of activities in which to be involved, Harvard entices with seduction of every interest, and the specter of potential for success within each realm continuously looms large. So many opportunities perhaps drive students to feel they have no excuse not to become director of an organization, captain of a team, first author on multiple scientific articles. This leads to a general mindset that success can and should be attained, often with sacrifices of things that I personally value: humility, relationships, and hard work. Self-promotion and cutting corners are apparently the keys to happiness, or at least a choice consulting position at Morgan Stanley upon graduation.

Consequently, more than a few times in my first two years here, I thought for sure that Harvard was the loneliest place on earth; with everyone looking out for himself, was anyone looking out for others? But through random often late-night conversations and participation particularly in service activities, I began to discover those individuals that I truly admire, not for their innate brilliance, but for their humility, ability to love, and diligence. These individuals, though by no means mainstream at this school, have shaped and inspired me to embrace Harvard for allowing me to meet them, to use the facilities that have so generously been awarded me, and to work hard in turn to give back to this wonderful college community. Now, on my way to graduating with a degree in neurobiology this spring, I have worked steadily to become the co-captain of the Division I fencing team, and as the Publicity Chair for the Harvard Korean Association and member of the Chunsa Korean fan dance troupe, I have found comfort and camaraderie within Harvard's dynamic Korean community.

How much of my personal growth over these past four years is because of Harvard, rather than because I'm at that age when I'm supposed to undergo some radical change? I will never know. I certainly do know I'm a stronger person because of the challenges—academic, social, moral—I have faced at this institution, and I have learned to love it. I do not love it as the world loves it; the glamorous prestige of telling people I go to Harvard has given way to a resigned anxiety about the potential responses, ranging from jealous resentment to enamored disbelief, to my dropping the H-bomb. Yet the quiet beauty of the columns of Widener Library, the surges of inspiration from devoted professors, and

the friendships of some of the most humble, loving, and hard-working individuals in the world have allowed me to overlook Harvard's ostensible pretentiousness and appreciate its true, subtle beauty.

It may very well be that my parents understood these viscerally wonderful aspects of Harvard all along. Unlike many Korean parents, mine are curiously restrained in their infatuation with my school. When I was admitted, my dad spent hours perfectly centering a Harvard decal on the rear window of our car, yet he didn't tell any of our relatives in Korea I was going to Harvard for several years. When I got him a Harvard shirt for his birthday, he adoringly tried it on but has never to this day worn it in public. My mom, who loves talking about me to her customers, often stubbornly avoids mentioning Harvard; when asked where I go to college, she answers, "On the East Coast." If questioned further, she says, "In Boston." Recently, she told me on the phone, "All I want are for my babies to be healthy and happy. I know they'll take things from there." But my parents always glow when they talk about Harvard and make it clear to me how proud they are to have a daughter in attendance there. I have no doubt my parents' reserved love of Harvard allowed me to discover it myself—to come willing to discard preconceived notions and uncover its amazing aspects on my own. I am forever grateful.

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Haemin Na
Self Portrait

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o b s e r v a t i o n s

Aaron Y. Lee



“I grew up in near isolation of other Koreans in the northern edge of civilization right in the middle of the continental U.S.: Denver, Colorado. I was the only Asian, let alone Korean, kid in my elementary school, other than my little brother, of course.”

Like most Koreans growing up in America, I found myself at the strange intersection of the conservative snapshot of Korean culture that my parents brought from South Korea in the late 1970s and the comparatively liberal, strongly individualistic culture of the United States. However, unlike most Koreans, I grew up in near isolation of other Koreans in the northern edge of civilization right in the middle of the continental U.S.: Denver, Colorado. To give you an idea, I was the only Asian, let alone Korean, kid in my elementary school, other than my little brother, of course.

None of this would be very important if it did not add any explanation of how my own “cultural identity” was formed. Since most of my exposure to the outside world consisted of my interactions with my fellow classmates in elementary school, I aligned myself to be closely “American” as much as my outward physical appearance would allow me.

Another limitation of how far my cultural identity could shift was imposed mainly by my parents who restricted me to dedicate my time away from school to further academic improvement, rather than socializing with my peers. Although more Koreans later moved into the area, because my family did not attend the

Korean church which acts as the nexus of social interactions for small community Korean immigrants, I had little exposure to them. By the end of high school, I did not really regard myself as either American or Korean.

My initial exposure of Koreans my age in America obviously came long before I entered college, but it was only at Harvard that I saw for the first time how they interacted in an academic environment. From this I was able to discern three distinct groups: Koreans from Korea, Korean-Americans who hang around other Korean-Americans, and finally Korean-Americans who dislike other Korean-Americans.

The first group, Koreans from Korea, seem to project an image of exclusiveness. The cultural capital that they possess is guarded and the condition of joining their group is a fixed, unchangeable fact. However loosely connected their association might be, they recognize each other as members through a common cultural experience in which one may not choose to not partake in being a member. The few times that I ran into a group of Koreans, they barely acknowledged me even though I could tell that they

recognized me as Korean.

The Korean-Americans who form groups comprising mostly, if not exclusively, of other Korean-Americans seem to exhibit similar characteristics albeit in a different manner. They hold themselves very close to Korean culture, almost in an overbearing fashion. Membership to their group is open and inviting,

“There was a discomfort that I felt when I saw other Korean-Americans exhibiting their cultural identity, as if my decision not to become a part of their groups somehow made me less Korean.”

yet unintentionally restricted to other similar Korean-Americans because of the discomfort caused to others. It seems to me that they form their lives around each other. They are the ones who comprise the core group of KA and spend most of their time living and playing with the same people.

Finally, the last group of Korean-Americans is those who have rejected the social conditions involved in being a member of such

a group. Instead perhaps they feel more comfortable in not exhibiting a part of their identity to which they do not feel akin. It seems that they feel more aligned as an American than as a Korean. It is not that they have thrown away their cultural identity as Koreans entirely, but like me, they have made a conscious choice not to show their cultural heritage and find discomfort when a direct attack is made questioning their cultural identity.

What is most fascinating is how each of these groups views each other. The Koreans from Korea view the Korean-Americans trying to recreate Korean traditions as a pale imitation of the true Korean experience. I always get the distinct feeling from them that they view themselves as superior in their Korean identity. While at the same time the Korean-Americans view Koreans from Korea as “FOBs” who are poorly integrated into American culture, and they view themselves as the bridge between Korea and America. Finally there are the Korean-Americans who refuse to show their Korean cultural identity that think the other two groups are engaged in a ridiculous cultural turf war.

For me, I did not feel the need to express my identity through Koreanness, so I left my own exploration of my cultural heritage as a private one. There was a discomfort that I felt when I saw other Korean-Americans exhibiting their cultural identity, as if my decision not to become a part of their groups somehow made me less Korean. This kind of internal attack of my identity made me choose to avoid other Koreans, irrationally fearing that next to them, I could not be seen as a Korean culturally and only as a Korean physically. This avoidance of discomfort ultimately led to my self-imposed isolation from Korean activities and other Korean-Americans at Harvard.

My own cultural exploration occurred through more discrete and personal methods. I took Korean language courses here at Harvard and became proficient enough at spoken Korean that I am now able to converse with my relatives. With that closing of the language gap, I was able to absorb a lot more of Korean culture and mannerisms when I visited Seoul. The customary bows and two-handed handshakes became more and more second nature. I could tell that Korean people could instantly tell that I was Korean-American, but I more often than not I found delight when they found that I could speak even limited Korean.

For most of my life, I could not understand why Koreans insisted so much that Korean-Americans be able to speak Korean to the extent that stories of taxi drivers scolding Korean-Americans in Seoul would circulate among Korean-American students going to study in Korea. However, in one of my most recent trips, I ran into an American adult working in a Korean radio station, and he was extraordinarily fluent, probably more fluent in Korean than I will be in my lifetime.

It was at that moment that I found myself wondering how he would be received if, some time in the future, he came back to America and he were unable to speak English. I understood then how strange it must have felt for Koreans to see Korean-Americans only able to speak English. I also understood where part of the elitism of the group of students from Korea must have come from.

Now, as a senior about to graduate, I reflect upon the years that have passed and some of the opportunities that I have missed. While I do not regret any of the decisions that I have made, I do realize that my lack of exploration of Korean culture has left me partially thirsty for more exposure and understanding of Korean traditions and customs. I hope that in the future, the three Korean groups I observed will eventually coalesce as the Korean presence in the United States and the number of second or third generation Korean-Americans continues to grow larger and larger.

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Untitled

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Bandung and Beyond:

On Teaching and Writing About African and Asian Pasts

Christopher Joon-Hai Lee

I am often asked how I became interested in African history, the frequent implication being “You’re Asian-American. Why are you studying Africa?”

In April 1955, twenty-nine newly independent African and Asian countries came together for a conference in the city of Bandung, Indonesia. The conference was sponsored by Indonesia, Burma (now Myanmar), Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), and the Philippines, though it included such politicians as Ho Chi Minh, Kwame Nkrumah, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Gamal Abdel Nasser. It was therefore an event that brought together a number of important figures of the nascent postcolonial world. It helped to create what became known as the Non-Aligned Movement during the 1960s, an Afro-Asian solidarity movement that sought to provide a third option apart from Western-style capitalism or Soviet-style communism during the early Cold War period. The goals of this conference were further solidified within the United Nations when the Group of 77 was formed in 1962, comprising a broad cohort of developing countries that sought to collect their interests against the pressures of Western countries and the Soviet Bloc.

I begin with this brief historical overview as a means of explaining why I think African studies is relevant to Asian and Asian-American studies. I am often asked how I became interested in African history, the frequent implication being “You’re Asian-American. Why are you studying Africa?” Admittedly this is a question I have often asked myself given the clear logic. However, over time I have found it more productive to question that logic to understand the politics of knowledge embedded within that perspective, and how it may distort senses of the past and senses of the self, despite its status as conventional wisdom within the American academy. Through this reflection, I have also become increasingly convinced that the street politics of race and the ongoing national discussion over civil rights and affirmative action could use a broader, historical context to reinvigorate a discourse that has become

increasingly insular, repetitive, and, at worst, divisive among minorities.

During my sophomore year of college, a significant national event took place that would have a deep impact on me: the Los Angeles Riots of 1992. Though the legal pardoning of white police brutality towards an unarmed black American—Rodney King—had been the origin of the uprising, it was the image of armed Korean-Americans defending their storefronts against African-American vigilantes that became a searing image in the minds of many. The National Rifle Association was among them and went on to embrace this example for their own agenda: to my mind and others, a deeply problematic outcome.¹ Moreover, these tensions went on to achieve

something approximating national status, with similar competition and conflict between African-Americans and Korean-Americans developing in the New York City area, a situation captured by Chang-Rae Lee's *Native Speaker* (1996) and Leonard Chang's *The Fruit 'N Food* (1996).²

My own response as a student was to read more deeply into the history of race-relations in the U.S. and eventually to question its global contours. I had previously received a fellowship to study at the American University in Cairo during the summer between my junior and senior years of high school, an experience that was not only my first on the continent

of Africa but already had had a formative influence on my program of study in college. I went on to take an equal number of courses in East Asian and African history, though a study abroad program in Botswana followed by a period of travel in South Africa—in 1995, just a year after the end of apartheid—convinced me to focus on southern Africa. I wanted to find a means

of participating in the process of political transition that the region was experiencing. I realized that such a choice would not amount to a complete departure from my commitment to Asian-American studies either. In fact, the parallels between both South Africa and the U.S. with regards to race are striking and have been the focus of a number of comparative studies. Furthermore, during graduate school I discovered a means of connecting these two competing

interests through the common history that was shared by both continents. Returning then to the issue of Afro-Asian relations, there is no doubt that the events of 1992 were local in character and based on a set of identifiable differences: economic, political, and cultural. However, the discouraging character and danger of these developments is that they conceal a deeper history of common ground and civil rights solidarity between Asian-Americans and African-Americans, and Asians and Africans more broadly.

In 1959 at the age of 91, W. E. B. DuBois—the twentieth-century's most important African-American intellectual who declared in his masterwork *The Souls*



of *Black Folk* (1903)³ that the problem of the twentieth century would be the color line—made a trip to China, where he announced:

Come to China, Africa, and look around. You know America and France and Britain to your sorrow. Now know the Soviet

(1956).⁵ As decolonization swept Africa and Asia during the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, African-Americans recognized the parallels between their political condition in the U.S. and those of colonized peoples elsewhere in the world. The anti-colonial thought and strategy of thinkers such as Amilcar Cabral,

only a focus of my research, but also an important component of my teaching. Area studies and multicultural studies in the U.S. have tended to be *inward* rather than *outward* in focus, with regions of the world being divided and insulated from one another, with racial, ethnic, and cultural

“Area studies and multicultural studies in the U.S. have tended to be *inward* rather than *outward* in focus, with regions of the world being divided and insulated from one another, with racial, ethnic, and cultural groups tending to be discussed and examined in isolation from one another.”

Union and its allied nations, but particularly know China. China is flesh of your flesh and blood of your blood. China is colored, and knows to what the colored skin in this modern world subjects its owner.⁴

This statement and conveyance of solidarity was the first among many between African-Americans and Asians during this period, no doubt an extension of Bandung four years before. Richard Wright, the well-known African-American author of *Native Son* (1940) and *Black Power* (1954), attended Bandung and went on to write *The Color Curtain: A Report on the Bandung Conference*

Frantz Fanon, and Ho Chi Minh had an impact on civil rights struggles throughout the world. The Chinese model of peasant revolution would provide an important example of success to peasant guerrillas in Zimbabwe and Mozambique during the 1970s. The black civil rights struggle in the U.S. would become connected with Asian-American politics and the anti-Vietnam War movement, as well as with other struggles such as the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. A whole host of connections were made by intellectuals and activists of the time that many in the present have tended to forget.⁶

These connections are not

groups tending to be discussed and examined in isolation from one another. An obsession with *difference* rather than *similarity* has often erased histories of comparative experience and direct solidarity. A common consequence of this condition is that Asian-Americans are expected to study Asian-American or Asian history, African-Americans to study African-American or African history, and so on. The contemporary politics of knowledge have then, in a sense, reified race and racial difference as well as other categories of difference. At its worst, such patterns, if uncriticized, could unconsciously reproduce practices

of exclusion.

There is then a need to address this issue. The key promise of multiculturalism in American universities has been to problematize the Euro-centrism that has prevailed for so long in the academy. Multiculturalism is an outcome of the civil rights struggles among African-Americans, Asian-Americans, Latinos, and women during the 1960s and 1970s. Multiculturalism clearly should not result in further division. It should enable students and scholars to engage with not only their own backgrounds, but also those of others, in such a way as to enlighten their own experience and sense of place in the world.

I finish with an example from my own family: my father still remembers the week the Japanese pulled out of Korea, not only marking their defeat at the end of World War II, but also the end of the colonial period. He remembers standing on a boulevard in Seoul with his mother, watching a convoy of military trucks passing by, filled with soldiers, with Koreans cheering their departure. One truck filled with officers stopped. Several jumped out, drawing their swords, in a final symbolic gesture of power now vanished. Some panicked, people began to run, and my grandmother pressed my father between her and a wall, so that he would not be trampled by the surging mass of people.

This moment is nothing more than a childhood memory, and yet it's connected to a world event and process, something similarly experienced on the streets of Accra, Johannesburg, Mumbai, and Saigon. It is a personal history of decolonization. It is a reminder that my dad was born a colonial subject, and that there are parallels between his experience and those of others elsewhere in the world during the first half

of the twentieth century, regardless of race or cultural background. It is something I think about when I teach the history of colonialism in Africa, the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, and when I write on my own research in southern Africa.

The common history between communities of African descent and communities of Asian descent therefore needs to be remembered and revived. A perspective of connections rather than difference needs to be embraced. Such an approach not only reveals a compelling past, but promises a rich future as well.

Christopher Joon-Hai Lee has a PhD in African History from Stanford University. He teaches in the Department of History at Harvard.

Footnotes

¹ For a stimulating discussion of this, see: David Palumbo-Liu, "LA, Asians, and Perverse Ventriloquisms: On the Functions of Asian America in the Recent American Imaginary." *Public Culture* 6:2 (Winter): 365-85.

² Chang-Rae Lee, *Native Speaker* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1996); Leonard Chang, *The Fruit 'N Food* (Seattle: Black Heron Press, 1996).

³ W. E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Dover 1994)

⁴ "DuBois, 91, Lauds China," *The New York Times*, March 5, 1959.

⁵ Richard Wright, *Native Son* (New York: Perennial, 1998); Richard Wright, *Black Power: A Record of Reactions in a Land of Pathos* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1954); Richard Wright, *The Color Curtain: A Report on the Bandung Conference* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1995).

⁶ For a discussion of these connections, see: Robin D. G. Kelley, Chapter 3 "'Roaring from the East': Third World Dreaming," *Freedom Dreams* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002).

An American in Seoul

“I had never been to Korea, and I assumed I would do some soul-searching, perhaps have some kind of personal epiphany of who I was. What I did not expect, however, is the change I had in my attitudes toward America.”

Daniel Chang

Last January, in his column “U.S. and Them”, *Crimson* editor Ebon Lee blasted South Koreans as “ungrateful” and called for a boycott of South Korean products in America. Lee was responding to a recent upsurge in anti-Americanism that was kindled by the acquittal of two U.S. Army soldiers who had accidentally killed two Korean schoolgirls by running them over with an armored vehicle.

Lee viewed these demonstrations as inherently ungrateful. He pointed to American sacrifices made in defending South Korea during the Korean War and the billions in American aid that set the foundation for today’s economic powerhouse. Incredulous at this apparent historical amnesia, Lee also blasted Korean mistreatment of American troops, whom he viewed as stationed there for their very own protection.

As a Korean-American, and as an international relations history concentrator focusing on U.S.-R.O.K. relations, I was astounded by such a misguided approach. American participation in Korea has certainly not been unwaveringly benign, and over one hundred years of shared history corroborate this. In 1905, for instance, Roosevelt compromised Korean sovereignty in a bid to establish spheres of interest with the Japanese, and was, ironically, awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. In 1945, Americans “liberated” Korea from Japan, but instead of allowing an independent government, divided the Peninsula into Soviet and American spheres of interest for an interim period of big-power “tutelage”—a division that, sadly, continues to this day. In 1961 and again in

1979, moreover, Americans supported the institution of military dictatorship in South Korea.

The list goes on and on, and whether justified or not, events like these partly formed the basis of anti-American sentiment in South Korea, which has galvanized in the face of President Bush's questionable foreign policy. Indeed, Bush seemed to personify what Koreans perceived as an American superiority complex and the self-righteous idea that America should unilaterally intervene wherever it deemed necessary. To make matters worse, as demonstrated with his now-infamous "Axis of Evil" speech, Bush seemed intent on brashly provoking North Korea to the point of destabilizing the Korean Peninsula.

In this context, I became ever more critical of U.S. foreign policy, not only with regard to Korea but also in the face of what seemed to be neocolonial aggression in the Middle East and flagrant disregard for international law and the United Nations. I was proud to be American, but ashamed and wary of what I saw as the nascent of a new age of imperialism.

So, as the typical burgeoning liberal college student, I was more than a bit perplexed when I found out I had been accepted as an intern with the State Department, and would be serving overseas at the Embassy in Seoul. That's certainly not to say I wasn't pleased—the embassy internship had been my goal, and for months I had pined away awaiting a letter of acceptance. But I had grown so disillusioned by Bush's foreign policy that I felt almost hypocritical, given that I would be in a sense perpetuating such destructive diplomatic approaches as an intern.

So I didn't know what to expect—not only with the job itself, but with everything. I had never been to

Korea, and I assumed I would do some soul-searching, perhaps have some kind of personal epiphany of who I was. I even vividly remember the anticipation I had for that symbolic first step off the plane and onto Korean soil, thinking that I'd feel *something*. Well, I have to admit that that first step felt like any other, but in retrospect I did learn a lot about Korea, and enjoyed absorbing myself in the culture that every Chang before me had experienced since birth.

What I did not expect, however, is the change I had in my attitudes toward America. I figured that after twenty years of life as an American, that those ideas had pretty much solidified. As I soon learned, they had not, and were capable of moving in directions I hadn't even imagined.

An American embassy is a strange place. It's in the middle of a foreign country; yet it is American to an almost conspicuous extent. On a typical day at work, you might struggle with a jammed Swingline stapler, stare for hours at your hypnotic Dell monitor, stride briskly past the curiously apropos Winslow Homer painting in the lobby, cruise around on official business in a gas-guzzling Ford, and even stand above the aptly named American Standard toilet. It's as if someone tore a chunk out of Omaha and unapologetically placed it overseas.

The only tangible difference, of course, is the people. The State Department dispatches thousands of Foreign Service Officers—our country's diplomats—around the globe, but hires even more Foreign Service Nationals to more feasibly fill the Embassy's countless logistical positions, ranging from translators to researchers. Naturally, in Seoul, these employees were all Korean.

In this environment, with Americans and Koreans

working so closely with each other, there was—not unexpectedly—a certain level of underlying tension in the workplace. Given the obvious sensitive nature of diplomacy and its subsequent security concerns, the Americans in the office invariably ranked ahead of their Korean counterparts, regardless of age difference or academic or professional background. While the atmosphere of the office in which I worked was by and large harmonious, this system inevitably created to some extent a distinct cleavage between the two groups.

As an American of Korean descent, however, I feel

society and government. I wasn't sure whether to take offense—for instance, had I heard such comments, say, in a classroom here at Harvard, I definitely would have been incensed.

But then I realized that for the first time, I had Americans viewing at me as simply American, and not as a Korean, or a Korean-American. Growing up around and going to school with a lot of Koreans, I suppose I always had enough people around me who looked like me, whose parents spoke the same language as mine did, that I could identify with them vis-à-vis a mainstream American culture personified by white Americans. But

“I realized that for the first time, I had Americans viewing at me as simply American, and not as a Korean, or a Korean-American.”

that I was placed in a very intriguing situation. On one hand, many of the Korean employees in the office seemed to regard me as Korean, encouraging my fractured attempts at speaking Korean and teaching me about the city and culture. Significantly, they shared with me criticisms of their American colleagues, mostly concerning what they (in certain cases, justifiably) perceived as a lack of respect.

On the other hand, the Americans in my office invariably treated me as 100% American, not even recognizing the Korean part of my identity. Perhaps this does not sound surprising to some, given that I was born and raised an American citizen, and was sent out to Korea by the U.S. State Department. Nevertheless, this was a new experience. For instance, at times in closed door meetings negative remarks would be made about the Korean impatience or antipathy, or its flawed

in this context of being outside the States, strangely enough, those barriers were completely undermined.

This was a startling realization—here I was, a kid just one generation removed from all the other Koreans in the office, yet by virtue of my citizenship I was trusted completely, as an American like the rest. Sure a skeptic might say, that's how it *should* be, but really, I don't think any other country in the world works like that in practice. For instance, I could certainly not see Korea, a homogeneous and relatively xenophobic country, embracing non-ethnic Koreans in this manner.

I guess what I was starting to realize, then, was that, for all of its shortcomings—amplified, I thought, by a particularly shortsighted President—there was something special and distinct about America. And while it's of course true that only once things are taken from you that you can begin to understand their meaning

and importance, when the subject of discussion is so intertwined with *you*, and your own identity, it takes on a special significance.

Later that summer, another pivotal event occurred that I remember distinctly. I lived in an apartment within an Embassy compound in Anguk-dong, separated from downtown Seoul only by a heavy stone wall and a couple of Korean military police. There were a lot of anti-American student demonstrations in the streets, and one day I happened to come across one inadvertently, right outside my place.

The funny thing is, that half a world away, living in the comfort and security that is America, I sympathized with Korean students involved in anti-American protests. But when I saw these young Koreans seething, brandishing derogatory banners, and shouting epithets about the United States, I was deeply distressed, almost to the point of tears. I found myself even thinking some of the thoughts that Ebon Lee had expressed, thoughts that had enraged me at the time I read them.

It seemed profoundly ironic to me that these demonstrations were occurring amidst the splendor and high rises of downtown Seoul, which owed so much to American assistance in the fifties and sixties. Likewise, many students so vehemently vilifying American imperialism and greed were proudly clad in their Nike sneakers and Calvin Klein jeans. And the entire exercise of demonstrating, I felt, was possible through a democratic system based largely on American principles.

This is certainly not to imply that I started to believe that American interaction in Korea has been completely benign. To the contrary, while this may seem obvious to say, every action America has taken in Korea has

invariably been taken with American interests in mind. And a lot of times, this has gone contrary to Korean interests, and has in countless instances has exacerbated the national division or retarded the development of democracy. But all in all, I began to believe, South Korea was better off than worse because of the U.S., and while still painfully flawed, American principles and actions seemed essentially good.

Strangely, it took me a trip to Korea to discover these strongly held beliefs about America. I still despise the current Administration, and am appalled and apprehensive of a dangerous, “us versus them” (as Ebon Lee clearly holds) mentality that is taking hold of so many Americans and has already taken hold of our foreign policy.

But I am proud of a being an American, just as I am proud of my Korean heritage. I am proud of this country that let my parents come overseas, penniless, to have a house and three Ivy League graduates as their children. I am proud that it can look at me as an American, and employ me, with full trust, in a country from which I am only one generation removed. And I am proud that in part because of its assistance, the land of my parents has risen from being a weak, decrepit society, transformed into an economic powerhouse and vibrant democracy. This is a country that can elect an idiot to its highest office, that can invade other nation based on the interests of big business, and can institutionalize the circumvention of constitutional liberties. But on a whole, I’m grateful to be here.

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Northern Lights:

the North Korean refugees in Seoul

Carrol Chang



photo courtesy of Dahm Choi

I spent last summer in South Korea living with and interviewing North Korean defectors (*talbukja*¹), the subject of my senior thesis in sociology. The following is the briefest snapshot possible of what I took away from the experience.

Yangcheon neighborhood, corner eatery, July, 10pm

A mixture of moonlight and orange street lamp glow is just bright enough to make out the scene at this street corner. Two men pour out *soju* for each other in small doses, as if they won't finish this bottle in the next fifteen minutes and go through another, and another, and then easily four or five by the end of the night. The neighborhood is shabby, and the dingy plastic furniture and dirt underfoot seem all too broken in by these men. It's monsoon season, warm enough to sit outside, but I have no doubt that in the colder months the

scene just moves inside. Once the alcohol kicks in the stories flow without end—the fiancée left waiting in North Korea, the corrupt border patrolmen taking bribes, the parents killed by diseases that they found out here in South Korea as easily curable. With no wife nagging to come home and no job looming ahead the next morning, the men can talk until their throats run dry or the *soju* runs out. Through the window I can just make out the apron-clad *ajumma*² in the kitchen. Otherwise, everyone else in this Seoul neighborhood has retreated to their homes. Tomorrow, it seems, won't be any different from today, or yesterday, or so many other days before that: these men are alone here in South Korea, with little more than the *soju* before them and the thoughts on their minds.

Hwarangdae neighborhood, Kim residence, July

Mrs. Kim³ is a living paradox. Her compact frame and wobbling bones, once diseased to the point of despair, move about the house in labored steps telling the aching history of her 50-some-odd years. Every step is like she's learning to walk again; inside her mouth is more silver than white. But under the repairs on her body is a will of steel. Little else can explain how this frail woman spends her nights alongside men half her age moving boxes of fish at a market in downtown Seoul. It's a secret, she whispers, her eyes glimmering with glee. Her two daughters think she's an overnight bedside assistant; they would never allow this if they knew. One minute, she is exhausted, on the floor, and the next, she is pumping her fists and shaking her hips in a resilient dance of joy. If her body could keep up with her spirit, I'm certain she would dance all day. Other defectors will tell you that the *talbukja* life in

South Korea is plagued with hurdles, but for Mrs. Kim, free at last after a lifetime of oppression and illness, each day is a miracle worth celebrating.

* * *

Three months of stories, friendships, tears, and lessons in under five pages? I'm struggling to fit everything in. The lives of North Korean defectors are not written in black and white. The unthinkable pains they have been through in their journeys to South Korea do not fit neatly into an article of any length. The sweeping generalizations that so many South Koreans pick up from school, TV, and the culture in general will never encapsulate the over three thousand defectors currently living in South Korea. Their lives, covering the entire range from the Yangcheon men to Mrs. Kim, span the idle and the zealous; the beaten and the resilient; the bitter and the thankful; the disillusioned and the hopeful.

One thing common to all the men, women, and children I met this past summer, however, is that they are ready to start lives of freedom. After escaping the totalitarian government in the North, they live as refugees hiding in China,⁴ followed by the same three months of interrogation and reintegration training after finally arriving in South Korea.⁵ For once, they would like to live as they please, to blend into society as the reunited brethren the South Korean government continues to claim North Koreans are. "I want no different treatment, good or bad, just because I came from the North," states an exasperated, 23-year-old Hyuk, after his neighborhood dry cleaner bombarded him with questions about his former life. "One day I'm going to go to America. That way, people won't see North or South; I can live as just a Korean." Hyuk

can't grasp even the alphabet when he asks to learn English; furthermore, he had been educated his entire life that America was the imperialist enemy, the cause of all North Korea's suffering. That he and dozens of other defectors who express similar frustrations are willing to become migrants yet again—to America no less—is a testament to the severity of the new struggles defectors confront in South Korea.

To all those who might otherwise write off those who came from North Korea as brainwashed, communist machines, I reiterate the most fundamental fact of their *talbukja* status: they are the ones who left. And while most of the defectors I met left primarily because of hunger—political oppression a secondary concern to their physical survival—the regime's ideological indoctrination dissipates in their minds, and defectors absorb the world beyond North Korea's borders with surprising speed. In the way to their success, however, are social hurdles that prevent North Koreans from

“The current state of relations between South and North Koreans is a shame on so many levels.”

achieving true social and cultural citizenship in South Korea.⁶ Defectors are welcomed with flowers and hugs when they first set foot on Southern soil, but they find little truth to the government assertion that the South and North are one brethren, aching to be reunited.

The current state of relations between South and North Koreans is a shame on so many levels. When I get on a thirteen-hour flight and can meet a dozen former North Koreans my second day in Korea, while the majority of South Koreans report that they've

never met a North Korean, reunification seems, at best, a dying flame. When any given person in the wealth neighborhoods of Seoul will most likely say with disappointing indifference that they don't want reunification for economic reasons, and when, at the same time, I think of my grandparents, who are brought to tears every time they think of their country split into North and South and whose dying wish is a unified Korea, I hear the voices of those who actually lived through the Korean War quickly being silenced by the boom and the lure of capitalization. When a South Korean asks what brings me to the country, and when the first thing he or she asks in complete ignorance is, “They're all spies, right?” I wonder if the stereotypes that are crippling defectors' potential for success in South Korea will ever, once and for all, be dispelled. When I hear the obsessive post-war mantra “uri-neun ha-na-da,”⁷ I hear only hollow words.

* * *

After our interview, Hyuk brings over a picture frame encasing several small, tattered black-and-white photographs. The water from the Tumen River has stained the pictures and washed away much of Hyuk's only memories of North Korea, but luckily, I can just barely see some of the figures. The man in the military outfit is his father, the stoic woman beside him is his mother, and the two shoeless boys in the dirt are his older brothers, photographed when they were in grade school. Three to starvation, one to a knife fight. “They've all passed,” he whispers. He leaves to pour us drinks.

I looked into that picture frame again and saw, behind the fuzzy image of his loved ones, my past next to his. I saw our simultaneous births in America and

North Korea; my daily Pledge of Allegiance in grade school and his hailing the Supreme Commander Kim Il-sung. When you meet someone of your own age and your own blood, someone whose life has been stripped of all of the things you have taken for granted in your own life, your entire existence becomes imbued with new meaning. Most of us do feel deep gratitude for having had opportunities that allowed us to pursue higher education, but only after my experiences with these defectors have I truly realized how influential sheer luck and circumstance have been in my life as a Korean-American attending Harvard. I am staggered

these folks, who have undergone unspeakable hardship and now live as second-class citizens in South Korea with personal histories regarded as social taboos, take the time to appreciate their good fortune in making it safely to the South, saying that they ache for their countrymen who suffer and await safe passage in China.⁸

Before this past summer, Korean-American to me meant eating Spam on a regular basis; it meant rolling your eyes when people's first guess was that you're Chinese; it meant having to fight back a snide remark when the next guess was Japanese; it meant that my

“When you meet someone of your own age and your own blood, someone whose life has been stripped of all of the things you have taken for granted in your own life,, your entire existence becomes imbued with new meaning.”

by the reality that a mere fifty years ago, the Korean peninsula was slashed in half in a decision that would ultimately grant my parents the freedom to emigrate from the South, while keeping the parents of my North Korean friends captive in a life that ultimately led to their deaths by disease and starvation. My very birth in America and the ensuing opportunities I have had because of that result largely from factors that were never in my or my parents' control. For North Koreans, the simple locale of their birth and upbringing has stunted their life chances—physically, educationally, and socially—in a way that is radically foreign to the Koreans who live relatively comfortable lives in the United States and Canada. What for me has been the luck of the draw for North Koreans has been the unexplained cruelty of chance. And, ironically, even

friends got money for good report cards while I got a two-hour lecture for anything below an A; it meant never having my mom or dad at meet-the-teacher night or class trips because they always had to be at the store; it meant not going to the doctor until I had a 104-degree fever because we didn't have health insurance; it meant not wanting to open the refrigerator in front of any non-Koreans lest the wrath of *kimchi* knock them unconscious.

Korean-American to me now means appreciating with the deepest gratitude all the annoyances that I now cherish as part of my upbringing, as quirks of the second-generation Korean-American experience. It's being conscious of a growing diaspora, of having a better understanding of how all foreign-born Koreans fit into the picture of Koreans across the globe, and

of how the circumstances behind my life have been a matter of chance. Stories like Hyuk's don't pass you by without leaving a mark on your conscience. Whereas North Koreans are sent to prison camps or executed for showing any sign of disloyalty to the state, I know that as suspicious of the American government as we all may sometimes be, I only have the freedom to even say so because the second part of my ethnicity is, indeed, American.

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Footnotes

¹ The word *talbukja* translates to 'one who fled the North.' Defectors resent the use of this word by South Koreans, as it implies a crime or wrongdoing that necessitated their escape, but it is the commonly accepted term in South Korea for former North Korean nationals.

² *Ajumma* refers to any woman whose age seems to fall between motherhood and grandmotherhood (roughly one's thirties to sixties); referring to someone as *ajumma* is more or less like saying 'ma'am.' This restaurant, like so many cheap eateries buried in every nook and cranny in Seoul, seats no more than twenty people, is open until midnight or so, and is run entirely by one or two people—usually an *ajumma*, sometimes her husband as well.

³ All names of North Korean defectors have been changed for the purposes of safety and confidentiality.

⁴ It is impossible for defectors to cross the heavily armed Demilitarized Zone separating North and South Korea; therefore, they use a roundabout path. They first cross either the Tumen or Yalu River into China, where they are deemed criminals and actively repatriated by the Chinese government. They then wait several months to several years in China for a contact or opportunity that will eventually lead them safely to South Korea. Finally, they sneak into and use Mongolia or Southeast Asian countries as a departure point to their

final destination.

⁵ As soon as defectors land in South Korea, they are whisked away by the National Intelligence Service to a center where they are interrogated for one month, in part to determine if they are spies. Upon successful clearance, defectors are then moved to the Hanawon reintegration complex for two months. Although this time is structured like periods in a school day—unlike the prison-type atmosphere during the first month of interrogation—Hanawon grounds are nevertheless surrounded by fences and barbed wire, and defectors must follow rules set by the teachers and researchers watching over them. Graduation from Hanawon is the first time in their entire lives that defectors breathe the air of freedom.

⁶ North Koreans are nearly irrevocably behind South Koreans educationally, and 80% end up dropping out of school, despite the incentive of government-paid tuition. The jobs they can get without a degree are the sort that Mrs. Kim works—taxing manual labor. North Koreans also lack the family background and roots that continue to play a role in one's status and marriage potential in South Korea, and the subtle ways in which South Koreans are educated about North Korea perpetuates negative stigmas.

⁷ "Uri-neun ha-na-da" is a commonly known saying among South Koreans translating to "We are one."

⁸ For every one defector living in South Korea, there are almost a hundred refugees hiding in China (estimates range from a conservative 100,000 to close to 300,000), and nearly a thousand locked under Kim Jung-il's oppressive regime in North Korea (population roughly 27 million). In this regard, a defector's very existence in South Korea is itself a near miracle.



Haemin Na
Family

Experiments in Translating Korean *Sijo*

Diana Hinds Evans

When a translation strays notably from an original text, scholars, poets, and translators alike decry the work as unethical or even sinful: transgression against the text. Much translation theory of the latter 20th century focuses on equivalence and faithfulness to the text. While this approach may work when translating Spanish into French or French into English, for example, when rendering Korean poetry into English it generally leads to awkwardness. Too often in the history of Korean poetry translations, efforts at equivalence have led to poor results in English.

As I have translated Korean into English, I have attempted to achieve a more holistic translation, one which takes into consideration each distinct aspect of a poem as part of a whole, like pieces of clay molded together into a new shape. The base material remains the same, but the work becomes a new entity. The poem is re-created, not merely translated. In this paper, using a single Korean poem, a three-line poem called a *sijo*, I will demonstrate my early efforts at equivalence translation as well as later, more holistic, but less technically “faithful” translations. I will also discuss translations of the same poem by established scholars in the field of Korean literature. In order to demonstrate some possible outcomes of employing different translation methodologies, I will now proceed with translating a single *sijo* in a few ways. The poem I will use is Hwang Jini’s “Dongjitdal.”¹

Here is the poem in Korean:

Dongjitdal ginagin bameul han heorireul dure naeeo
Chunpung ibeul arae seori seori neoheot daga
*Eorunnim osinnal bamieodeun gubi gubi pyeorira*²

Here is a lexical equivalence translation:

Winter solstice month (11th month of the lunar calendar) / long, long night / large (long) waist / two in dividing (sharing)

*Spring wind blanket under / coil coil (coilingly) / placed it and then
Loved one came day / night is if / wind wind (windingly) spread*

Once I put it into English word order, add subjects that are implied in Korean but must be spelled out in English, and render it into idiomatic English, the result follows:

*I divided the long December night in two
And rolled it up under a spring blanket.
If it is night when my love comes, I will unroll it.*

Although this translation attempts to convey the essential lexical meaning of the original work, it lacks vitality in English.

As I think about ways to make it sound more poetic, I consider the rhythm of the original. Below, I use a canonical form of English meter in order to give the translation a rhythmically “correct” feel for the target audience. It would not do to directly import the breath phrasing of the Korean poem or the grouping of syllables in it, because such would not read well in English.

The structure of the poem in Korean falls within the category of the “regular” *sijo*, that is, *sijo* with three lines. Its logical development consists of the following pattern: introduction in the first line, development in the second line, twist in the first three syllables of the third line, followed by the conclusion. Because the structure of a Korean sentence usually demands that the verb come at the end, it is difficult in an English translation to structurally capture the twist in the same way as the original. Therefore, I employ the rhythm of the poem to create the effect of a twist before the concluding line. In the translations below I employ an irregular iambic tetrameter in the first, second, and fourth lines. I set apart the third line by changing its rhythm. In this way the reader may sense a subtle, rather than overt, twist in the third line, or something rhythmically unstable that breaks the flow of the poem, thus imparting the flavor of a “twist.”

*I slice the waist this long winter night
And weave it through my summer quilt
When my love comes in the evening
By strips will I unravel it*

Below I will show translations of two scholars who also focused on forms of equivalence, one on translating the “twist” in *sijo*, the other on mirroring the syllabic count of the original poem.

Kevin O’Rourke translates *sijo* with an eye to originality of form in the translated version. Here is his version of “Dongjitald:”

*I’ll cut a piece from the waist
Of this interminable eleventh hour night,
And wind it in coils beneath these bed covers, warm and fragrant as the spring breeze,
Coil by coil
To unwind it the night my lover returns.*³

His aim is to impart to English readers the uniqueness of *sijo* compared to poetic forms in English. He does this by using a five-line poem in which the fourth line represents the “twist” in three syllables, thus mimicking the three-syllable twist of the original. The surrounding lines are lengthened for contrast. He maintains no regular meter, focusing instead on nuances of meaning.

Richard Rutt’s translation follows the syllabic count of the original.

*I will break in two the long strong back
of this long midwinter night,
Roll it up and put it away
Under the springtime coverlet.
And the night that my loved one comes back again
I will unroll it to lengthen the time.*⁴

Rutt proclaims to remain faithful to the meaning as he feels it is understood by Korean readers, admitting that this may leave his work “flat and prosy,” but he also believes this is in line with the tone of the original.⁵ Walter Benjamin states, however, “In the appreciation of a work of art or an art form, consideration of the receiver never proves fruitful.”⁶ Here is a case in point: Rutt’s attention to readers’ response to the original work forces him to consider the impossible, which leads to a relatively poor translation. He further restricts himself by precisely reflecting the number of syllables in the original.

O’Rourke, Rutt, and myself performed equivalence translations by focusing on form, either by mirroring (or in my case, approximating) the twist or the syllabic count of the original poem. I feel that the singularity of our

focus may have brought us to produce English translations that could have resulted in a better poems if our focus had been broader. As Matthew Arnold said, “the process of translation must recreate the manner and movement of a poet or a text rather than looking for exact equivalencies...”⁷ He “conceived of the text as a whole rather than just the individual details.”⁸ I espouse this holistic, reconstructionist approach for my translations of this poem below. Rather than focus on only one or two elements of the poem, I free myself from feeling tied to the text in any traditional sense of faithfulness.

*Chill deep night and I cut thru its core,
stuff it into my spring blanket,
Whip it out when he comes at dark.*

Another version reads,

*Cutting November’s prolonged gloom
across its dun waste,
Shoving it curled under covers
used on fairer days,
Should love come at gloaming,
I will spread it, I will splay.*

The above versions present varied interpretations of the tone or mood imparted by the original work when I as reader experienced it on two different occasions. The difference in mood between the two is evident. Such translations may with impunity stray far or stay near to what one might call the “original tone” of the poem because of its plethora of possible interpretations. In the pieces above, the former example develops the more coquettish and charged attitude of the lover, while the latter seems more contextually tuned to the stereotypical *gisaeng*⁹ waiting for a lover who seems to have grown cold.

There is more work to be done in achieving a full picture of a *sijo*. *Sijo*, for example, is an oral form, as was much Korean poetry in earlier days. In fact, *sijo* was not considered to be poetry at all, but song. The poem as read, either silently or aloud, is an entirely different beast when presented in its musical form. What does a translator do with the music? How might one represent in translation the sound-images of the poem?

Sijo in its sung form is called *sijochang*. There is a standard musical form for *sijochang*, to which any number of *sijo* are sung. In *sijochang*, the music does not follow the words (or vice-versa) the way most songs in English do. Instead, a single syllable will be elongated to last for the space of four to five slow beats, while another will be abruptly squeezed into the space between beats.

My first attempt to “translate” the music of this Hwang Jini poem included thinking about what musical forms in the Western canon could be said to bear a resemblance to *sijochang* in some fashion. First I considered the historical context of the *gisaeng*. These women belonged to the lowest class by birth, but were welcomed in the homes of kings and nobility to entertain. I thought of jazz singers of days past in the U.S., many of whom were African-American at a time when racism was much more overt in our society. Despite societal prejudices, these women were respected across classes because of their singing talents, and they too performed for higher echelons of society.

In my search for a Western song that could somehow approximate *sijochang*, I looked for jazz standards that dealt with love or unrequited love, as many of the *sijochang* do. I finally came across the song, “Black is the Color of My True Love’s Hair,” performed in this case by Nina Simone. It fits the above descriptions, and in addition the tune is mournful and the rhythm slow, with the syllables of some words stretched across a number of beats. I tried singing my translation of Hwang Jini’s *sijo* to the tune of this song. The experiment was interesting, the result a little strange. To fill the length of the song I would have to repeat the poem at least four times.

It seems that a better way to approach the translation of the music would be to compose a new piece myself. Then I would be free to compose a work that I feel brings together all the nuances of the original, rather than tie myself to seeking near equivalences in rhythm, pitch, tone quality, or context, as was my inclination. I leave this effort to someone with more musical talent

than me.

The movement of the poem also bears further investigation, both in the music as well as in the written word. What non-explicit gestures exist in the poem, how do music and movement interact with each other, and how can these elements be played out for a different culture? As in the music conundrum, the gestures found in a Korean work, whether abstract or concrete, must be captured, reformed, and presented in the new text. Imagine the text of a poem represented by a dance. What kind of movements and gestures would you find in the dance when performed for a Korean audience? How would these differ for a Western audience? Further work in this area will be fruitful in fleshing out the overall view of a poem that is chosen for translation. It is my hope that through these and similar methods translators will find more effective means for presenting the poetry of Korea to the English-speaking world.

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Footnotes

¹ In compliance with the publisher’s request, I use the romanization system currently employed by the Korean government.

² Kim, Seon Heui, ed. *Hanguk jeontong munhak jeonjip*. Pg. 132.

³ O’Rourke, Kevin. *The Book of Korean Shijo*. Pg. 55.

⁴ Rutt, Richard, ed. *The Bamboo Grove*. Pg. 76.

⁵ Rutt 8.

⁶ Schulte, Rainer and John Biguenet, eds. *Theories of Translation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992. Pg. 71.

⁷ Ibid 5-6.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Female entertainer.



Shelly Choo
Untitled

Shelly Choo '06 is a Biochemistry Concentrator in Mather House.



Haemin Na
Diver

ASIAN AMERICANS and MENTAL HEALTH

Tiffany Hsieh

Is being Asian American, especially second-generation Asian American, a curse?

People have ranted to great length and expended much angst about the so-called “model minority,” a stereotype now so stale that I hesitate even to use it. And it is true that on average, Asian-Americans have relatively high levels of educational, occupational, and economic achievement. Asian-Americans also have the lowest utilization of mental health services relative to all other ethnics groups in the U.S., regardless of gender, age, and geographic location (2).

This statistic does not mean that Asian-Americans experience little or no mental health issues. On the contrary, depression and other mental illnesses have become pervasive among Asian-Americans for a number of culturally unique reasons that differ across generations. Many Asian-Americans do not seek help; among those who do use such services, the severity of their mental illness is often extremely high; Asian-Americans tend to delay seeking treatment until symptoms reach crisis proportions (3).

Considering the barriers that Asian-Americans face in obtaining suitable mental health care, this is not surprising. About 21% of Asian-Americans lack health insurance coverage (1). Additionally, the definition of normal and abnormal mental health in traditional Asian cultures is considerably different from that in mainstream Western health systems, and consequently standard psychiatric diagnoses in the United States may not always identify the signs of mental illness in Asian-Americans. New immigrants and older generations of Asian-Americans face linguistic barriers to mental health treatment; there are approximately 70 Asian-American mental health care providers available for every 100,000 Asian-Americans, compared to 173 per 100,000 whites (1). With more than 100 Asian languages and dialects spoken in this country, and up to 40 percent of Asian-Americans with limited English proficiency, access to appropriate health services is difficult.

But even before that, cultural stigma prevents many Asian-Americans from actively seeking treatment. Even though research is deplorably scarce on this issue, there is no doubt that shame and stigma contribute to the lower utilization rates of mental health services in Asian-American communities. The belief held by many Asian-American families that mental illness is a taboo subject, often prevents victims from expressing anxiety about their own problems or those of other family members, much less seeking treatment. Though these beliefs differ in degree depending on educational background and time spent in the country, the influence of the Confucian tradition on many Asians, for one, strongly discourages the expression of emotion, treating it as an intolerable manifestation of personal weakness that damages the structure of the family.

With second and third-generation Asian-Americans, the familial and social expectation to succeed can be intensely harrowing on a psychological level. Asian-American children and adolescents are considered by mental health providers to be highly prone to depression (4). According to studies released in 2001 by the National Asian Women's Health Organization and the National Mental Health Association, Asian-American women have the second-highest female suicide rate among 15 to 24 year-olds and the highest rate of depressive symptoms for adolescents among all racial, ethnic and gender groups; 30% of Asian-American girls in grades 5 through 12 reported suffering from symptoms of depression; Asian-American girls had the highest rates of depressive symptoms compared to white, black and Hispanic girls (5).

Why is this?

Cultural values, too, may contribute to and

exacerbate depressive symptoms and syndromes among Asian-American adolescents. It would not be a gross generalization to say that many Asians believe that the family is the central unit of life, and derive a sense of personal identity from meeting family expectations and needs. Asian parents often demand total obedience and compliance toward themselves and other authority figures; they often show their love in indirect ways and urge their children to internalize negative feelings

“[Asian parents] often believe that the child simply needs more will power or harsher discipline, misinterpreting symptoms of depression and anxiety as lack of motivation and concentration.”

rather than express them in a constructive way. Finally, and perhaps most damagingly, academic achievement is often perceived as the only validation of parents as “good” parents, and the only pathway to a “successful” life for the children.

Asian-American children and adolescents also experience distinct mental health stresses accompanying their status as members of a minority—not just any minority—and descendants of immigrant families: racism in society, lack of role models in school, cultural and generational conflicts with parents, lack of emotional nurturance from parents who must acculturate quickly, often in an atmosphere of extreme socioeconomic adversity. These pressures are complicated by debilitating incidents of verbal and physical abuse by parents, and sometimes separation from parents in early childhood when the parents are

establishing themselves in a new country before the child joins them (5).

Examples of depressive symptoms among adolescents include volatile mood, rage, intense self-consciousness, low self-esteem, poor academic performance, truancy, delinquent behaviors, substance abuse, sexual acting-out, social withdrawal, eating and sleep disturbance (5).

Many Asian parents suffer from misguided perceptions of such psychological problems: they often dismiss the child as just “lazy” or “defiant.” Similarly, they often believe that the child simply needs more will power or harsher discipline, misinterpreting symptoms of depression and anxiety as lack of motivation and concentration because they do not fully understand the objectives and methods of psychotherapy. In family environments that are less than ideal, many Asian-American adolescents exhibit difficulties in managing or expressing anger, isolation in family and in school, and poor methods of handling disappointments or losses in life (5).

In order to address and ameliorate these issues, community education about the nature of mental disorders may help to reduce shame and stereotypes about the mentally ill. Prevention efforts, like parent training programs, bicultural adjustment strategies, and culturally oriented self-help groups have been initiated to promote mental health and well-being in Asian-American communities (1). Cultural sensitivity and knowledge is of crucial importance in targeting and providing mental health services to Asian-Americans, who require culturally appropriate strategies in order to improve the quality of their mental health. It is absolutely necessary for mental health professionals

to be mindful of these issues when treating Asian-American patients, and attention to culture-specific forms of intervention will help bring about a more beneficial use of mental health care services in this population.

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a daughter's burdens

Gloria Hou

They said all this because they loved me. In a distant, rational way, I knew that. But I could not talk to them. And so I gave up trying to explain.

Light leaked through the gaps of the Venetian blinds and was cast upon the wall in cold hard beams. I blinked, oddly fascinated by the light. It was something new, a change from the preceding hours of darkness. On the fringes of my consciousness, a thought danced like a flickering shadow: A new day is here. I should dress.

But I am so tired...

Suddenly, a harsh voice pierced the air: “Sarah!!! Where are you? Why are you so lazy? Get out of bed!”

“Yes, *umma*, I’m coming.”

Reluctantly, I pulled myself out of bed and headed to the bathroom, wincing as the chill air hit my body. The slightly cracked tiles of the bathroom floor were ice cold on my feet. As I brushed my teeth, I scrutinized my face carefully. This is who I am—this is how the outside world sees me.

A sinking sensation, a familiar part of my daily routine, filled me. I stared at the pockmarks on my

face, willing them to disappear. I took a hold of my brush and mechanically yanked it through my knotted and frizzy hair. It was pointless. My hair would never be the beautiful glossy curtain of perfectly straight hair that was the pride of the other Korean girls at school. I am worthless, I thought. Disgusted, I trudged downstairs.

Rice and *kimchi* soup were already prepared for me. I ate it quickly. My mom was waiting impatiently at the door to drive me to school so that I would not be late.

In class that day, my AP Calculus BC teacher started droning, “In order to see if the series converges, you have to know the right test...” My head started throbbing with a persistent pulsating pain. Suddenly, I felt an intense desire to be outside—to run, to scream, just not to be there. I felt caged, like a hamster running so hard, always running to turn the wheel, but running for nothing.

Suddenly, I snapped back into consciousness. My friend's hand was on my arm. Classmates were crowded all around me, faces warm with concern.

"Sarah, are you okay? We have been trying to wake you for the past ten minutes."

My face burned with shame. "I am very sorry. I don't know what's wrong with me—I'm just tired, I guess."

At dinner that night, my father looked very stern. "Sarah..."

"Yes, *appa*." I looked down, afraid of his displeasure.

"Sarah, Sung-Min's mother told your mother and me that you fell asleep in class today and could not be woken."

"I am sorry, *appa*. I don't know what happened—I guess I was just tired."

Silence.

I cringed, waiting for the torrent of admonition to come. But my father said nothing. The air throbbed with unspoken anger and disappointment. I had gotten a 79 on my last calculus test and had promised to be a better student.

My father and mother have always given everything to me. How do they deserve a stupid, useless daughter like me?

My mother went to Seoul National, but for me, she gave up her career. Without complaint—every day, every week, every year, she has woken me, made my meals, done my laundry, and driven me to and from school and violin lessons. So many hopes pinned on me, but for what?

The rest of the meal passed in awkward silence. I was grateful that I did not have to speak, did not have

to answer the probing questions.

I had spoken to my parents before about my poor academic performance. They did not understand. "What is wrong with you, Sarah? You are not trying hard enough. When we were your age, we used to get up with the dawn to study."

I tried to tell them that I found no joy in calculus, no joy in the sciences, that it was painful, that I hated it.

"Sarah, listen to us. Learn from your parents' struggles. We only want what is best for you. Be practical. You have to show them that you are twice as smart, twice as competent. As a minority, nothing is going to be given to you. We do not ever want you to have to worry about where your food is going to come from. We do not want you to have to suffer like us."

They said all this because they loved me. In a distant, rational way, I knew that. But I could not talk to them.

And so I gave up trying to explain.

That night, I cried for a long time, silently into my pillow. I cried until my tears ran out. But I did not feel better.

I stared dumbly up at the ceiling as I had on so many other nights before. Alone. Waiting for the dawn to come.

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To Whom Must I Listen

Aaron Kim



illustration by Jane Y. Kim

Mr. Krezagy'll amble down the hall, make a big show of checking up on the labels, but he'll always end up at the counter. That's where I am. And then he tells me things. I listen.

I've won the employee of the month prize so many times and redeemed the five buck gift certificate to Knappy's Subs I get from the owner so much, I'm not entirely sure why he insists on giving it this regularly to me. Basically, it's become a useless gesture. There're only three of us who run the store: one for the mornings, one in the afternoons and evenings, and me on during the night. I'm the only one who's regularly sober. The other two are stoned half the time. It's simply matter of fact to say that I take the prize by default. That, and the joy of a Knappy's hero is fleeting. Prize money that gets a guy subs which lasts through a single lunch and no more get him nowhere on the five-sixty an hour income the guy makes.

I think the real reason I get the prize is because I listen. I listen to all the things that Mr. Krezagy deems fit for my ear whenever he is in the store. Sure, during those times, he's usually in his backroom office, working on the store bills. But once he gets tired of the numbers, he emerges from his hideaway, and, he'll come over to me. He'll amble down the aisle, make a big show of checking up on the labels, but he'll always end up at the counter. That's where I am. And then he tells me things. I listen.

Mostly, he talks about an old person's things. Memories, I mean—memories of the bygones. He talks about how he was a G.I. during the Second World War. He talks about his dead wife and his dead son and how his daughter

ran away from him thirty years ago and how he hasn't seen her since. When he's through with repeating his anecdotes, every so often he'll move onto giving me little bits of advice. Small business tips he's picked up during the years that he, himself, manned the counter alone, an indistinct immigrant who'd just set up his business on an indistinct street corner: avoid slighting your customer by absent-mindedly pushing back change with your middle finger; keep at least a three feet of distance between your talking head and the customer's; if the man in front of you is wearing a torn shirt, be especially wary of him, for he may not be able to pay. I listen.

I've listened well enough to know that the man in front of me now won't pay: he would rather that I pay him. He's wearing a black ski-mask and holding a shotgun at my chest, demanding me to put money into his black duffel bag. He demands by pointing and by gestures as though he is afraid to talk. I bet he thinks if he does, I may later be able to identify him when he is caught by the sound of his voice. That's smart. But I don't want to praise a man for his cunning while he is the midst of doing a bad thing.

I've listened well enough to know that I should resist what demands the man in front of me is making. I should say that I need a key to open the cash register because the owner doesn't want his employees stealing his stuff when nobody's buying anything. Then, I should slowly, slowly—one hand in the air—palm outward to show my apparent goodwill—lower my other hand to the shelf on which Mr. Krezagy has stored the 45-millimeter. Then I should slowly, slowly take the gun out, keeping it hidden from his sight for another two shelves and then

before he knows it—BANG—he'll be shot, writhing on the ground dying, or dead if my shot was clean. The gun is never locked on safety like it's supposed to be. I suppose that's because Mr. Krezagy comes from times when safety hardly meant anything to anybody.

So I talk to the ski-masked man. I tell him: "Hey, buddy, just wait a couple moments, okay? Let me get the key that opens the cash register—"

He makes a movement that I take to be a protest of what I have just said about the key.

"Hey, buddy," I say in a reassuring voice, "it's only standard procedure. The register opens when somebody buys, and you ain't buying. It's what we always got to do so the owner knows we ain't stealing his stuff. I ain't doing it just because you're here, okay?"

Ski-Mask gives a grunt and waves his gun. He seems to be telling me to go on. I do.

Slowly, slowly, I lean down, reaching with one hand—reaching to the shelf where the gun is kept. My other hand I keep conscientiously in full view of Ski-Mask. I watch him as I slowly move. The way Ski-Mask stands like he isn't expecting anything more than a key that'll lead him to the money: I can tell that he thinks I'm up to no funny business. I know that what Mr. Krezagy has told me to do is right.

My hand reaches the gun. I touch the cold steel, and my breath quickens. With only my fingertips, I carefully feel my way around the gun, searching for the handle and the trigger. Two moments and I have found them. I wrap my hand around the handle, slowly, so as not to make any sounds that an object larger than a key is scraping on the bottom of a shelf.

Ski-Mask grunts. I think he suspects something is up because he grunts again and rocks a bit on his feet. I realize that my slowness has become too deliberate for his comfort. I am taking too long to get the key. For him, I am no longer a nervous cashier who has watched too many police shows in which the man who is being threatened by a gun moves slowly, as though the gun's presence forces him into slow motion. My great mistake was my composure. Either I must give in to my ruse or have a go at him with the gun. I must act. Quickly.

I hear Mr. Krezagy in my head now, more than ever. "Don't look them in the eye, Alfie, don't look them in the eye," I recall his gruff voice the one time he showed where the gun was kept and how to use it. "Don't even look at them. Just take out the gun and shoot."

I'm not looking at Ski-Mask. Besides, even if I did look at him, the mask makes his face indistinguishable.

But Mr. Krezagy never told me about listening to one of them breathe. I hear. I listen to the sound of Ski-Mask's intake and the exhale. In-out. The mask doesn't hide that. The mask can't hide that; it has a hole for his mouth. Neither can it hide the living person standing in front of me. Can I shoot the living person standing in front of me?

"Point, don't aim. You haven't got time to aim. He should be standing right in front of you anyway. If you aim, you waste your time trying to figure out what it is that you're aiming for. The head, the legs, the arms, the hand that he's holding his crowbar or whatever with. There's too many parts to aim for. Just point the thing and shoot!"

He doesn't have a crowbar, Mr. Krezagy. Or a baseball bat. He has a damn shotgun, and it's pointed at me. What if when I shoot, he shoots, too. What would I do then, when I've got twenty oozing holes in my chest—or without a pair of shoulders without a head sitting on top of them. What if I miss.

Or, what if I were to dupe him into believing that he's wasting his time here, and drive him away by doing so without the cash he wants?

Ski-Mask awaits. His grunts beckon me. I must make my move.

I let the gun go and straighten myself, slowly, slowly, showing both empty palms. "Hey, buddy, I don't know where the key is, okay?" I say. "Look, I don't know what you can do. Maybe you can try—"

The shotgun swings back and hits me smack on the left arm. The impact hurls me to the corner of the counter farthest away from the register. Ski-Mask loses no time. He pounds the lock on the cash register with the butt of his shotgun. As I watch helplessly from the corner, it busts by his second hit. My eyes are watering from the pain of what I'm sure is a broken upper arm. He throws open the money-shelf and dumps the whole thing into his duffel bag. I suppose he doesn't want fingerprints left all over the place. He looks over in my direction and gives another one of his grunts as if to thank me. Then he leaves. The door closes shut behind him. I nurse my broken arm. I'm crying now. And, believe me: it's not just from the pain.

Aaron Kim '06 is an English concentrator in Eliot House.

All Hands

Dahm Choi

Zzyzx.

The end of the alphabet, and a long flat look at the end of the world. An open expanse of rough-textured off-white, studded with bumps like the stucco ceiling of an '80s California ranch-style house. I imagine giant upside-down real estate people walking around in the sky above us, *We really must strip that stucco—it's so passé. Potential buyers will absolutely adore the fresh, airy look of a two-tone paint job—Albatross White instead of stucco, can't you see it? And what's that insect scurrying along the edge there...* Our truck drives along the barren shore of Soda Dry Lake, on the road to a place called Zzyzx.

Solomon drives idly, with one thick wrist thrown across the top of the steering wheel. "I'm going to turn around soon."

"Guys, this is not the time for

cowardice," I warn.

"You have a long way to push if we get a flat. Who would want to live out here anyway?"

"Here, turn off into the salt flat. All speed records are set on salt flats."

"No, what about the environment. And look at that stuff anyway—a salt flat is a flat tire."

"Let's just get around that next bend." I lock the door, open the window, and clamber out to sit on the window edge, holding fast to the roof as the truck flies down the deserted road. The desert wind is furious in my face, delicious to breathe. When I turn my head and open my mouth, the wind speaks through me, whistling hollow notes with every twist of the truck.

Zzyzx comes into view, or at least the end of the road to the end of the alphabet. A sign stands sentinel



illustrations by Janet Kim

in the harsh Mojave heat: “California State University Desert Facility.”

“Where’s the oasis full of vacationing Swedish girls,” Solomon answers. The sign doesn’t change its response. We walk out, and find a broken pump, devil-brand red, a crutch in the wilderness. Frankfurt lights a cigarette.

“Guys, pump some oil for me,” I call. Frankfurt grabs the crooked handle. Solomon lights a cigarette. I take a photo. Governor Schwarzenegger had promised to pump up our state, but nothing flows out of the broken red fixture in Zzyzx, California. Solomon stands by in a bright polo shirt of alternating horizontal stripes. He looks horrifically large beside the pump. Frankfurt squints, and shifts in his large-tongued construction boots. He begins trudging toward the salt flat.

The broad, open surface is firm to the touch but gives softly under pressure, like an over-baked brownie as you press your fingers into it and squeeze. The sky at Zzyzx is vast and clear.

Frankfurt does a handstand.

“This would be a great place to fly drugs in,” comments Solomon. “You could make a killing unloading it in Vegas, and nobody would know where it came from.”

“I’d like to run across this really fast,” I mention.

Frankfurt has walked away from us. He stretches an arm up toward the sun, pointing at the clouds above, long grooves of jet exhaust serrating the sky, then crouches down to inspect some weathered shards of glass.

Solomon drives. He has the remarkable ability to remain alert at all times, even when emotionally

fatigued. Perhaps he would make a good soldier. We pass electrical towers, and vague desert lines, and nothing. Sol has flush cheeks across an angular jaw, giving him a constant clean-cut appearance. He has a freshly-shaven look even when his face is patched with the grisly hair of a long week camping. Now that I consider it, the guy looks remarkably trustworthy. My mom calls him Daniel. He argues a good point. I trust him, and sometimes chance with pleasure and assurance on the same thoughts as him. Sol is an interesting read, if obscured at times by the lamination of brash arrogance, when the sun strikes him just so. Solomon glances back, and asks Frankfurt if he’s comfortable.

I met the two of them in grade school, when we would make cinnamon toast at Solomon’s large, bustling house and play ballgames in his cul-de-sac. Frankfurt once put my bike twenty-feet up a tree. I have always wondered why I’ve been unable to connect with Frankfurt in the way that I’ve been able to with other childhood friends—differences in personality, perhaps (as he’s always been normal) or maybe it was that time in middle school when he made an elaborate scavenger hunt for me by stealing my entire shelf of carefully-alphabetized-by-author paperbound classics. I found them in a bag on a freeway overpass. That was the week he killed my hamster. Within a month, he had also smeared cooking lard into my binders, soaked my room by firing a garden hose through the window, and bought me ice cream. Soon thereafter, he was taking me bowling. Over the years, Frankfurt and I have had many moments of understanding, but there is still something impenetrable in our relationship, as though we see each other through the glass, but neither wants to take the risk of breaking it. The smaller one’s universe, the

simpler to manage it. Frankfurt has a broad grin, a hairy chest, a tall, wide back across

hunched shoulders, and eyes that twinkle. My mom calls him Tarzan.

Solomon speaks up. “So, are we going to Russia?”

“We just need to hurry and apply for visas,” I reply. “And I think your dad mentioned that he can introduce us to the Prime Minister of Ukraine.”

“Where is the love,” notes Frankfurt.

“Deece, we need to sit down sometime and plan everything. I don’t think I want to go to the Baltic States and Slovakia and all that with you—Frankfurt, we can leave Kiev, swing through Italy, then make it across Southern France to spend time in Spain. I need to see Spain.”

“Guys,” I admit in a measured tone, “I’m excited about this summer, but I’m really anxious about what’s ahead after that.” I am Theodore Isaac Descension, my friends call me Deece, and I am anxious about what’s ahead after that.

“...so I figure I’ll then apply to the law school, since I’ll already be there,” explains Frankfurt.

“What about public service work?”

“Yeah, I’d love to get an M.P.P if I got accepted, but it’ll be difficult.”

“There’s a point—”

“Exactly. Why is this process so frustrating—why shouldn’t we have a wide-open door if we want to be idealistic and help this society, why do we have to fight the wrong people all the time?”

I have no answers. The conversation has been

I am Theodore Isaac Descension, my friends call me Deece, and I am anxious about what’s ahead after that.

going for over twenty billboards’ time now, and we circle the same spirals, encountering again and again the bittersweet insanity of fearing tomorrow but anticipating beyond reason the day after next. I comment that I see us all affecting change at age forty, that I see us embarking on quests, that I see us making possibilities happen, that I see us living the dedicated life. Solomon erupts with his own enthusiasm, that he sees us with families and happiness, that he sees our kids playing together, that he sees us doing incredible work in our professional lives, that he sees us in the arms of opportunity. We thought the same things at age sixteen, as I anxiously sat in my chair and peered down corridors while Sol and another intern did after-hours handstands and lewd dance moves outside our cubicle at City Hall. After the adults go home, Sol is a two-tone paint job. Frankfurt opens the window, and lights a cigarette. We have always been talking about big things, together. But today, we know nothing about the year coming up. More billboards fly by. Solomon and I teach a class once a week at a school in inner-city Philadelphia, but with every passing week, a doubt grows within me as to whether we have done anything special for the kids’ lives.

As we enter the Cajon Pass, the gateway from Southern California to the rest of the continent, a thick fog claims us in a rich grayness, throwing the truck three hundred miles offshore for a brief illusory moment. As the fog abates, we find our tires again swimming the



narrow leftmost lane of the 15 to Vegas. Solomon points across the divider—Southbound traffic has come to a glacial stillness for miles, and people walk about on the foreign surface of the fogbound freeway. Sixty-six cars have piled up, each vehicle rammed in collision with the forward vehicle it had trusted to stay the course. Sixty-six drivers in accidents, each having followed the next too closely.



blackjack table somewhere? We'd lose all our money here in a second."

Frankfurt sits to play, but we chicken out. Solomon and I decide to walk the Strip for a while.

Las Vegas is a place everyone has an opinion on, a place everyone has something to say about. As I walk

We enter the Bellagio late at night, and walk straight to the Poker Room. The space is dusted off into a remote corner, unkempt, crowded, and surprisingly human amidst the neat squadrons of robotic slot machines arrayed across the main floor.

I measure the players. There are only two types in the room: middle-aged, gruff wage-earning bears in heavy-set expressions, and young jackals in cheap t-shirts and headphones, eagerness in their eyes. Everywhere, dead serious jaws, eyes glazed over, and the thick silence of a smoke that isn't in the air. Necks crick confidently. One bear burns his eyes at me, in a leave-if-you-don't-believe expression.

"Sol, I can't do this."

"Deece, let's move. Do you want to just go find a cheap blackjack table somewhere? We'd lose all our money here in a second."

along the Strip with Solomon, I stare in wide-eyed oblivion at a CVS pharmacy with a giant neon Crest toothpaste tube on the side, squirting twenty feet of unswimmable fluorescent blue with blinking white sparkles. Last summer we had lain in a meadow in the Yosemite High Country, and seen the Milky Way poured out across the August sky, a gossamer river of immeasurable depth and balance as it chased the brilliant beacon of a Mars on fire—precisely where a prostitute-red arrow now flashes above the Barbary Coast Hotel and Casino, Come and Get It. Our culture is one of mimicry and consumption, and the Crest tube points the way.

Two blocks separate the Empire State Building, the Eiffel Tower, and the wonders of Ancient Egypt, so Solomon and I turn to worldly matters as we walk the earth. “Look at that—that’s beautiful,” exclaims Solomon as we pass an import car rental place. “Why don’t critics accept automobiles as works of art? Think of the design that goes into it, the process, the cultural significance...”

“Well,” I mumble, “I suppose it has to do with mass production. Or function.”

“But what about buildings? What the hell are buildings anyway? Are you telling me that architects are somehow different from the design teams that work on each model? You can’t get lost in functionality.”

“This brings us back to our earlier thoughts on materialism.”

“Deece, we’re all materialists, you know that, we love it, who cares, why shouldn’t I enjoy something beautiful if its metaphysical corollary is vanity or

commercialism or dogshit. We have to understand our lives exclusive of greater spiritual forces or anything asinine like that.”

“Can I push you on your newfound existentialism,” I question. Solomon studies History and Literature at Béatrice, and theory consumes him. Theory consumes *us*. Separated from the plain-faced reality of the un-ironic immediate in every situation, we have locked ourselves away from the headline simplicities of our childhood thoughts. We have refused our bread and consumed all our butter.

We order double-shots of Black Label, and another round, and try to settle our bodies in high, nervous seats, anxiously perched on the edge of adulthood.

“The more I study it, the more I realize that existentialism’s the only way to think,” states Solomon.

“Sol, I can’t bring myself to neglect history, and continuity, and the beautiful little binds-”

“I’m not ignoring history! You keep saying that!” retorts Sol. As we step onto the people-mover that carries pedestrians from the Strip to the front door of the Bellagio, I mute my friend’s vague rant on his junior paper, and listen for the desert wind in the frightening hush of neon lights and explosive fountain shows. A figure leans against the rail on the opposite people-mover, a petite woman with an idiosyncratic nose and sunken features set against an aggravated black shawl.

She is coming out of the casino. Destitute, or heart-broken, or victorious. The woman looks at Sol, then me, then Sol, then me, then Sol. I adjust, to distance myself from Sol as the people-mover brings us to the end of its track.

We sit at a ten-dollar blackjack table. We order double-shots of Black Label, and another round, and try to settle our bodies in high, nervous seats, anxiously perched on the edge of adulthood. Pretending responsibility, we spread two twenty-dollar bills each

Oblivious to the smallness of our lives in the vastness of this casino *of this city of this country of this world of this moment* Frankfurt, Solomon and I huddle and dance, lost in the early-morning euphoria of our own precious immature revelry.

on the table. I glance across at Solomon, unsure. He looks back, fragile as me but somehow more resolute. Sol is always hungry for entertainment. Frankfurt soon joins us, throwing in his own forty. Casinos have no clocks. The night pushes.

“Where are you boys from?” asks Donna the dealer. “You’re obviously not from around here, by the looks of all the questions you ask!”

Donna the dealer has recently-manicured hands, with nails that are the deep red color of the linen banners hanging in churches the week before Easter. They move swiftly across the felt-green surface of the table in deft, eloquent motions. But there is something awkward about her routine as well—her left wrist is

stiff, unbending, as though rigid with the death of her blood-red nails. When Donna the dealer recommends hit, we hit; when Donna the dealer recommends stay, we stay.

Chips begin to accumulate.

Lady Luck, Sol had whispered as we entered Vegas, and the chips keep piling. I wonder whether this would be enjoyable without these two beside me, as I look across our table to search for the heavy-lidded eyes of the lonely, diminutive man on the end, soon to be tortoise-bald, soon to be out of chips. With a weary laugh, he tells us he has lost eighty-five hundred dollars in three days. I instinctively touch my wallet, then glance at the sign to the left of Donna the dealer that reads, “\$10 Blackjack.”

Our luck won’t go away, even as we continually ask Donna the dealer what we should do in situations.

Frankfurt sits hunched, as always. Solomon has sweaty palms, I know it. Frankfurt tips the cocktail waitress again. Tortoise-bald keeps rubbing the table nervously, stroking back and forth. Solomon holds a scattered group of chips. Frankfurt plays with his stack, three, then four, now seven hundred-dollar chips high. Another hand in our favor, and all the others at the table lose. The pit boss walks over with a clipboard, and scribbles something. I frantically ask Donna the dealer an ignorant question. The pit boss peers at me from his ill-fitting gray suit and three-week-old crew cut. I swallow some whisky, and look back at him with wide, blank eyes. He walks to the next table.

“Two more hands, boys?” asks Frankfurt, after

assessing everyone's situation. We nod.

We play them out, then get up and stumble over to "The Cage," where they keep the cash. We turn in our chips, and the costumed clerk lays out the hundred-dollar bills—nineteen of them. "Ah!" sputters Solomon. Oblivious to the smallness of our lives in the vastness of this casino *of this city of this country of this world of this moment* Frankfurt, Solomon and I huddle and dance, lost in the early-morning euphoria of our own precious immature revelry.

"Come on, let's play something else while we're hot," suggests Frankfurt.

"What about craps," shouts Solomon, "Craps!" He shakes his thick wrists in glee. None of us have ever played.

We walk over to the craps area, and the other gamblers are missing. Instead, eight attendants of different heights stand around one table, each in farcical pie-hat and funny cummerbund. *Gremlins*. Solomon lifts his arms high and waves at them. "Hoo! Show me the way!"

"Boys, this is our chance," he whispers. "This pays for this trip, for Europe, for a trip to Boston and New York, for everything—come on. We throw it in and win big, now." Frankfurt quietly tucks his winnings into his pocket, and refuses. He looks away.

"Deece, come on, I know I have it, *Lady Luck*, don't forget—this is our chance!" As I look blankly around the room to avoid Sol's eyes, the Disney animation of Pinocchio enters my mind with color and clarity. The more I look over at the gremlins standing around the craps table, the more vividly I picture the lurid carnival attendants on Pleasure Island *who bellow with laughter as my friend turns into a hee-haw donkey*.

"Deece!" Sol barks in my face. "Deece!" What, yes, I trust you, yes of course, here, here, whatever, this is a terrible idea, I hope you know what you're doing, yes, of course...

Solomon lifts the dice high in the air, blows on them with all the histrionics he can muster while early-morning drunk, and throws them down the length of the table, like two tumbleweeds set loose in a vast dustbowl surrounded on all sides by leering hoodoo gremlins, standing watch.

I begin to walk to the other end of the table to see what we've rolled, but am suddenly knocked into the side of the table by a surging gremlin. All the attendants begin running. I peer up in hazy confusion, and look back to figure out the commotion. Sol has stolen two of the gremlins' hats, and with one in each hand, is running the length of the casino floor, neatly avoiding a dozen gremlins' tackles.

I roll over onto the abandoned craps table, throw some chips over my body, and try to get some sleep as I await Sol's return.

Dahm Choi '05 is a History concentrator in Leverett House.

The Korean-American Way

by Anna Joo

The cause for identity is often some
misinterpreted form of loose ends

If only a pretty little bow
and the world could be a neighborhood
exposed by ambiguously inadequate
patriots like me.



Shih-Han Huang
Untitled

Shih-Han Huang '05 is an Economics concentrator in Leverett House.

Regarding the Stranger who was a Reporter

by Anna Joo

Your name does not matter. You are to
Me, to the most in number
Simply a byline
Accompanying breakfast.

But neither does my name impress upon you.
It will color, substantially,
The print on grey below your claim to
Fame
But shall never appear.

And yet I would be all over it,
The white that failed to consume all of the
Black, the victim who became the grey
Backdrop. A's, N's, O's, Y's,
And the rest will flit and fit
Like giddy lovers,
Later crimson with shame.

To spell: four months of sophomore year,
Boiled scarlet and tender. And now a new
Molestation,
The wear and tear of your drum-rolling
Ballpoint blue against my pink hide.

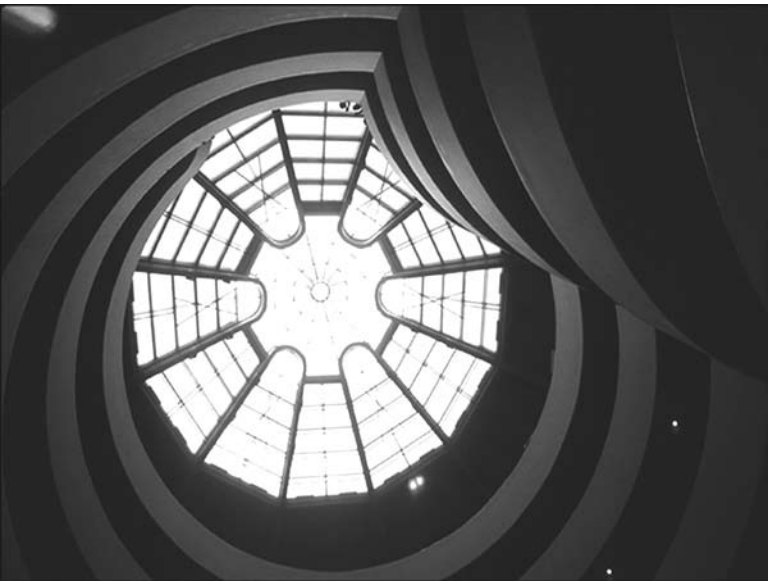
Alas, objective empathizer,
The blue blood will soak through
The fine truth and fill every beat
Of your story with half-lies
That rip.

The strokes of your vision, as direction
Less and manufactured as your
Beloved Papermate. You know everything
But how to patch the paper. If
Only you were a creator of the ultimate
Kind: the fantasizer,
The noble-hating author.

Then your fantasy could answer,
Deliberately grey.
And I could be to most
A faceless Hester
In a tale. Bound,
forever,
by spirals and decent exposure.

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