

Performative Ethnicities: Culture and Class in 1930s Colonial Korea

Jin-kyung Lee

Introduction

Recent scholarship on the historical origins of modern Korean nationalism has successfully illustrated its ethnicist nature. The gradual shifting of the locus of Korea from the state to the ethnic people as the source of political legitimacy took place through the decades of 1900s and 1910s.¹ The construction of ethnic nationalism in modern Korea, i.e., coinciding of ethnicity and nationalism, can be attributed to multiple factors: ethnically-based Japanese colonization effected production of “Chosenjin,” an ethnically-defined collective, “Koreans”; the Social Darwinist notion of ethnic group as a quasi-biological community of

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1. Andre Schmid, *Korea Between Empires, 1895-1919* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 140-142. See also Hyung-Il Pai, *Constructing “Korean” Origins: A Critical Review of Archaeology, Historiography, and Racial Myth in Korean State-Formation Theories* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2000), 1-21.
 2. Henry Em, “Minjok as a Modern and Democratic Construct: Sin Ch’aeho’s Historiography,” in *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, ed. Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 1999), 353. Schmid also notes that it was after 1905, the year when Korea was made a “protectorate” of Japan, that “minjok” became widely deployed, 173-174.

Jin-kyung Lee teaches Korean literature as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Literature at the University of California, San Diego.

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shared ancestry, a dominant contemporary discourse, was a significant force in creating and reinforcing Korean ethnicity³; and nationalists also drew from the Western discourses of “cultural racism,”⁴ which relied on the notions of spiritual essence and cultural objects commonly held and inherited as constituting the basis of an ethnic collective. By the end of 1910s, we can safely say, the concept of Koreans as an ethnic entity as the timeless and naturalized subject of the Korean nation and of Korean history was securely established.

This paper traces the changes that Korean ethnic nationalism further underwent in the late 1920s and through the 1930s when the nationalists began to turn their attention towards the peasantry in an unprecedented manner under the influence of the newly imported socialist and fascist populism.⁵ With the introduction of Marxist thought into the Korean peninsula in the mid 1920s, the existing ethnic nationalism was fractured and transformed into opposing and yet intersecting ideological camps. While for some, namely Marxists/radicals, the concept of class re-worked the notion of Korean ethnos as deeply divided by economic disparity, others defined themselves by their opposition to Marxism, stressing ethnic homogeneity over economic stratification. Ethnicism of the latter group, known as the “Minjokjuŭi” camp in Korean and Cultural Nationalists in English, was further fortified by fascistic ideas that trickled into the peninsula in the early 1930s. I argue in this paper that for the nationalist elites as a whole, the introduction of the notion of class had the contradictory effect of simultaneously intensifying and yet challenging the idea of Korean ethnicity.

Although the concept of Koreans as an ethnic group had come to replace the traditional notion of a political collective, i.e., the state, based upon monarchical sovereignty and aristocratic privilege, by the 1910s, Korean ethnicity had remained a political category primarily defined in relation to other ethnic/racial groups, such as the Japanese and the Westerners. The category of ethnicity defined in such a way was unable to bring any fundamental political changes in re-thinking the internal structure of the ethnic collective until the import of

3. Schmid, *Korea Between Empires*, 175, 182-183, 198.

4. Tzvetan Todorov, “Race and Racism,” in *Theories of Race and Racism*, ed. Les Back and John Solomos (London: Routledge, 2000), 64-70. For an analysis of the historical evolution of the relations between race and culture in the modern European context, see Robert Young’s *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995), 1-28.

5. Clark Sorenson, “National Identity and the Category ‘Peasant’ in Colonial Korea,” in *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, ed. Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson (Cambridge: the Harvard University Asia Center, 1999), 288-310.

Marxism. For those who belonged to the Cultural Nationalist camp, the idea of class division, within the boundary of the already accepted notion of an ethnic collective, had the effect of reinforcing the notion of ethnic homogeneity. We may be able to maintain that the very notion of ethnic homogeneity co-emerged with the notion of class and economic (and political) in-equality: the notion of (class) difference brought material significance to the idea of (ethnic) sameness. The “ideological split” of the nationalist elites into Marxists and bourgeois/Cultural Nationalists, conventionally noted in the historiography of colonial Korea as taking place in the mid 1920s, must be re-conceptualized as a solidification of the existing ethnicist thinking, as a further ethnonationalization of Korea. On the other hand, once Marxism in Korea came to take a serious internationalist turn under the Soviet directives beginning in the late 1920s and through the first half of 1930s⁶, this new trend in effect came to undermine the ethnicist conception of Korea, implicitly and explicitly, through its reliance on the Marxist notion of universal class and trans-national and trans-ethnic/racial alliance. At the same time, when some of the Cultural Nationalist thinkers I discuss in this paper, including Yi Kwang-su and Sim Hun I, came under the influence of the fascism that was spreading globally in the early 30s, the Cultural Nationalist conception of Korea as an ethnic entity could only be emboldened, accompanied by their turn to traditionalism and agrarianism. Thus, I argue, the 1930s was a contradictory decade where the lines of ethnic boundaries were being further hardened while at the same time weakened in the opposing discourses of the divided elites.

In the sphere of material changes in the colony, the early 1930s saw a certain diminishing of the ethnicized division between the colonizers and the colonized population, as the colonial state moved toward policies of co-optive incorporation of Koreans, especially the elite class. Japan’s mobilization for total war in the late 1930s, of course, resulted in a multi-faceted assimilationist policy, the beginning of the “imperialization” (*kominka*) of Koreans under the banner of “Naisen ittai” (Japan and Korea as One Body).⁷ The subsequent accumulation of wealth for the small minority of Koreans in the context of colonial industrialization and their ongoing urbanization and Westernization

6. Kim Jun, “1920-30 nyōndae nodong undongesōūi minjok munjewa kyegūp munje,” (The Issue of Minjok and Class in the Labor Movement of the 1920s and 1930s), in *Iljehaūi sahoe undonggwa nongch'on sahoe* (The Social Movement and the Rural Society under the Japanese Colonial Rule), ed. Hanguk sahoesa yōnguhoe (The Association for Korean Social History) (Seoul: Munhakgwa chisōngsa, 1990), 63-64.

7. Kang Man-gil, *Hanguk hyōndaesa* (A Modern Korean History), revised edition (Seoul: Ch’angjakgwa pip’yōngsa, 1994), 34.

made the boundaries of ethnic identities more fluid for the colonized elite class throughout the 1930s. The case of the colonized proletariat was even more contradictory. The incorporation of the Korean elite class into the larger Japanese empire further polarized class division, producing the effect of racializing the colonized underclass on the one hand, while on the other, the policy of assimilation and imperialization simultaneously made it possible to recruit another class of imperial subjects from the colonized proletariat. Then, we must remind ourselves of the fact that by the end of the 1930s, both elite and proletarian Koreans, as Japanese/Japanized subjects, were inserted into a multi-ethnic imperial structure, characterized both by an exclusionary hierarchy (colony-metropole) and a guarantee of a certain degree of inclusion for the colonized-ethnicized population⁸.

In post-Liberation South Korea, the successive authoritarian regimes and their fascistic state nationalisms that exploited the anti-colonial dimension of ethnic nationalism further hardened the ethnic boundary. Through the 70s and 80s, the decades of active labor and democratization movements, leftists who opposed the US neo-colonial hegemony and the dictatorial regimes contributed to what may be called the ethnonationalization of Marxism. Under such circumstances, South Korean historians of the colonial period, until the mid 1990s, had interpreted the Korean ethnos under colonial rule as a supra-political category⁹: the definition of the “political” has been restricted to the “political” as anti-colonial (equated with anti-Japanese for both bourgeois and leftist historians) and the “political” as class-determined (according to Marxism). This post-colonial ethnonationalization of Marxism resulted in overlooking the trans-ethnic/trans-national dimension of Marxist thought embraced by colonial intellectuals, especially from the internationalist period between the late 1920s and the mid 1930s. This paper points to the ways in which the Marxist concept of class, on the one hand, played the role of further essentializing ethnicity by bringing the Cultural Nationalist camp into being. Simultaneously, it explores

8. For a discussion of the dynamic relation between interiorization and exteriorization of the colonized native population, see Etienne Balibar's “Racism and Nationalism,” in *Race, Nation Class: Ambiguous Identities*, ed. Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein (London: Verso 1991), 42-43.

9. Gi-Wook Shin, “Nation, History and Politics: South Korea,” in *Nationalism and the Construction of Korean Identity*, ed. Hyung Il Pai and Timothy Tangherlini (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 148-165. According to Shin, South Korean left-wing historiography does not question the linguistic, cultural and ethnic/ethnoracial homogeneity of the Korean nation, while challenging and seeking to transform the division of the nation based on class differences. Thus, left-wing nationalists preserved the equation between ethnicity/ethnorace and nation.

the ways in which Marxist ideology, which based its conceptualization of class upon the trans-ethnic/national structure of global capitalism, played an interruptive role by linking the heterogeneity of classes to ethnicity. This paper seeks to re-define Korean ethnicity as a political category—understood as fundamentally ambiguous and subversive relations of power.¹⁰

If ethnicity is essentially “fictive,”¹¹ its fictiveness is also real insofar as ethnicity is a discursive and material practice that is performative. My definition of ethnicity as performative borrows from theorizations of performativity of gender and sexuality, articulated most recently and prominently by Judith Butler. I will argue that Korean ethnicity is a set of cultural norms, pertaining to such performative sites as language, clothing, customs, and mental and behavioral dispositions, which had come to be closely associated with the quasi-biological notions of race and ethnicity since the 1900s in Korea. By the mid 1910s, these racialized/ethnicized cultural norms had already formed the foundations of modern ethnic nationalism in Korea: it is these performative practices that came to constitute “Koreanness.” Butler calls this process of acquisition of gender and sexual identities one of sedimentation or materialization, taking place through the assumption and citation of the power of the dominant social authority from which identities derive themselves.¹² The enormous pressure of racist/ethnicist colonialism and the equally fierce emergence of ethnically based anti-colonial nationalist resistance in colonial Korea lent much force to further naturalizing these performative practices of Koreanness.

This paper will highlight what are relatively marginal moments, moments of crossing of ethnic boundaries in colonial Korean fiction from the late 20s and 30s. These moments of ethnic transgression, i.e., when other ethnicities, Japanese, Chinese, Western/white, African, etc., are cited by “ethnic Koreans,” render a sedimentation of Koreanness visible, revealing the very citationality of Korean ethnicity. These moments of “cross-ethnicking”¹³ demonstrate to us the ways in which the discursive and material practices of Korean ethnicity, predominantly understood as a quasi-biological and racialized cultural category in the colonial

10. See Joan Scott for a definition of politics as “any contest for power within which identities such as class are created” in *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 57.

11. Etienne Balibar, “Racism and Nationalism,” 49.

12. Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter* (London: Routledge, 1993), 12-15.

13. Jennifer Robertson, *Takarazuka: Sexual Politics and Popular Culture in Modern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 89-138.

period as well as in the post-colonial interpretation of the colonial period, co-exist in constant tension with ethnic Koreans stepping beyond the very same boundary. However, on a cautionary note, my reading of these moments of ethnic crossing most frequently addressed in this paper, i.e., the Japanization, Europeanization, Russification, etc., of Koreans in various performative sites, clothing and language, is not meant to suggest that one is able to switch one's ethnicity at will and with ease. On the contrary, these moments of ethnic crossing are often appropriated within the literary and critical texts in order to re-affirm and reinforce the perimeters within which "ethnic Koreans" must remain. Rather, these moments of transgression should be grasped as revealing the inherently historical and constructivist nature of Korean ethnicity and further indicating a certain degree of flexibility of ethnic identification in specific and delimited relation to other categories such as class, gender, nation and empire. These ethnic crossings must be read as mutually determining relations of these categories and, ultimately, as the impossible desire of the ethnics of different classes to transcend the reality of the fixity of their positions.

This paper consists of two parts, comparing the articulations of ethnicity and class by the Cultural Nationalist camp with those by Marxists. From the Cultural Nationalist camp, I focus on two representative agrarian novels, Yi Kwang-su's *Soil* and Sim Hun's *Evergreen*. I will draw attention to the contrast between the novels' portrait of two groups of elites, the Westernized-Japanized elites on the one hand and the Westernized-universalized-Koreanized elites on the other. My reading will also point to their conflicting depictions of the peasantry as the primitive racial other, as the essentialized autochthonous ethnics and as the reformable universal modern subjects. The second half of the paper treats a wide variety of texts from the Marxist and leftist-leaning camp, including proletarian agrarian literature and others that deal with migration and industrialization. First, I focus on Marxism's impact as a universalizing/whitening agent of both Korean history and Marxist intellectuals. Second, my reading contrasts the ethnic crossings of the elite class (the landlord and industrial capitalists) with those of proletariats in the leftist works. If Cultural Nationalist works limit performativity of ethnicity to the elites and intellectuals, the leftists offer us a much more radical picture of the proletarian class's motivation and potential for occupying positions of fluid and flexible ethnic identity.

Ethno-Cultural Unity and Ethnicized Class Division in Cultural Nationalist Agrarian Novels: *Soil* and *Evergreen*

The category of “peasant” itself as a group of people with social, economic and political significance came into existence in the mid 1920s along with the introduction of Marxism into the peninsula.¹⁴ The term “peasant literature” (*nongmin munhak*) was imported from Japanese proletarian literature, which had in turn originated through the process of Soviet writers’ discussions, resolutions and the propagation of such materials abroad.¹⁵ Yi Kwang-su’s *Soil* (1933) and Sim Hun’s *Evergreen* (1935), the two most famous examples of “peasant novels” (*nongmin sosŏl*), were the Cultural Nationalist response to “proletarian agrarian fiction.”¹⁶ As Korean Marxism took a further radical turn in the late 20s and continued this trend in the first half of the 30s, some of the bourgeois nationalists, including Yi Kwang-su and Sim Hun, came under the influence of European fascist thought.¹⁷ Bearing the unmistakable traces of fascism—their exaltation of the blood, *soil* and the folk, as well as their open expression of racism (which does not appear prior to this date), both *Soil* and *Evergreen* illustrate the ways in which the fascistic tendency played a role in intensifying the essentialization of ethnic nationalism and in re-conceptualizing the relation between class and ethnicity in the 1930s. The existing historiography generally understands the Cultural Nationalist camp as emphasizing the unity of the ethnic nation and its collective political predicament of colonization over class division. While this type of assertion is the ostensible message of literary works like *Soil* and *Evergreen*, the avowal of ethno-cultural unity and homogeneity is simultaneously contradicted in *Soil* and *Evergreen*, as both texts conceptualize the contemporary “class” differences to

14. Clark Sorenson, “National Identity and the Category ‘Peasant’” 293-294.

15. Kim Jun, *Hanguk nongmin sosŏl yŏngu* (A Study on Korean Peasant Novels), 10.

16. The conservative version of peasant literature was accompanied by the larger “Enlightenment” (*Kyemong*) movement led by intellectuals. They drew on the 19th Century Russian social movement, “To the People,” often referred to as “Punarodü,” which had been theorized and headed by famous Russian intellectuals such as Tolstoy among others. Kim Jun, *ibid.*, 79-105. Between 1929 and 1935 two nationalist newspapers, *Chosŏn* and *Tong’a*, sponsored a series called the “peasant enlightenment movement” (*nongch’ŏn kyemong undong*) with such goals as increasing literacy, improving health and hygiene, abolition of superstition, and encouraging savings. See O Yang-ho, *Nongmin sosŏlron* (A Study on the Peasant Novel) (Seoul: Hyŏngsŏl ch’ulp’ansa, 1984), 15-17.

17. See Pak Ch’an-seung, “Yi Kwang-su and The Endorsement of State Power,” in this volume.

be more or less continuous with the traditional status system. Essentialization of ethnicity in Cultural Nationalist agrarian works takes place as a hierarchized essentialization of Korean tradition: high and low, aristocratic and folk. Simultaneously, the novels conceive classes of colonial Korea to be ethnoracialized in accordance with the prevailing global hierarchy of races and civilizations: the elites as the universal/whiten-ed subjects and the peasantry as the barbarous/darken-ed racial other.

Contradictory Essentializations and Relative Reformability of the Peasantry

Strikingly, *Evergreen* opens with what approximates a minstrel show, featuring “primitives” from the South Seas, put on by the student participants of the “village enlightenment movement” in a gathering upon their return to Seoul. The parallel between Korean peasants of “primitive tribal villages” (*wŏnsi purak*) and the “natives” (*t’oin*, “mud people,” literally) from the South Seas is implicitly established for the reader.¹⁸ *Soil*, narrated from the perspective of the urban elites, depicts the rural villagers as “barefoot,” “half-naked,” “foreign barbarians”; our protagonist, Hŏ Sung, notes that it is as if he were amidst a different “race” (*injong*) of people.¹⁹ The stratification of the Korean ethnic collective is performed here according to the normative racial/civilizational hierarchy, positioning the Korean peasants as the “uncivilized (*yaman*) races” of Africa and the South Seas, while the elites’ racial darkening of the peasantry simultaneously reveals their identificatory desire for whiteness and the Western/universal civilization, as we will see below. This racializing categorization of the peasantry as the primitive other places them in a time frame eternally alienated from Enlightenment, separated from two other temporal structures in which they are simultaneously located, those of the mythological, enduring ethnos and of the universal, ethnonational modernization.

18. Sim Hun, *Evergreen* (Sangnoksu), in *Chŏngt’ong hanguk munhak taegye*, vol. 7 (Seoul: Omungak, 1994), 43, 59, 159. Jennifer Robertson discusses a kind of entertainment, “soldier show,” that Japanese soldiers stationed in Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands in the 1940s staged, in which cross-ethnicking and cross-dressed soldiers would parody the rituals of those they were occupying, *Takarazuka: Sexual Politics and Popular Culture in Modern Japan*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 101-102.

19. Yi Kwang-su, *Soil* (Hŭk), in *Chŏngt’ong hanguk munhak taegye*, vol. 1 (Seoul: Mungak, 1994), 108, 151.

Contradicting the kind of racializing othering of the peasantry we saw above, these texts also represent them as autochthonous ethnic beings. The sway of fascism is most clearly felt in further essentializing the peasantry as the authentic embodiment of Korean ethnicity.²⁰ For *Soil* and *Evergreen*, this does not mean that Korean elites are not essentialized or conceptualized as non-autochthonous. The idea of essentializing autochthony is applied in hierarchical terms to both classes: two classes constitute a stratified ethnic unity in the conservative nationalist perspective. Nonetheless, for their proximity to nature, rural life, folk customs, and their seclusion from adulterating foreign influences, these works locate the peasantry at the heart of the ethnic collective. The “smell of their sweat” mingles intimately with “the warmth of the sun, the softness of soil, the fragrance of ripening rice stalks.”²¹ As the healthy, bared shins of peasant girls in the rice fields are admired, the city girls in silk stockings and high heels are disparaged. The narrative in *Soil* and *Evergreen* is structured as a contrast between the purity of the autochthonous folk in the country and the decadence of the Westernized elites in the city and their consequent alienation from the Korean people, culture, and tradition, i.e., Korean ethnicity. The plot of *Evergreen* sacrifices the female protagonist, Yǒng-sin, a Westernized Christian, who learns the meaning of true Koreanness among the peasants. Her death in turn becomes the literal foundation for the regeneration of the ancient community: the future generations of villagers will spring forth from Yǒng-sin’s buried “flesh, bones and blood” as *evergreens*.²² The autochthony of the folk creates the bodies’ immutable co-extensiveness with the time and space of the ever-renewing nature and territory. The folk emblemize the mythological time and space of the enduring ethnic body.²³

Upon close inspection, the conservative camp’s conception of the peasantry as essential ethnics also posits them as objectifiable as nature, conquerable as vacuous territory, and helpless as children. Such a construction of the peasantry allays the anxiety of the bourgeois colonial intellectuals through a means of what may be called representational disciplining of the peasantry who were now being assigned a different role by Marxists, that of revolutionary, under another

20. See especially the lyrics of “Aehyangga” (Song of Love for One’s Native Village) that the young villagers sing in *Evergreen*, 51-53, 57. See also Tong-hyŏk’s “Nazi-style salute,” 22.

21. Yi Kwang-su, *Soil*, 80, 84.

22. Sim Hun, *Evergreen*, 51. In *Soil*, the “bones, flesh and blood” of the generations of the villagers who lived, died, and were buried in the *soil* constitute the community of the village, “*Salyŏul*,” which indeed represents Korea itself. Yi Kwang-su, *Soil*, 16.

23. Clark Sorenson, “National Identity and the Category ‘Peasant,’” 300.

name, rural proletariat. The notion of peasantry as authentic yet docile ethnics is therefore requisite for the conservative elites to be able to posit them safely as relatively reformable subjects, and thus to bring them back into the temporal boundaries of a modern nation and universal history. *Soil* and *Evergreen* locate the centrality of the peasantry to modern nation building within their numerical majority.²⁴ When the body of the ethnos is imagined as a tree, the peasantry, “80% of the entire population,” make up its “roots and the trunk,” while others including the intelligentsia are only its “leaves.”²⁵ In duly noting the intensifying impoverishment under colonial rule, as capitalism destroys the peasantry’s traditional subsistence living, both *Soil* and *Evergreen* exhort that all areas of village life, such as health and hygiene, agricultural technique, economic organization of the village, and illiteracy, must undergo modernizing reforms. Their “wretched animal-likeness,” ignorance, passivity, and above all their abiding faith in their leaders to pull them out of their misery²⁶ are interpreted as indications of peasants’ disciplinability and reformability. The Cultural Nationalist camp conceived their reforms, of course, as an ethnonationalist project: reforms were intended as part of the process of modern nation building and mobilization of the peasantry. However, the anti-colonial ethnonationalization of the peasantry promoted by the Cultural Nationalists in the late 1920s and the first half of the 30s can be said to have prepared them for the policy of intensive imperialization to follow starting around 1937, as the nationalist efforts necessarily dovetailed those of the colonial state’s to incorporate and marshal the colonized population. Both the conservative nationalist elites and the colonial state shared their interest in the modernizing reform of the peasantry, the “absolute majority”²⁷ of Korea.

The slogan of the agrarian movement of the 30s, “To the People,” repeated in *Soil* and *Evergreen*, did not aim at narrowing the gap between elites and peasantry. For the Cultural Nationalist camp, to participate in the agrarian

24. The authority upon which the discursive integration of the peasantry becomes the essentialist basis of the modern ethnic nation derives from multiple sources. One of them is from the traditional Confucian notion of “agrarianism” (*nongbonjuŭi*) cited in *Soil*, 42. Another is the Western notion of the sacredness of labor that gradually came to replace the traditional view of physical labor as mean and debased since the late 1910s. Furthermore, the Western fascist valorization of the countryside and agriculture that began to trickle into Korea via Japan also constituted part of the diverse groundwork for locating the essence of Korean ethnicity in the peasantry.

25. Yi Kwang-su, *Soil*, 45.

26. Yi Kwang-su, *Soil*, 16, 85.

27. Sim Hun, *Evergreen*, 23.

nationalist project was to affirm the intellectual and moral superiority of the elites by fulfilling their obligation to the people. In *Soil*, for them to “live, eat, sleep like the peasants do”²⁸ is to recognize the performativity of their elite identity, the intrinsic flexibility of their positionality. Simultaneously, this move fixes peasantry in three conflicting (a-)racial positions: as the primitive racial other, as the essential autochthonous ethnics, and as the relatively reformable universal subjects. In occupying these three positions, the colonized Korean peasantry is placed in a triple temporal structure: the time of primitivity, the time of mythological ethnicity, and the time of universalist national modernization.²⁹ The ahistoricity of their positions as foreign primitives and indigenous ethnics ensures their re-entry into the historicity of universal modernizing (ethnic) nations as disciplinable subjects. If their position as eternally foreign primitives justifies maintaining the polarized class structure, their yet another identity as mythical autochthonous ethnics becomes a way of dissimulating ethnic unity, compensating for the rapid and radical social fragmentation and class polarization, the process in which they take part as reformable colonial-modern subjects.³⁰

Performativity and Ethnic Hybridity of the Elites

In *Soil* there are two distinct types of ethnic crossing by the elites. The first type is associated with the urban elites with Western-style education. Their Japanization and Westernization are presented to us as superficial and inessential—“Japanese-plated, Western-plated”³¹—and as an affectation or a fashion as opposed to their true core Korean identity. Their “cross-ethnicking”³² is portrayed as anti-nationalist and, therefore, it is the object of the novel’s moral censure and reform. The second type of ethnic crossing in *Soil* involves a group of nationalist elites who are simultaneously Westernized and Korean-ized. Here, the elite characters’ Westernization is represented as that of universalization: their “cross-ethnicking” is made invisible by equation between the West and universality. Simultaneously, their Western-universality must be

28. Yi Kwang-su, *Soil*, 35.

29. See H. D. Harootunian, “Figuring the Folk,” 146. See also Sorenson, “National Identity and the Category ‘Peasant,’” 300.

30. H. D. Harootunian, “Figuring the Folk,” 145.

31. Yi Kwang-su, *Soil*, 37.

32. Jennifer Robertson, *Takarazuka*, 89-138.

accompanied by their assumption of an ethnic particularity, made conscious and visible by their selective recuperation of tradition, i.e., Koreanization.

Soil and *Evergreen* continually portray a group of urban, Western-educated elites—both male and female characters—as “foreign” (*oeguk saram*).³³ These young men and women, “modern girls” and “modern boys,” are associated with the fashionable urban lifestyle of contemporary colonial Korea, summed up as “eroguronönsens” (erotic-grotesque-nonsense) by the narrator of *Soil*.³⁴ Their main occupation in life revolves around the pursuit of romance and sexual pleasure, enjoyment of Western-style living, and interest in money and consumption. Somewhat contrary to the name of the genre to which it belongs, the most urgent objective of the agrarian enlightenment novel, *Soil*, is not education and reform of peasantry; rather, the novel aims at reforming the decadent elites who have been estranged from their ethnicity and their people, i.e., at re-Koreanizing them. We have three urban elites’ transformation in the course of the novel, Chöng-sön, the protagonist Hō Sung’s “modern girl” wife, Sön-hŭi, a kisaeng, and Kap-jin, a “modern boy.” The conversion of these urban elites that concludes the novel is symbolized in the last scene where they have donned the humble Korean peasant costumes, working in the fields and in the village. The restoration of their Koreanness does not erase their identity as Western-ized/universal elites but rather it makes it possible for them to discover the intrinsic performativity of their elite identity in a correct manner: they are both Western(-ized)/universal and essentially Korean(-ized) leaders. *Soil*, furthermore, presents their transformation into universal-ethnic-nationalist elites as ultimately resting upon the superiority of their hereditary status. A village peasant woman praises Chöng-sön, who is now assimilated into the village life, familiarly addressed by many as a “yöpp’yöñne,” a village wife: “. . . she is indeed an aristocratic (yangban) woman after all . . . ”³⁵

In both *Soil* and *Evergreen*, the elites’ contact with Western thought, in its variety of guises such as liberalism, Marxism and Christianity, does not simply bring about changes in the sphere of their ideas, but rather it appears to produce the material effect of “whitening” them, just as the Westernized lifestyle of the “modern girl” or “modern boy” seems to transform their race. The young male and female protagonists of *Evergreen* query each other about their ideological

33. Yi Kwang-su, *Soil*, 149.

34. Yi Kwang-su, *Soil*, 159. See Miriam Silverberg for a description of “eroguronönsens” in “The Café Waitress Serving Modern Japan,” in *Mirror of Modernity: Invented Traditions of Modern Japan*, ed. Stephen Vlastos (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 213.

35. Yi Kwang-su, *Soil*, 383.

and religious affiliation, whether the other is “*kūrisūch’an*” (Christian) and “*marūkūsūjuūija*” (Marxist), which are “fashionable these days.” The use of the English terms, designating these groups of Koreans, suggests the hybridizing slippage between the discursive and cultural contact and the somatic and racial transformations.³⁶ *Evergreen* sets out on a twofold task: to prove that Tonghyōk, the male protagonist, is a believer in Carlyle’s ideas, rather than in Marxism, and to convert the female protagonist, Yōng-sin, a Westernized Christian, into a Korean-ized Christian. Yōng-sin models her resolve to dedicate her life to the agrarian movement and the peasants after Miss Billings, a white woman missionary, who has devoted her life to “teach(ing) the ignorant masses” of an “uncivilized foreign country.”³⁷ The performative positionalities of hierarchical races and classes are played out in the following manner: the white woman missionary is to the unenlightened Korean race as a whole as Yōng-sin, an educated, Christianized/Westernized Korean elite is to the native Korean peasants. For Yōng-sin, a surrogate Western missionary, Korea becomes a foreign frontier, “virgin soil” (*ch’ōyōji*).³⁸ The agrarian movement in *Evergreen* is clearly offered as resistance to Japanese colonialism, but in its aligning itself with Christian and Western modernization and enlightenment, it also assumes a colonizing role vis-à-vis the Korean peasantry. Yōng-sin’s dual position as a universal and particular subject is also extended to the multiple roles she performs in the village—a nurse, doctor, principal, missionary, janitor³⁹—whereas peasants are limited to their capacity as workers and to their role as recipients of Yōng-sin’s charitable, moral acts. Her sacrificial death at the end of the novel is mourned by villagers as if she had been their “parent.”⁴⁰

While Christianization is unmistakably a process of becoming white, the novel also distinguishes between those who have lost their Koreanness in their Christianization and others who combine their cultural and racial particularity with their Christianity/whiteness/universality. A brief portrait of a Korean minister whose pronunciation of Korean language imitates that of white, foreign missionaries critiques those in the former category, while Yōng-sin’s position as a universal/white/Christian subject, now joined to the particularity of her

36. See David Palumbo-Liu’s *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999) for a conceptualization of the relation between somatic/racial and discursive/cultural changes, 83.

37. Sim Hun, *Evergreen*, 87.

38. *Ibid.*, 101.

39. *Ibid.*, 75.

40. *Ibid.*, 229.

ethnicity, can only be further enhanced, as she learns to cherish her Korean ethnic identity as the novel progresses. In both *Soil* and *Evergreen*, Westernization of the elites and its de-racializing somatic effect must be complemented by a regimen of Koreanization, a crucial ingredient of the universality of their position; it is the particularity that enables their transethnicity, the unfixability of their ethnic position. In *Soil*, Han Min-kyo, the protagonist Hō Sung's mentor, exemplifies the ideal racial hybridity imagined for colonial Korean elites. Han Min-kyo, whose surname means "Korea" and whose given name signifies, "Teach People," is an Enlightenment nationalist, with a Western-style education, who makes a living as an English teacher, while simultaneously embodying all the positive moral traits of the traditional elite, such as "Korean-style humility, Korean-style dignity, Korean-style tolerance, Korean-style pride . . . pure Korean character."⁴¹

While both novels, *Soil* and *Evergreen*, maintain the chasm between the elites and the masses, articulated in racialized terms, they repeatedly posit a unity of the Korean nation: ". . . all of us share the name, Korean . . ."⁴² An emblematic scene in *Soil* features a five-hundred-year-old locust tree that stands at the entrance of the village, Salyōul, as "a witness to history." The historical tree represents the enduring tradition of the Korean race: strong communal sentiment, politics of "fairness" and "tolerance," and above all, "harmony between the individual and the collective, 'I' and 'We.'"⁴³ Yi Kwang-su's re-writing of the traditional Korean society as a liberal democracy with a fascistic strain that underscores the purity and strength of the ethnic unity dissimulates the ethnicized class division of colonial Korea. I would locate the central concept of "Koreanness" in these two works, neither in the ethnic unity asserted nor in their efforts to obscure the ethnicized classes, but in Koreans' potential for both elite and peasant classes to reform. It is their reformability—for the Westernized elites to be re-Korean-ized and for the essentialized, racialized Korean peasantry to be partially modernized and universalized—that constitutes the complementary dimensions of Korean ethnicity. Ultimately, it is some elites' ability to produce Korean ethnicity and to effect modernizing and Koreanizing reforms in both other elites and the masses that emerges as the privileged locus of true "Koreanness."

41. Yi Kwang-su, *Soil*, 37.

42. *Ibid.*, 27.

43. *Ibid.*, 101-102.

(Post-)Ethnicist Marxism and (Trans-)Ethnic Classes: Ethnic Crossings in the Leftist Literature

The leftist and leftist-leaning works from the late 20s and 1930s offer contrasting articulations of ethnicity and class from those set forth by Cultural Nationalist texts. There is a fundamental way in which the leftist texts' privileging of class as a trans-ethnonational category counteracts Cultural Nationalists' essentialization of ethnicity. However, the two camps by no means stand in opposition to each other: rather, they partially overlap with each other in their relation to the issues of universalism on the one hand and ethnonationalization as a reaction to universalism on the other. If Cultural Nationalists' essentialization of ethnicity and culture is the "residue"⁴⁴ of the impossible universalization, the leftist writers of colonial Korea faced a similar predicament in dealing with the universalism of Marxism and its racializing effects. The leftist works I survey in this paper offer us two simultaneous responses. The universalist Marxist framework causes some to overlook the complex relations between ethnicity and class in the colonial capitalist context of Korea in their imagining of what we may call a post-ethnic Marxist community; internationalist Marxism enables positing of a utopian space where ethnonational boundaries will have already been dissolved.⁴⁵ However, some of these texts reveal the traces of the impossibility of such a post-ethnic universe as the ethnics' desire for whiteness. Another group of leftist texts, while still adhering to the internationalist tenet, does register ethnicization of the colonized proletariat: their universalism does not disavow the issue of racial hierarchy in relation to class and colonial capitalism. Here, such representations of ethnicization can be said to, at least partially, ethnonationalize Marxism in the colonial context, interrupting the racializing universalism of Marxism. Below, my discussion of leftist works centers on three different "classes" of the colonized population: Marxist intellectuals, the elite class (landlords and industrial capitalists), and the rural and industrial proletariat. In differing representations, the colonized can be constituted either as universal-ized, post-ethnic class subjects (universal Marxist intellectual and universal proletariat), or

44. Tomo Hattori conceptualizes ethnic identity as the "residue of a trauma that Cultural Nationalism cannot resolve in its encounter with the material political and economic forces of the modern world." Cited in Rey Chow's *The Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 110.

45. I am borrowing the term, "post-ethnicity," from Sheng-mei Ma's *The Deathly Embrace: Orientalism and Asian American Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 147-160.

as ethnonationalized class subjects (anti-colonial ethnonationalist proletariat) or as trans-ethnonational colonial (Korean-Japanese) elites.

Performative Marxisms: Universality and Ethnicity of Marxism

Clearly marked as an internationalist Marxist work, the short story, “Nakdong River” (1927) by Cho Myŏng-hŭi, re-inscribes Korean history and people in the universal history as conceived by Marxism. The very opening description of the landscape along the Nakdong River, where the story is set, empties Korea of its historical and ethnic specificity. In contrast to the almost anthropomorphized old locust tree in its intimate connection to the Korean people in *Soil*, we have a representation of nature removed from the history of a people in “Nakdong River”: the pristineness and grandness of the river bank is merely an objectified and alienated backdrop. This landscape first imbued with primordial universality is now suddenly thrust into contemporary universal history by the appearance of “a monster....wandering this peninsula.” The “monster” is, of course, the “specter” of communism, about to bring about an unprecedented, inevitable “storm” in the Korean peninsula.⁴⁶ In “Nakdong River,” the staging of universalized (Korean) history is followed by a description of people who populate this universal, “exotic” peninsula. Introduced to us as members of youth, labor, peasant, women’s and untouchables’ movements, they exhibit their membership in the contemporary history of globalized Marxism through their costumes: some wear traditional Korean clothes, others, Western suits and “rubashka.” Although these leaders do not reject their connection to the Korean ethnic community, they declare their attachment to “this land,” i.e., Korea, this connection is at best an incidental one. They also state that they could be working for the same cause in India, China or other places.⁴⁷ Marxist universalism disavows the particularity of the ethnonational collective and its history. This foreclosure of difference bypasses the past and existing historical problems, such as feudal tyranny, contemporary racist colonialism and anti-colonial fascist ethnonationalization, and posits a space of post-historical, post-ethnic utopia already reached. Marxist universalist history here is a disfiguring force, embodying the normativizing and regulating political and intellectual

46. Cho Myŏng-hŭi, “Nakdonggang,” (Nakdong River), in *K’ap’ŭ taep’yo sosŏlsŏn* (Representative Works of KAPF), ed. Kim Sŏng-su, vol. 1 (Seoul: Sagyejŏl, 1988), 265-266.

47. *Ibid.*, 273.

authority of Marxism. Interrupting the fantasy of relentlessly essentialized ethnicity in the Cultural Nationalist works, the residue of impossibility of this universalization is transformed into another fantasy, that of a-racial utopia, revealing Marxism's blindness to the issues of racialism and ethnonationalism, its *de facto* racism.

It is not difficult to find literary works from the late 20s and 30s in which Marxism and Marxist movements are romanticized and exoticized. These works, considered to be the products of an immature stage of Marxism, are not part of the South Korean leftist canon proper, as the central concerns of these works are not those of class and nationalist struggle. However, the "apoliticality" of these representations of Marxism is in fact symptomatic of what I would call an ethnicist reception of Marxism by a non-white, colonial population. "Nakdong River" introduces the reader to a group of leaders of the Marxist movement and one of them is called "Rosa," named after Rosa Luxemburg. Marxist ideology effects a racial transformation of a daughter of a butcher, a member of the caste of the untouchables of traditional Korea, into a cosmopolitan European-ized, Marxist intellectual. Although her regional dialect of the Korean language she speaks reminds us of her ethnic particularity intermittently, her name "Rosa" continually threatens to erase the very same. "Rosa" is this portrait of a fantastic hybridity, a composite outcome of the fact of ethnicization and the desire to overcome it, to become white/European, that universalist Marxism has brought about.

Several short stories from the early 1930s by Yi Hyo-sök, known as one of the "fellow travelers," offer a very good example of Marxism's impact as a whitening/exoticizing agent.⁴⁸ These stories are often set outside the Korean peninsula, in cities like Harbin in China or in Russia, referred to in the titles of two stories as "the Northern Country."⁴⁹ Most interestingly they bring to surface the kind of exoticism associated with Marxism that we encounter in a much more latent form in other Marxist works of the period. Yi Hyo-sök's stories feature Korean Marxists who now work in Russia and have been russified: they are mostly male, although we occasionally we do run into "*engels*

48. Yi Hyo-sök's literary reputation as one of the important modernists of the 1930s is assuredly not based upon these stories.

49. Yi Hyo-sök, "Pukguk sasin" (A Private Epistle from the Northern Country) (1931), in *Yi Hyo-sök chŏnjip* (The Collected Works of Yi Hyo-sök), vol. 1 (Seoul: Ch'angmisa, 1983), 181-196; "Pukguk chŏmgyŏng" (Sketches from the Northern Country) (1931), in *Yi Hyo-sök chŏnjip* (The Collected Works of Yi Hyo-sök), vol. 1 (Seoul: Ch'angmisa, 1983), 243-255.

göl" (Engels girl) or "*marūkūsū göl*" ("Marx girl").⁵⁰ In a story, titled "The Marching Song," we meet a young Korean man, disguised as Chinese, on the run from the Japanese police. He is identified only as "Arasa," an older name for Russia in Korean, because he participated in street demonstrations—he "walked with the workers" in a Russian city. Names like "Arasa," or "Rosia" (Russia), which occur in this and other stories, indicate these men's russification.⁵¹ Their fetishization of the Russian language, Russian culture and Russian Marxists and their work, seems to transfigure these men's ethnicity.⁵² Marxism, grasped by the ethnicized, colonized intellectuals as an ideology of European origin and of white race, functions in these stories as an agent that de-ethnicizes and whitens the colonized race. In another story, "A Private Epistle from the Northern Country," by Yi Hyo-sök, set in a Russian café filled with "Mobo" ("modern boy") and "rumpen" ("lumpen") dancing to Jazz tunes, the kiss of a young Russian woman, "Sasha," and her declaration of love for our narrator, a Korean Marxist, makes him shout with joy, ". . . it is that Sasha has been thinking of me just as I have been thinking of her. Without any racial prejudice, she did love me, me, a Korean."⁵³ His desire for her substitutes for his desire for the whiteness of Marxism. His confirmation that she returns his love for her makes him breathe a sigh of relief that Marxism is indeed a universal ideology and not what he suspected it could be, (a-)racialist ideology of failed universalism. The ethnicist reception of universalist Marxism reveals Marxism's unintended and thus inevitable racism/racialism. Nevertheless, this gesture toward a post-ethnic utopia, I would argue, should be acknowledged as playing a valuable role of interrupting the essentialist ethnicism of the Cultural

50. See Yu Chin-o, "Owölüi kujikja" (A Job Seeker in May) (1929), in *Chöngt'ong hanguk munhak taegye*, vol. 27 (Seoul: Omungak, 1994), 193, for a reference to "Engels Göl" (Engels Girl). Yi Hyo-sök's "Sketches from the Northern Country" portrays a "*modön göl*" (Modern Girl) who turns out to be a Marxist assassin. The interchangeability between "Modern Girl" and "Marx Girl" is rooted in their Westernization, i.e., their racial ambiguity and glamour associated with it, 251-255.

51. See Pak Söng-gük's "P'ungjin" (Through the Dusty Windy World) (1938), in *Chöngt'ong hanguk munhak taegye*, vol. 27 (Seoul: Omungak, 1994), where a Russified Korean's nickname is "Rosia." See also Paek Sin-ae's "Kköraei" (Koreans) (1933), in *K'ap'ü taep'yo sosölsön*, vol. 2 (Seoul: Sagyejöl, 1988) for depiction of Koreans in Siberia. The term "Kköraei" refers to Koreans whose ancestors had left the Korean peninsula a couple of generations prior to the contemporary 1930s for Russia and were now assimilated into Russian culture.

52. See Yi Hyo-sök's "Ch'uök (A Memory) (1931), in *Yi Hyo-sök chönjip*, vol. 1 (Seoul: Ch'angmisa, 1983), 131-141, for an intense romanticization of Marxism and Marxist ideas.

53. Yi Hyo-sök, "Pukguk sasin," 196.

Nationalist School.

*Ethnic Ambiguities of the Colonial Elites:
the Case of “Western Suits”*

Although sartorial Westernization of intellectuals and elites is an important marker of their status in *Soil and Evergreen*, the term, “*sinsa*” (gentleman), is favored over another term, “*yangbokjaengi*” or a “Western Suit,”⁵⁴ with its pejorative or mocking tone. The term, “*yangbokjaengi*,” or its visual equivalent, often appears in the leftist and leftist-leaning literature in order to point to the class disparity and its racializing effects between the colonized proletariat and the colonized Korean ruling class (including the lower level Korean colonial officials). This section on ethnic crossings of the elite class (the landlord and industrial capitalist class) focuses on the ambiguities produced by clothing. One’s clothes and fashion became a principal means of identification and classification in colonial Korea in terms of the complex relations between class and ethnicity in the same way that the phenotype of a person is the dominant mode of racial categorization in a racially stratified society. In the context of rapid Westernization of lifestyle among the elites and the colonial state that also associated modernization with Westernization, social transformations—the processes of colonization and capitalization that resulted in unprecedented re-configurations of class and ethnicity in colonial Korea—came to be embodied in clothing in their very material form.⁵⁵

The abolition of an ascriptive status system in the late 19th Century also entailed dissolution of sumptuary laws that had enforced the traditional social stratification. Clothing was now no longer a matter of indicating one’s fixed status but it came to reflect the possibility of social mobility through one’s access to wealth and other social privileges owing to wealth, such as Western-style education.⁵⁶ At the same time, as the elites began to re-imagine modern Korea

54. I am borrowing the term, “Western Suit,” from Chun Kyung-ja’s translation of “*yangbokjaengi*” from Ch’ae Man-sik’s *Peace Under Heaven* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1993).

55. Dorinne Kondo, “Fabricating Masculinity: Gender, Race and Nation in a Transnational Frame,” in *Between Women and Nation: Nationalism, Transnational Feminisms, and the State*, ed. Caren Kaplan, Norma Alarcon, and Minoo Moallem (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 298.

56. Clark Sorenson, “National Identity and the Category ‘Peasant,’” 293. See also Dorinne Kondo, *About Face,: Performing Race in Fashion and Theater* (London: Routledge, 1997), 115.

as an ethnic community, they conceptualized the peasantry to be constituting the core of the ethnos, a corps of people to be mobilized for economic development, to be educated and, eventually, to be included in the political process. In turn, the peasants' traditional clothing, white cotton clothes, came to symbolize the primordial essence of the ethnic collective as a whole. Through the process of colonial-capitalization, the ascriptive status system and its sumptuary regulations were replaced, on the one hand, by symbolic homogenization through construction of the "white-clothed" race (*paegŭi minjok*) that represented the modern ethnic community. However, at the level of material heterogeneity of the colonial capitalist class society, emancipation from the status system was followed by racialized re-stratification: Westernized elites in their Western/universal suits and the peasantry in the (modern) ethnic costume, i.e., their traditional white cotton clothes.

A poem by Yun Tong-ju, "A Sad Race," is a terse expression of this inextricable association established between the modern ethnic community and the white-clothed peasants.⁵⁷ Each line of the four-line verse begins with the adjective "white" modifying four pieces of clothing on a peasant woman. It is a still-life of a single female peasant whose white kerchief on her head, white rubber shoes, white blouse and skirt and white string around her waist seem to have grown into her skin, marking her "sad body" and demarcating the dark silhouette of her subjectification in white clothes, as that of the colonized-ethnicized people. The abject ethnicity of the white-clothed peasantry—suffered more intensely for their class position, but also representing the whole "sad race"—is an essentializing emblemization that predicates their very being in the gaze of the elites who imagine the modern ethnic nation. At the same time, we cannot ignore the fact that the ethnic sentiment invested in the white clothes also performed a resistive function for both conservative and leftist camps. As the colonial state encouraged "colored clothes" (*saekbok* or *saeg'ui*) instead of the traditional white clothes, the peasants' reluctance to comply with and active resistance to this policy, noted in literary works, seem to indicate their recalcitrant ungovernability.⁵⁸ However, the leftist works do not place so much emphasis on the symbolic value of the white-clothed peasantry that integrates

57. Yun Tong-ju, "A Sad Race" (1941), in *Hanguk hyŏndae simunhak taegyŏ* (Collected Works of Modern Korean Poetry), vol. 8 (Seoul: Chisik sanŏpsa, 1980), 79. The following is my translation of the poem: "The white kerchief wraps her black hair/The white rubber shoes are thrown over her rough feet/The white blouse and skirt hide the sad body/The white string tightly ties her thin waist."

58. Sim Hun, *Evergreen*, 197. Ch'ae Man-sik, "Pori panga" (Barley Grinding) (1936), 103.

Koreans as an ethnic group. Rather, they focus on the new kind of social stratification that re-ethnicizes the class division of the ethnic collective, again, materially embodied in their clothing. This stratification is expressed by opposing sets of terms that connote antagonism between two classes, the peasants and the new elites, such as “*sangt’ujaengi*” (Topknots), referring to the peasants who still adhered to the traditional hairstyle and “*yangbokjaengi*” (Western Suits) or “*haikala*” (Western Dandy).⁵⁹

Many Marxist and Marxist-influenced literary works from the 1930s depict the Korean elite class, landlords and industrialists, as collaborating with the Japanese colonial state. Some of these Koreans hold offices in the local government and others are members of local associations sponsored by the government, as this type of participation by Koreans was encouraged and enforced as part of the colonial state’s official policy of co-optation for the larger part of the 1930s. Many characters of this class are represented as simultaneously Japanized and Westernized in terms of their language, educational background, attire and lifestyle.⁶⁰ In contrast to both *Soil* and *Evergreen*, where the Japanized elites—clearly distinguished from the universalized/Westernized (also Korean-ized) nationalist elites—are morally condemned for their anti-nationalist betrayal in no uncertain terms, the leftist works do not differentiate between the disapproved Japanization on the one hand and the sanctioned universalization/Westernization on the other, presenting these ethnic crossings, in a matter-of-fact manner, as the logical consequence of inter-ethnic collaboration under the colonial regime.

59. Ōm Hŭng-sŏp, “Hŭlŏgan maŭl” (A Village that Flowed Away) (1930), in *1920-1930nyŏndae minjung munhaksŏn*, (Selected Works of Proletarian Literature from the 1920s and 1930s), ed. Chu Chong-yŏn and Yi Chŏng-ŭn, vol. 1 (Seoul: T’apch’ulp’ansa, 1990), 119.

60. For representation of the landlord class see Yi Puk-myŏng’s “Minboŭi saenghwalp’yo” (Minbo’s Monthly Budget) (1935), in *K’ap’taep’yo sosŏlsŏn*, vol. 2 (Seoul: Sagyejŏl, 1988), 240-265, and Yi Pong-gu’s “Mokhwa” (Cotton Flowers) (1938), in *1920-1930nyŏndae minjung munhaksŏn*, 165-174. See also Yi Chŏk-man’s “Ch’ongdongwŏn” (Total Mobilization) (1931), in *1920-1930nyŏndae minjung munhaksŏn*, 261-279, for a depiction of a Korean rubber manufacturer, collaborating with the local government. For an explanation of the state’s co-optive policy regarding the landlord class, see Gi-Wook Shin and Do-Hyun Han, “Colonial Corporatism: The Rural Revitalization Campaign, 1932-1940” in *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, ed. Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 1999), 70-96.

61. Kim Ki-rim, “Ch’ŏldo yŏnsŏn” (Along the Railroad Tracks) (1935), in *1920-1930nyŏndae minjung munhaksŏn*, 74.

In some works, a character's ethnicity is not explicitly stated, but rather, the visual identification of him in his Western suit temporarily suspends his ethnicity. Only later, is the reader often, though not always, let in on these characters' ethnic identity, either Korean or Japanese. "Along the Railroad Tracks" by Kim Ki-rim is a trenchant critique of the ways in which railroad construction has completely disrupted a traditional village, exploiting the villagers and other Korean peasants-turned-laborers who have gathered from all corners of the peninsula. In the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the opening of the train station, we are given a visual description of the participants: some in "clean Korean-style overcoat" and others in "Western Suits" ("yangbokjaengi"). Only when the speech by the Japanese county supervisor is given does the reader figure out that some of the "Western Suits" are Korean colonial state officials, since one of them is said to be translating the speech given in Japanese into Korean, "word for word."⁶¹ The temporary ethnic ambiguity of these characters articulates the trans-ethnic structure of Japanese colonial rule. As the "virtues of a marvelous modern invention" –the railroad–are extolled, the Western costumes of colonial officials, both Japanese and Korean, re-enact the norms and standards of a universal civilization, while at the same time figuring the tripartite nature of Korean colonial modernity in which both Korean and Japanese elites function as the agents of modernization cum Westernization cum colonization.⁶²

"The Railroad Crossing," by Han Söl-ya, deals with recurring accidents and deaths at a railroad crossing due to the lack of a proper safety guard, which the authorities refuse to put in for the villagers. The main victims have been children, who are attracted to the sights and sounds of the trains, the passengers, and the traffic lights. Playing around the railroad station, the children sing about "yangbokjaengi" (Western Suits) who are passengers on the train: ". . . *haikala sang, haikala sang . . . ya emine saekjukyöng ssötne . . . kö yangguk pokjang jot'a, kaehwajang jot'a.*" (. . . Mr. Western Dandy, Mr. Western Dandy . . . A Woman with Glasses. . . Western clothes are great, a Modern cane is great.)⁶³ In this little ditty, the word "*haikala*" (Western Dandy) is affixed to the Japanese appellation, "*sang*" (Mr.), indicating to us that the children associate

62. Another story offers a scene where a local elite is first identified only in terms of his Western attire, his Western dog (a German Shepard) and his "Japanese horse." Later we learn that he is a Korean owner of a department store. See Yi Puk-myöng's "Tapssari" (A Bean Patch) (1937), in *K'ap'ü taep'yo sosölsön*, vol. 2 (Seoul: Sagyejöl, 1988), 267-289.

63. Han Söl-ya, "Ch'öllo kyoch'ajöm" (The Railroad Crossing) (1936), in *1920-1930nyöndae minjung munhaksön*, 359.

men in Western-style clothes also with the Japanese, the colonizing race. In the next line, the children link the Western suit, “*yangguk pokjang*,” with “*kaehwajang*,” “a cane of *kaehwa*,” i.e., enlightenment and civilization, thus with Westernized Korean elites. The children affirm the Western suit as the material embodiment of Japanese colonization, the hegemonic status of Western civilization, and Koreans’ goal of (self-colonizing) modernization.

Ann Hollander describes the masculine image projected by the modern suit as suggesting “probity,” “restraint,” and “detachment,” on the one hand. On the other, she writes, in “providing the standard costume of civil leadership for the whole world,” the modern suit still “remains sexually potent and more than a little menacing.”⁶⁴ The symbolic significance of “the costume of civil leadership” in colonial Korea is multiple and contradictory. As a universal costume, it stakes out a third space, a liberatory one at some level, for Korean elites, even enabling them to recover a little bit of dignity through their sartorial identificatory act with Westerners. However, the Western suit also provokes a sense of inferiority and anxiety. In a story by Kye Yong-muk, “A Pastoral,” a country father, angry at his son’s decadent lifestyle after college graduation, stuffs his son’s Western suit to make a scarecrow out of it. The village children’s limerick—“A scarecrow in the golden rice paddies/Doesn’t he look funny/A Western Suit (*yangbokjaengi*) scarecrow/ A gentleman (*sinsa*) scarecrow”—evokes the emptiness of his Westernized being in his transformation into an effigy.⁶⁵ Another brief scene, from Ch’ae Man-sik’s story, “Pale Faces,” reminds us of the doubly colonizing effect of the Western suit. The narrator and his friend comment on a couple going into a café, “Salon Arirang”: “A New Woman (*sinyösong*) and a Western Suit (*yangbokjaengi*) are walking arm in arm. Somehow they look foolish.” They conclude, “He is a Mobo all right, except that a damn Korean Mobo is a Mobo who is a Modern Yobo.”⁶⁶ “Mobo” is a Japanese word, short for “Modern Boy,” being circulated in its colony, Korea, while “Yobo” is a Japanese derogatory term for Koreans, which also became a term of self-deprecation. This pithy exchange shows us the ways in which the Western suit was not only an articulation of the colonized elites’

64. Dorinne Kondo, “Fabricating Masculinity,” 298.

65. Kye Yong-muk, “Mokka” (A Pastoral) (1936), in *Chöngt’ong hanguk munhak taegye*, vol. 6 (Seoul: Omungak, 1994), 327. Joseph Roach tells us that to effigy as a verb can mean “to evoke an absence” in *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 36.

66. Ch’ae Man-sik, “Ch’angbaekhan ölguldül” (Pale Faces) (1931), *Ch’ae Man-sik chönjip* (Collected Works of Ch’ae Man-sik), vol. 7 (Seoul: Ch’angjakkwä pip’yöngsa, 1989), 14. “Modern Yobo” is in English in the original.

desire to occidentalize and empower themselves but also the sign of their orientalized racialization by the West and their further ethnicized colonization by Japan. The partially homonymic word, “Mobo,” i.e., “Modern Yobo” that replaces “Mobo” of “Modern Boy,” sounds the barely audible incommensurability of three different values of ethnicities and their relations to modernity: the modern/Western, the semi-peripheral/modern/Japanese and the colonial/modern/Korean.

*Universalization, Japanization and Carnivalization of the Korean
Proletariat in the Leftist Literature*

This section considers three modes of representation of the colonized proletariat in the leftist works. First, I examine the universalizing portrait of peasantry in Yi Ki-yŏng’s agrarian novel, *Native Village*, which imagines the emergence of the universal industrial proletariat as a revolutionary subject. The second section discusses the ethnicized proletariat, Korean workers’ Japanization, i.e., their attempt at racial mobility, in a group of texts set in the incipient industrial sector; it gauges the extent of the colonized underclass’s assimilation into the Japanese empire as the very extent of their under-ethnonationalization. The third section analyzes instances that deal with the material destruction of the bodies and lives of the colony. I explore depictions of the extreme conditions of bodily exploitation and suffering that both affirm and transcend the ethnic boundaries and the boundaries between the human and sub/non-human forms.

Yi Ki-yŏng’s agrarian novel, *Native Village* (1934), is the socialist counterpart to the Cultural Nationalist agrarian novels, *Soil* and *Evergreen*, we examined in the first part of this paper.⁶⁷ If the Cultural Nationalist reformist project for the peasantry inserts them into the universalist history of capitalist modernity as essentialized ethnonational subjects, Yi Ki-yŏng’s Marxist reformism conceives them as universal proletarian subjects in the Marxist historical trajectory of revolution and progress. Marxist reformism transforms them into a-racial or race-neutral industrial proletariats, dislodging them from their position of essentialized ethnic particularity. By the novel’s end, the

67. In fact, the Marxist agrarian movement in the period between the late 1920s and the mid 1930s parallels that of the Cultural Nationalists in terms of the goals they set out and the kind of moral obligation and elitism the intellectuals felt vis-à-vis the peasantry. See *K’ap’ū munhak undong yŏngu* (A Study on KAPF Literature Movement), ed. Research Institute on Korean History (Yŏksa munje yŏnguso) (Seoul: Yŏksa pip’ŏngsa, 1989), 18, 64.

(Korean / ethnicized) peasantry exist only as abstract, dis-embodied signposts toward the Marxist utopia. For Yi Ki-yŏng, this de-ethnicizing universalization of the Korean proletariat is based upon the Marxist valorization of labor and productivity. As the foremost task of the Marxist intellectual hero in *Native Village*, Kim Hŭi-jun is to instill this notion of “sacredness of labor” in the peasantry. The political sovereignty and universal subjecthood of the Korean proletariat reside in the equality of the value of their labor. He marvels at the “great power of production,” as the colonial Korean countryside is gradually transformed into an industrial environment.⁶⁸ In contrast to many leftist works that deplore the wretched conditions of the factories, the oddly positive portrait of two central proletarian characters’ entrance into the industrial workforce makes absent the materiality of their bodies and their living through their insertion into the abstract world of labor, production and revolution. The proletarian class’s identification of themselves as an ethnicized labor force, shown in other leftist works, is largely erased in Yi Ki-yŏng’s novel by an imposition of trans-ethnic internationalism on them.⁶⁹ However, while positing this universalized proletariat, the novel does not present this world as an entirely post-ethnic space, nor does the impossibility of universalization of the proletariat articulate itself as their desire to become white/European as happens in the works of Yi Hyo-sŏk and Cho Myŏng-hŭi we examined earlier. In this sense, the novel, nonetheless, offers an interruptive counterpoint to the essentializing ethnicism of the Cultural Nationalist camp.

As early as in the 1920s under the so-called “Cultural Rule,” the colonial state, capitalizing on the class division of the colony, recruited their lower level functionaries, such as policemen and county workers, from the sector of the disaffected, or more accurately, the insufficiently ethnonationalized, peasant class.⁷⁰ With the expanding bureaucracy and the increasing assimilationist policy of the 30s, the collaborationist working-class could only have been a growing group among the colonized populace.⁷¹ However, colonial Korean literature from both leftist and conservative camps rarely features proletarian

68. Yi Ki-yŏng, *Kohyang* (Native Village), 174, 264, 412.

69. Song Yŏng’s “Kyodae sigan” (Changing Shifts) (1930) is a classic example of the Marxist elites’ attempt at educating the ethnicized proletariat to form trans-ethnonational class alliances: in *K’ap’ū taep’yo sosŏlsŏn*, vol. 2 (Seoul: Sagyejŏl, 1988), 50-71.

70. Kang Man-gil writes that in the year of Annexation (1910) about half of the Japanese military police and more than half of the regular police force already consisted of Koreans. See *Hanguk hyŏndaesa* (Modern Korean History), revised edition, (Seoul: Ch’angjakgwa pip’yŏngsa, 1994), 22.

ethnic crossings—the colonized working-class’s Japanization, assimilation and collaboration. When these ethnic transgressions are noted in literature, literary criticism or historiography, they may be acknowledged, at least implicitly, as a consequence of their alienated class position, but the underclass’s willingness for assimilation or collaboration is seldom interpreted as an articulation of resistance to the polarized class structure, with potential to problematize and threaten the ethnonational boundary itself. In other words, the heterogeneity of the under-nationalized underclass is contained by the presupposed homogeneity of ethnonational community.

Such canonical works as Yŏm Sang-sŏp’s “On the Eve of the March First Movement” (1924) and Yi T’ae-jun’s “Coming Home” (1931) feature an appearance of Korean detectives who work for the Japanese colonial state; they follow, harass and interrogate returning students from Japan.⁷² In these works by Yŏm and Yi, both outside the Marxist camp, the nationalist elite protagonists summarily condemn the moral and political choices these Korean-Japanese detectives made without giving any consideration to the contingent relation of their class and ethnonational positions. For the conservative nationalist camp, who mobilized the idea of the peasantry as embodiment of racial-cultural essence in order to elide the class division, the peasants’ “betrayal” of the ethnic collective would undermine the very basis of their nationalism. In Yi Kwang-su’s *Soil*, we have a brief scene where our protagonist, Hŏ Sung, an educated elite on his way to Japan on a ship, remarks upon a Korean peasant who is speaking in a loud voice “awkward Japanese” and “sitting in Japanese style.”⁷³ The image of a peasant’s ethnic crossing, dismissively registered, first of all, mirrors the elites’ own Japanization and Westernization. This structural similarity questions the implicit idea in Yi Kwang-su and Sim Hun’s novels that only the educated elites are capable of transgressing and transcending the ethnic boundary, alerting us to the possibility suggested here that the peasants’ ethnic crossing is an equally forceful expression of their desire for social mobility and empowerment as that of the elites.

71. See Ch’ae Man-sik’s short story, “Maeng sunsa” (A Policeman Maeng), published in December 1945 for another portrait of Korean Japanese policeman. Maeng, who worked for the Japanese colonial state, now applies for a position under the US military government rule, following Liberation. Ch’ae Man-sik, 259-268.

72. Yŏm Sang-sŏp, “Mansejŏn” (On the Eve of the March First Movement) (1924), *Yŏm Sang-sŏp chŏnjip* (Collected Works of Yŏm Sang-sŏp), vol. 1 (Seoul: Minŭmsa, 1987), 41-46. Yi T’ae-jun, “Kohyang” (Coming Home), 127-130.

73. Yi Kwang-su, *Soil*, 47.

Among the leftist works, some note fleetingly these ethnic crossings by the working class: an old repair man and his daughter-in-law, both dressed in kimono, conduct their conversation in Japanese to the shock of our narrator, new to the port city of Pusan. One of the most Japanized cities of colonial Korea, Pusan was the contact point between the “interior land” (*naeji*) and the “peninsula” (*pando*). A young clerk at a Japanese merchant’s store praises his boss and his wisdom, dreaming of one day becoming successful, happy and Japanese.⁷⁴ Just as these ethnic crossings are unequivocally criticized from the leftist nationalist perspective of these texts, these acts of the underclass’s subversion of the ethnonationalist boundary, an illustration of their insufficient identification or even disidentification with the ethnonational collective, have also been overlooked by South Korean leftist critics. Other leftist works do register the proletarian ethnic crossing, i.e., their Japanization, as a complicit yet subversive reaction that attempts to compensate for the colonial state’s ethnicization of the colonized workforce. A group of Marxist short stories from the 1930s that narrate the conditions of Korean workers in the industrial setting⁷⁵ feature conflicts between Korean supervisors and Korean workers. In these texts, Koreans who have secured positions of power over other Koreans are, of course, resented for their association with the Japanese, and for the ways in which they speak and act as if they were Japanese.⁷⁶ This “intra-ethnic” conflict caused by Korean supervisors’ ethnic crossing points to the ambiguity of their position, as their bilingualism and their role as intermediaries between the Japanese management and the Korean workers simultaneously signifies their ethnicization as Koreans and yet carries the authority of Japaneseness.⁷⁷ What makes Korean supervisors indistinguishable from their Japanese counterpart is their performance, their role as supervisors, insofar as supervisors’ main function is to discipline workers, consisting of acting out of a set of pre-determined behaviors. The nickname, “Sakura Bat”—Sakura, the national

74. Yi Nam-wŏn, “Pusan” (Pusan) (1935), 182-192. Ch’ae Man-sik, “Ch’isuk” (An Idiot Uncle) (1938), 191-204.

75. See Yu Chin-o’s “Pamjunge kŏninŭnja” (A Man Who Walks in the Night) (1931), in *1920-1930nyŏndae minjung munhaksŏn*, 315-324, Kang Ro-hyang’s “Kŭrŭm mudŭn hŏngŏbŭl chupnŭn saramdŭl” (Those Picking up the Oiled Cloths) (1932), in *ibid.*, 426-433, and Om Hŭng-sŏp’s “Him” (Power) (1936), in *ibid.*, 367-381.

76. Om Hŭng-sŏp, “Him” (Power) (1936), 367-381.

77. In Pak Hwa-sŏng’s “Hasudo kongsa” (Sewage System Construction) (1932), in *1920-1930nyŏndae minjung munhaksŏn*, 392-425. Bilingualism is a central theme but it is presented here as a marker of the bilingual worker’s education and enlightenment as a Marxist.

flower of Japan—given to a Korean supervisor by Korean workers, indicates his cross-ethnic performative function. The ironic epithet, “Sakura Bat,” embodying the disciplinary acts of colonial capitalism, betrays and even accentuates his Korean ethnicity on the one hand, while at the same time directing our attention to his “Japanized” performance. Korean workers conclude that, “Among the supervisors, some are Japanese and others are Korean, but their attitude is about the same”⁷⁸ The bitterness Korean workers harbor toward supervisors, either Japanese or Korean, does not entirely stem from their perception of the supervisors’ essential ethnicity but takes into account the performativity and flexibility of their ethnic identity. While some of the leftist works portray the colonial ethnicization of labor as inciting anti-colonial ethnonationalization, others, such as these two works we examined above, delineate the ways in which the instances of ethnic crossing disturb and complicate the prevailing demarcation of the ethnic boundary.

In a parodic short story, “Mister Pang,” set in the days immediately following Liberation in August of 1945, we are told about one “Mr. Pang” who, like other numerous colonized peasants driven out of the peninsula, had wandered the streets of Shanghai as a shoe repair man, served the Japanese during the colonial period at the POW camp for the Allied Forces in Seoul, and now will render his labor as an interpreter to the newly arrived US military. Mr. Pang’s smattering of knowledge of three imperial languages, Chinese, Japanese and English, marks his status as an ethnicized colonized peasant, while it simultaneously articulates his disaffection vis-à-vis Korea and his de-colonizing identificatory investment in the colonizing forces. We encounter, consequently, Mr. Pang quite perplexed on the historic occasion of Korea’s emancipation from the Japanese, not finding remarkable the newly gained national independence, as it afforded him no personal gain: “But Sambok couldn’t feel moved or happy. He couldn’t figure out why the people on the streets, strangers to one another really, were embracing, shedding tears of joy. Watching this he only felt embarrassed”⁷⁹ The ethnic crossing of a subaltern, only minimally outlined for us by Ch’ae Man-sik, suggests to us the possibility of locating more heterogeneous and subterranean resistance, excluded by the privileged discourse of emancipation—that of ethnonationalism.⁸⁰

78. Yi Tong-kyu, “Chayu nodongja” (Free Laborer) (1932), in *ibid.*, 385.

79. Ch’ae Man-sik, “Mist’ö Pang” (Mr. Pang), 236.

80. See Gayatri Spivak, “A Literary Representation of the Subaltern: A Woman’s Text from the Third World,” in *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (London: Routledge, 1988), 245.

Beyond the universalized proletariat as disembodied revolutionary subject and the Japanized proletariat as under-ethnonationalized subject, the leftist works offer us another more materialist representation of the colonized underclass. These are transient and transformative moments of the figuring of their bodily destruction, both due to the extreme impoverishment in the rural areas and the brutal working conditions of the industrial sector. In the period between the late 1920s and the first half of the 1930s, the rural economy of colonial Korea could only further deteriorate as the Great Depression swept the globe. Starvation in the countryside was a commonplace phenomenon.⁸¹ As the decade moved onto the era of intensified industrialization for the total war in the mid to late 1930s, the colonial proletariat was now subject to another kind of physical abuse in the factories. This focus on the body and its severe abjectness and disintegration produces a wide variety of representations in great quantity. Here I list only some of such numerous examples: “corpse-like” children and peasants on the brink of starvation;⁸² a “human-eating rice cake” that tells the tale of a starved child who gorges on some rice cakes and dies;⁸³ a peasant in rags who, mistaken for a deer, is shot by a local landlord who takes up hunting as a pastime;⁸⁴ a factory workers’ song that decries the machines operating on their bodily fluids—their blood, sweat and tears; cannibal-like factory owners who skin the workers alive and eat them; and the workers’ wage that is like a “dick of a leper,” as it gets smaller and smaller due to all the compulsory deductions.⁸⁵ In these extreme moments of bodily suffering and destruction, their ethnic identity—and their humanity—occupies a decidedly ambivalent position: the import of their ethnicity is both diminished and augmented, just as their subhumanization further underscores their very humanity. These moments of material and non-metaphoric metamorphoses of the colonized proletariat into de-formed and fractured bodies capture most acutely the degradation and abjection of ethnicization while transcending the very same.

81. Gi-Wook Shin and Do-Hyun Han, “Colonial Corporatism,” 78.

82. Yi Pong-gu’s “Mokhwa” (Cotton Flowers) (1938), 169.

83. Kim Yu-jŏng, “Ttŏk” (Rice cake) (1935), in *Chŏngt’ong hanguk munhak taegyŏ* (Collected Works of Modern Korean Literature), vol. 8 (Seoul: Omungak, 1994), 274-282.

84. Yi Ki-yŏng, “Noru” (A Deer) (1938), in *1920-1930nyŏndae minjung munhaksŏn*, vol. 1, 124-129.

85. Yi Puk-myŏng, “Yŏndolnam” (A Chimney Man) (1937), in *ibid.*, 304, 307.

Two stories, “The Spider with a Human Head” and “The Homecoming of Bellybutton Pak,” illustrate this ambivalence between ethnicization and its transcendence and between de-humanizing subalternization and humanizing resistance to it. “The Spider with a Human Head” is set at an expo where the narrator encounters this “monster.” The head, a face of a living man, is said to have handsome features with fashionable Western-style hair, while the rest of the creature’s body is that of a giant spider. The narrator, along with other visitors, marvels at this “Man-Spider from the South Seas.” When this Man-Spider spots our narrator, it begins to weep and tells its story. The astonishing monstrosity presented to the reader as the “riddle of Sphinx” is unveiled to us as no more than a victim of a mining accident in Japan whose amputated legs are dressed up in a spider costume for “five pennies” per viewing in a freak show. He is part of the ethnicized/colonized migrant labor force that was pulled into “*naeji*” (interior land), Japan. The story of the Man-Spider poses two riddles for us: first, the riddle of the (ethnicized) human body as the ultimate commodity in (colonial) capitalist modernity; and second, the riddle of infinite changeability and heterogeneity of the human form. The Man-Spider’s relationship with his “owner,” who provides him with a costume, a stage and opportunities for exhibition and collects the fees, illustrates to us, by an implicit parallel, the miraculous and mysterious commodification of formerly indentured peasant bodies into free wage-laborer bodies. The Man-Miner-turned-Man-Spider also points to the spectacularly resistive force in the very flexibility of the human form to change and thus to endure in the context of trans-ethnonational capitalist modernity.⁸⁶

“The Homecoming of Bellybutton Pak”⁸⁷ tells the story of a peasant who leaves his village with a dream of going to “*naeji*” and coming home a rich man. With many misadventures along the way, he never quite makes it to Japan, but he does manage to save up some money as a migrant worker drifting through many construction sites on the peninsula. As luck would have it, on his way back to his native village, he drowns in a flood. The story is structured as a first-person narrative of the peasant’s ghost addressing a fellow villager, the Elder Han, who came to fish in the river where Pak’s remains lie. The peasant-ghost’s narrative mixes humor and satire with a heartrending torrent of his bitterness and resentment against the injustices he suffered. His last plea with the Elder

86. Kye Yong-muk, “Indujju” (The Spider with a Human Head) (1928), in *Chōngt’ong hānguk munhak taegyē* (Collected Works of Modern Korean Literature), Vol. 6 (Seoul: Omungak, 1994), 291-296.

87. Kim Sŭng-gu, “Paekkopjaengi paksōbangŭi kwihyang” (The Homecoming of Bellybutton Pak) (1939), in *1920-1930nyōndae minjung munhaksŏn*, 327-336.

Han is to dig up his body from the bottom of the river and to retrieve the bag of coins he kept under his clothes and return it to his family. The peasant-ghost's story here compels us to conjure up an image of a bag of coins stuck between the bones of his chest under the flowing river. The ethnic proletarian body has now been literally transformed into its material worth, a bag of coins, but his proletarian consciousness has been turned into a supernatural force: his outcry to the Elder Han, "What did I do to deserve this fate?" echoes through the village. What is remarkable in both stories is these two peasant proletarian characters' voice of protest. They call out to their addressees/readers: The Man-Spider pleads, "Don't you recognize me? It's me, your friend..."; Bellybutton Pak calls out to a fellow villager, "Hey, Elder Han!"⁸⁸ The two proletarian ethnics, who have had to answer to the call of the ethnonation, empire and capitalism, have now become "protestant ethnics" who will interpellate others into the order of resistance.⁸⁹ These proletarian ethnics, now monstrous and supernatural, carnivalize the very structure of interpellation, calling out from both within and beyond the ethnonational and human boundary.

Postscript

In place of a conclusion, I would like to suggest the ways in which the problematic of intersecting articulations of ethnicity, class, nation and empire could further be extended beyond the colonial period and beyond the scope of this paper. This paper limits itself to representations of ethnic crossing within "Korean Literature" proper, excluding the more radical forms of de-constitution and re-constitution of "Korean" ethnicity that appear in literary works that would belong in other "national literatures," such as literatures of Korean Residents of Japan and Korean Americans, just to name a couple. These two literatures recently attracted a great deal of attention in a contemporary South Korea that began to re-imagine itself as the origin and center of globalized, diasporized pan-Korean ethnic communities. Literatures of Korean Residents in Japan and Korean Americans are also being inducted into the respective

88. Parts of this story have been lost to censorship. The edition of the story I use for this paper contains ellipses in several places, indicating deletion of ideas and references deemed subversive. However, it can be safely inferred that the conversation between the narrator and his friend, Man-Spider, deals with organizing the workers and their "education." Kye Yong-muk, "Indujiju" (The Spider with a Human Head), 291-296.

89. I am borrowing Rey Chow's term from *The Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

national canons in Japan and the United States, both of which started to make marginal adjustments to their simultaneously assimilationist and essentialist notions of race and ethnicity through policies of multiculturalism. In these diasporic texts, to the extent that the circumstances of migration and immigration necessitated further de-Koreanization and assimilation into the mainstream societies and required simultaneous re-Koreanization in the racist context, Korean ethnicity may be apprehended and lived in fundamentally different terms than how it is conceived “within” the boundary of Korea proper: “Koreanness” of diaspora remains to be further explored in conjunction with that of Korea “within.”

If the derogatory Japanese term, “*senjin*,” short for “*Chosenjin*” (Korean), that produced the previously unconceptualizable collective through ethnicization, became the very basis for resistive ethnonationalization of “Koreans” in the colonial period, a similar sense of racial inferiority continued to be the foundation of defensive ethnonationalism in the post-Liberation (1945) period under US neo-colonial hegemony. What is, however, grossly overlooked is that this anti-(neo-)colonial ethnonationalism was simultaneously accompanied by Koreans’ further ethnicization of other peoples and races: the resistive ethnonationalism premised itself upon a relational and hierarchized conception of ethnicities and races. Since the late 1980s when South Korea reached the status of subimperial power over China, Southeast Asia and as far as Mexico, where South Korean conglomerates re-located their production, South Korea positioned itself as a colonizing-ethnicizing power over these areas. The late 1980s also marked the end of two decades of intense anti-government and labor activism. This gradual process of political democratization and economic stabilization resulted in the simultaneous formation of a permanent underclass on the one hand and the trans-ethnonationalization of middle and upper classes on the other. Prior to the effective dissolution of the Student Movement, ethnonationalist Marxism had served a progressive purpose in furthering the cause of the South Korean rural and industrial proletariat, despite its inability to form international and trans-ethnoracial alliances. The disappearance of radical politics now left South Korean society in a state of acute contradictions: the growing rhetoric of essentialist global pan-Koreanism is becoming as prevalent and intense as South Korean bourgeoisie’s crossing-ethnicking assimilation into the global community of transnational elites; the mainstream’s unabashed ethnicist pride in its subimperialism abroad obliterates the shadowy presence of subalternized migrant workers from various parts of Asia in South Korea; the violent protest recently mounted against continuing US hegemony over the Korean peninsula—its military presence in South Korea and the national division as a residue of the Cold War—does not quite seem capable

of recognizing its own position that commits similar acts of domination over other races/ethnicities. It would not be unfair to say that except for a minority of critical voices, South Korea as a whole has been reluctant to grapple with the historicity of its contradictory position it has attained in the hierarchy of global capitalism. It needs to further reconcile its persisting sense of victimization and defensive ethnonationalism with its new role in the very production of anti-(sub)imperialist ethnonational resistance on the part of those whom they economically dominate.

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