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Under a South Korean Gaze:
Representations of Chosŏnjok

INTRODUCTION

In his book, Postmodernity's Histories: The Past as Legacy and Project (2000), Arif Dirlik discusses some of the problems presented by diaspora discourse relating to the peoples of Chinese descent, many of whom are leading uncertain lives in Korea. One of these problems is "the reification of Chineseness by erasure of the boundaries among different Chinese populations, and the contrary move to break down such reification through the notion of hybridity" (198). In order to deal with this issue, Dirlik emphasizes the importance

1 In the article, "Chosŏnjok, Standing by Oneself," the editorial department of Midri states: "Even though it has already been 20 years since the overseas Korean law has been established, the Korean-Chinese in Korea are still living a shaky life without the immigrant qualification (F-4) . . . There are more than 600 thousand Korean-Chinese living in Korea, and they have become one of the main groups of immigrants; however, our society still has not settled the issue whether they are Korean-Chinese or Chinese, and still trying to figure out whether countrymen policy or multicultural policy or foreigner policy should be applied" (119). The author also states "As of October 2011, the number of overseas Koreans living in Korea are 552,406, and the number of Korean-Chinese are 480,274 which is about 87% of the total figure . . . Still in Korea, Korean-Chinese are somewhere in between overseas Korean and foreign workers" (121).
of place and history against diasporic reification. Although Dirlik's theory has some application to the case of the Korean-Chinese, it also has its limitations. This is because Dirlik's theory deals with overseas Chinese who have settled in foreign countries, while the Korean-Chinese in Korea are immigrants who have settled in a nation whose ethnicity they share.

Nonetheless, Koreans themselves tend to think of Korean-Chinese in a complicated manner. One upshot of this is that when Korean-Chinese commit crimes, Koreans tend to attribute this to the “Chinese” aspect of their identity; when Koreans-Chinese are successful, Koreans tend to attribute this to the “Korean” part of their identity. As some Koreans make use of this distinctive feature of Korean-Chinese, the Korean-Chinese face a form of double persecution. Nonetheless, it seems plausible that with the understanding of place and history of the Korean-Chinese, this distinctive feature could also form the basis of a new community within Korea.

INTERPRETING THE WON-CHUN OH CASE

In Korea, the names of two members of the Korean-Chinese community have become well-known, but for very different reasons. These two cases help to understand the complicated nature of the reaction of ordinary Koreans to the Korean-Chinese community.

The first name is that of Won-Chun Oh. In April 2012, Oh was convicted of kidnapping, raping, and murdering a young woman in Suwon. This murder case was particularly shocking because the victim was subsequently dissected. At the time, there were suspicions that the dissection was for the supply of human meat. As a result, many Koreans accused the Korean-Chinese community of being a supplier and broker of human meat.

After the Won-Chun Oh murder case, the news headline was full of headlines about Korean-Chinese people, and the anti-Korean-Chinese sentiment surged in the wake of further rumors about other possible crimes committed by the Korean-Chinese community. What is

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2 In Korea, various rumors tend to circulate regarding the Korean-Chinese, including that on October 10th, Korean-Chinese people will come to Korea looking for human meat; that Korean-Chinese babysitters kidnap
interesting in all this avid attention is that not a single media outlet suggested the possibility that there might be Korean buyers for the human meat. Most of the stories dealt with the idea that the meat would be delivered to "barbarous" Chinese (or Korean-Chinese) consumers. Similarly, although the rumor that human meat capsule had been brought into Korea was revealed to be true, most media outlets argued that these human meat capsules were imported for consumption by the Korean-Chinese (or Chinese) working in Korea. In these cases, the crimes have been presented in the form of an ethnic conflict between Koreans and the Korean-Chinese community, with its links to China. In most of these cases, the Korean-Chinese community has come to share the negative connotations associated with "Chineseness." The headline titles reinforce this impression. At the beginning of the investigation, the media wrote about the Korean-Chinese community as "Chinese" or as "Chinese fellow countrymen"; it was only a few days later that they began to talk about the “Korean-Chinese.”

A similar example involves a murder case that took place on 6 October 2012. On the day following the murder, one headline read: "'What Are You Looking At!' Chinese Murderer Who Stabbed Customer in Restaurant is Apprehended." The title itself shows that the reporter considered the Korean-Chinese killer to be "Chinese." These titles prove that the Korean-Chinese community tends to be used by some Koreans to reify "Chineseness." What is more interesting is that many of the comments (probably from Korean readers) show that readers like these kind of headlines. This is because the reporter has drawn a line between Korean and Chinese, placing the Korean-Chinese community outside the boundaries of acceptable Korean behaviour. Moreover, just as in the Won-Chun Oh murder case, there were hundreds of comments that called for the deportation of the Korean-Chinese. In these examples, the murder case has turned into an ethnic conflict between Korea and China, and meanwhile the Korean-Chinese community has become a bridge that links Korean-Chinese identity with a stigmatized Chinese one.

and extract human organs; and that various unconfirmed murders are supposed to have been committed by Korean-Chinese individuals.

3 The TV program Lee Young-Don PD's Food X-File first aired the documentary regarding human meat capsules, capsules containing dried ground fetus. More recently, there have been various news reports discussing arrests that have been made regarding the sale of human meat capsules. A few articles that mentioned the buyers by stating: "according to requests from domestic buyers, the Korean-Chinese from northeastern cities in China has been smuggling human capsules."
In the United States, the John Huang case, which Dirlik analyzes, shows some remarkable parallels.

The problems presented by diaspora discourse may be illustrated through the recent case of John Huang, the Chinese American fund-raiser for the Democratic National Committee. When Huang was charged with corruption on the grounds that he raised funds from foreign sources, the Democratic National Committee proceeded immediately to canvass all contributors with Chinese names to ascertain whether or not they were foreigners, turning a run-of-the-mill case of political corruption into a racial issue. (175)

Here, Dirlik brings the example of John Huang and explains why he was so "useful." He argues that not only the government in Washington or U.S. transnational corporations but also the governments in Beijing or Taiwan have used diasporic Chinese for their own purposes (181). According to Dirlik, John Huang was useful to the U.S. media because he has helped to reify an alien sense of Chineseness (or Asianness) and functioned as a bridge to erase the cultural differences within the diasporic Chinese. Likewise, the Won-Chun Oh case and the restaurant killing show that the Korean media and government can use the Korean-Chinese community as a bridge or cultural interpreter for their own purposes. As a result, racism is provoked.

In order to understand the reason why some Koreans show hostility toward the Korean-Chinese community and regard Korean-Chinese criminals as "reified Chineseness" is partly because certain prejudices that some Koreans have toward the Chinese. The various Korean words that indicate the Chinese shows this; words such as "Toe-nom," "Tte-nom," "Tchang-kkae," and "Tchang-kkolla" all have negative connotations. One survey found that only 12% of the respondents regarded China positively, and since the Korean-Chinese have Chinese nationality, this kind of hostility tends to be projected onto the Korean-Chinese community as a whole. This phenomenon is related to the tendency of many Koreans to value Korean-Americans more than Korean-Chinese. Sang-Bok Ha's article helps explain this phenomenon:

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4 In the case of Internet media, highlighting “Korean-Chinese” tends to raise the number of clicks; in case of the government, by continuously exposing stimulating cases to the people, it can divert the people's attention from political matters.

5 This material comes from the article, "Korea 88%, China 90%, Japan 61%, Past History, Unsolved."

6 Possibly due to this reason, there have been many cases in which Korean Americans became famous entertainers in Korea, while before Chung-Gang Paek, there was not a single Korean-Chinese who has been welcomed by the Korean entertainment business.
Franz Fanon's thought . . . helps to explore racism with internalized white supremacy that is working as racial politics in the consciousness and everyday life of the Korean people after the end of the 19th century. And his examination also helps to understand that the acceptance and proliferation of western racialist perspectives in Korea are the result of Korean people having been won over to a 'coloniality of being and knowledge' constructed by eurocentric modernity. (555)

Here, Ha argues that due to the inferiority complex that Koreans began to have during the Japanese occupation and the Korean War, they have accepted Western (especially American) racial perspectives. Thus, he argues that the reason why Koreans have tended to treat people of colour with contempt and discrimination is because of the illusion that they are more “lactified” and therefore more civilized. This theory helps to explain why some Koreans regard the Korean-Chinese as primitive barbarians who consume human meat capsules.

It may also be possible that some Koreans are imitating Western perspectives toward China. To America, China is a kind of eyesore, which threatens the U.S.-centered New World Order. Moreover, China has developed quite differently from the West (Dialogues, 119), not to mention the fact that a large number of overseas Chinese in America have amassed fortunes. During the interview, Dirlik states that "modernity is a Euro-American creation, empowered by capitalism," and that "modernity can be conceived only in terms of Euro-American models" (Dialogues, 36). Adopting this Euro-American perspective, the media of the West labeled China as "backward" or "primitive." For example, the media cried out about the injustices that had been happening in China, such as the oppression of Tibet and the censorship of Google and YouTube. Though they advocate justice, it is also possible that behind the curtain, there are political or economic intentions that explain why China is labeled with the term "primitive" or "backward." The point here is that due to the illusion of some Koreans that they are lactified, it is possible that some Korean media may follow a similar perspective toward China. In this way, this perspective could influence their view of the Korean-Chinese community. However, there are also some voices of self-examination within the western academia. For example, though Bruce Robins admitted that labeling still

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7 This term comes from the word “lactification,” a term introduced by Frantz Fanon.
8 For detailed contents, refer to the articles “Dalai Lama Says China Has Turned Tibet Into a ‘Hell on Earth,’” "Violent Clashes Reported in China Over Mosque Demolition,” and "Interview: Sergey Brin on Google’s China Move."
9 For detailed contents, refer to the articles “분신으로 들끓는 티베트,” and “구글 창업자 브リン 사용 통제·검열로 인터넷 위기.”
persists when discussing China, "after the genocidal horrors perpetrated by Europeans and Americans in the process of colonization and in the Second World War, Europeans and Americans have forfeited any right to call anyone else 'primitive or backward'" (Dialogues, 185-6). In the same vein, Koreans should ask the question whether they are qualified to label the Korean-Chinese in the same way.

INTERPRETING THE CHUNG-GANG PAEK CASE

The second important Korean-Chinese name is that of Chung-Gang Paek. Paek is a member of the Korean-Chinese community who won first prize in the TV program Star Audition: The Great Birth in 2011. This was the first time that a Korean-Chinese had attempted to succeed in the world of Korean entertainment, and some say that his ethnicity contributed to his victory (Joongang Ilbo). Koreans who heard about Paek's unfortunate childhood felt sympathy for him and the fact that he was a poor Korean-Chinese made it more dramatic. In contrast to the murder cases, many Koreans have shown positive attitudes toward Paek. To many Koreans, who sympathize with Paek, the word "Korean-Chinese" reminds them of a poor group of people who have a similar ethnicity to theirs. After Paek's victory, many people viewed it as the 'Korean Dream come true,' and many Korean-Chinese cried out: "Paek has given dreams to his fellow countrymen" (Joongang Ilbo).

The concept of the 'Korean Dream' which began in the late 1980s when Korean-Chinese living in China believed that since they had a (relatively) wealthy home country, they might also become rich by coming to Korea. However, though there are various cases that show successful Korean-Chinese, most Korean-Chinese who have come to Korean in search of the Korean Dream, have ended up in large amounts of debt. They have also had to deal with such issues as mental suffering and illness, fake marriage and divorce, hunger and begging, unemployment and prison. Moreover, it can be seen that the concept of the Korean Dream itself has been used in a variety of incompatible ways. For example, in People who Have Created the Korean-Chinese Myth, the author states: "two million and four hundred thousand Korean-Chinese, 530 thousand overseas Goryeo, and 900 thousand Korean Japanese share

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10 During the live broadcast, the contenders had to win the approval of both the judge and the audience; a contender who gained a favorable impression from the audience had the advantage.
the suffering and sorrow from the era of Japanese Rule. Therefore, understanding the overseas Koreans' lives means understanding our own people's history, and has a lot to do with our future" (3). The author therefore insists that by reading the various successful Korean-Chinese stories, Koreans can confirm their own ethnic identity and feel pride and dignity, realizing that the Korean-Chinese community is a valuable ‘asset.’\(^{11}\) Similarly, in *Korean Traditional Private Houses in China*, the author shows various private houses of the Korean-Chinese in Yanbian city, and insists that their excellence proves that our brothers have shown their ability to overcome hardship and have retained their pride as Korean communities. Additionally, as the Korean-Chinese are well known for their zeal for education, the illiteracy rate of Korean-Chinese has been the lowest of all the minority races in China; and this fact has also been a source of Korean pride showing that all Koreans are intelligent.\(^{12}\) These examples show that some Koreans and the Korean government are using Korean-Chinese in order to speak of their own pride and dignity.

**CONCLUSION**

Even though the cases of the murderer Oh and the singer Paek illustrate the twin dangers of the Korean-Chinese community being used as a bridge either to reify a sense of Chinese-ness or Korean-ness, if carefully handled, the bridge could become beneficial to both. In order to do so, it would be helpful to look into Dirlik’s alternative and its limitations. As a solution to the problem presented by diaspora discourse, Dirlik discusses the alternative of focusing more on place and history. It seems that this question of place and history should be taken into consideration when dealing with the Korean-Chinese as well. For instance, history can offer reasons why some Koreans show hostility toward the Korean-Chinese. During the Korean War, South Koreans and Korean-Chinese regarded each other as enemies. Even today, the war has not ended, and North and South Korea are only in a state of armistice. What this

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\(^{11}\) The writer of the book *Ten Incidents of Korean-Chinese that Happened in the Twentieth Century* also uses the word “asset” to describe the Korean-Chinese: “We have more than five million and five hundred thousand overseas Koreans as asset, but had no composure to look back at them. The conflict between North and South Korea has worsen the case. However, our overseas Koreans have always wished to be at service when our country was in crisis” (6).

\(^{12}\) It is said that the Korean-Chinese themselves also have pride in their ethnicity and differentiate themselves from other mainland Chinese. This is one of the reasons why many Korean-Chinese did not allow their children to marry other Chinese.
means is that the word Chosŏnjok and the accents found within the community, which remind South Koreans of North Korea, could arouse feelings of wariness. Moreover, some Koreans' acceptance of the western racial perspectives could also create problems for the Korean-Chinese. As such, the different history of the Koreans and Korean-Chinese provides reasons why there has been a gap between the two; however, it can also show why they should mend fences. They share the same ethnicity, they share similar suffering. Both the Koreans who remained on the Korean Peninsula, and the Korean-Chinese, whether they emigrated voluntarily or forcefully, suffered from colonial rule. Moreover, both of them were affected and abused by the various national powers surrounding them.

Though Dirlik's theory helps in understanding the Korean-Chinese community, his alternative of focusing on place and history has its limitations. As Dirlik’s argument that overseas Chinese should not be considered the same as the Chinese living in China, the Korean-Chinese living in different places should not be considered as one group of people. Nonetheless, according to Kwang-Suk Park, there is also a sense of a de-local and transnational community among the Korean-Chinese with the advancement of the Internet and transportation. In this case, the issue of space might mean little. Moreover, the question of space might not work when applied to various classes of Korean-Chinese. For example, most poor Korean-Chinese coming to Korea cannot pay their brokers, get into debt quickly and find themselves in situations that stop them from leaving Korea while they work to repay their debts and scrape together some extra money. On the other hand, the so-called New Chosŏnjok, who do have enough money, tends to move freely between the national borders. Thus, it seems that the question of place might not cover the case of the high class

13 The word "Chosŏn," which come from Chosŏnjok, reminds South Koreans of North Korea since its official name is Chosŏn Minjujuŭi Inmin Gonghwaguk (Democratic People’s Republic of Korea). However, this is not the reason why Korean-Chinese are called Chosŏnjok. The actual reason is that after the Communist Party succeeded in unifying China, the Korean-Chinese were able to obtain Chinese citizenship. As a consequence, the Chosŏn-in (Chosŏn people), which was used during the era of Japanese rule, was transformed into the new designation used by the Chinese government (Kwon, 124).
14 The various powers that have attempted to influence the development of the Korean-Chinese community include China, the Soviet Union, Japan, North Korea, and South Korea.
15 For example, Kwang-Suk Park explains the differences between the Korean-Chinese working in Korea and the Korean-Chinese working in Chengdu (249), while the news article “Beyond the Pacific Ocean, ‘Sorrow of the Nail Shop’” shows the lives of Korean-Chinese working in the U.S., which is different from either the Korean-Chinese living in Korea or China. Moreover, the Korean-Chinese working in Japan tends to have more high-quality resources than the Korean-Chinese working in Korea who usually work in 3D (Dirty, Dangerous, Difficult) jobs.
16 Moreover, the exclusive identity of the Korean-Chinese community, which is argued by Kwon, could also be the reason why Korean-Chinese have retained a separate identity (138).
Korean-Chinese.\textsuperscript{17}

Many scholars argue that the Korean-Chinese would be a great help when reunifying North and South Korea. They believe that North Koreans might be more open to the Korean-Chinese, since throughout history they have helped each other out.\textsuperscript{18} According to a recent survey, the Korean-Chinese do not particularly favor one side or other,\textsuperscript{19} which makes them perfect middleman. Moreover, since the Korean-Chinese also live on the border with Korea and China, they could also form a bridge between the two countries. Many scholars agree that China will become the biggest rival of the U.S., and that Korea should go between the two in order to survive. It is said that due to discrimination in Korea, many Korean-Chinese elites have moved to other countries to succeed. This is an unfortunate loss for both Koreans and the Korean-Chinese. If South Korea can embrace these human resources, it might open a totally new situation for East Asia. Due to the unique features of the Korean-Chinese community, the strict binary between the Korean-Chinese and Koreans, seems impossible. While the issue of nationality and space becomes less important, it seems that the possibility of a “Complex Korean Community” can be suggested. This community may consist of Koreans who share the same ethnicity, including Koreans, the Korean-Chinese, Korean-Japanese and other overseas Koreans. Though there needs to be more study of whether this community could become an alternative, if based on the understanding of each overseas Korean community's history and space, this complex may provide for better relations for everyone in the future.

\textsuperscript{17} This does not mean that Dirlik overlooked the concept of class. Dirlik argues that class is an important factor that should not be passed over, and in fact the reason why he raises "the question of place is to raise the issue of difference on a whole range of fronts, including those of class, gender, and ethnicity" (192).
\textsuperscript{18} For example, in Zhang Lu’s movie \textit{Dooman River} (2009), the Korean-Chinese villagers help the North Koreans when they ask for shelter and food. The movie director said that among the real villagers, there were no families that had not helped the North Koreans at one time or another.
\textsuperscript{19} When asked which country they prefer, more than 56% of them answered that they like both. What is more interesting is that when asked to what country they would like to belong, about 23% of them answered a unified Korea (Jung, 162). Though about 73% answered China, considering that more than 96% of the Korean-Chinese think their homeland is China, this outcome may mean something.
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