

Manly Colors

Masculinity and Mobility among Globalizing Korean Men

Alex Jong-Seok Lee

South Korea and its mobile citizens provide a fruitful point of entry for observing how US-based racial hierarchies shift and circulate through and against transnationally and locally inflected ideologies of race, nation, gender, and sexuality. This article explores how the Korean state's aspirations for global significance and regional dominance express themselves as staged presentations of ostensibly superior Asian masculinity at home (in Asia) and abroad (in the West).¹ Against the backdrop of the South Korean state's zealous globalizing efforts, cisheteronormative Korean men increasingly assert aspirational Korean masculinities within a transnational field of ranked races and nations.² Korean males' complex and contingent proximities to whiteness demonstrate how state efforts to transform the image of South Korea from a notoriously inhospitable "backward country" (*hujin'guk*) to a welcoming "advanced country" (*sŏnjin'guk*) play out in diverse everyday contexts.³ In making this claim, I follow recent scholarship on men in contemporary Asia that stresses the need for analyzing masculinity through the lens of sexuality and desire.⁴ Additionally, this article extends the analysis of practices that transgress the socially constructed boundaries of heteronormative masculinity (e.g., homosocial bonding) beyond the realm of sexuality-defined gay masculinities.⁵

These themes appear in vivid relief within different forms of popular culture. An illustration of their key tropes is on display in the film *Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story*.⁶ Save for its foregrounding of a nonwhite subject, an Asian American male, *Dragon* is standard Hollywood biopic fare. The film largely follows the conventions of the genre—attractive actors, impressive set pieces, and a familiar story about personal triumph over seemingly impossible odds—but features Bruce Lee, the late Asian American icon, as its protagonist.⁷ Slavishly

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coloring its long-deceased protagonist with hagiographic strokes, the film was officially sanctioned by Lee's widow, Linda Lee Cadwell—further adding to its putative authenticity (as well as its predictable cisheteronormativity). Yet *Dragon* also presents surprisingly astute scenes depicting the workings of transnational race, gender, and sexuality throughout Lee's life.

It is 1959 and the young San Francisco-born Lee (played by Hawaiian/Chinese American Jason Scott Lee) is filled with hopes and dreams of America.⁸ In an early scene in the film, Lee's father decides to send his son abroad for exhibiting *too much* masculine swagger.⁹ Lee has no doubt that the (cisheteronormative) masculinity that defined him in Hong Kong, to which his family migrated when he was a baby, will sustain him in his natal country, the United States.¹⁰ In another scene Lee walks through the large freighter that carries him and other immigrants to San Francisco. Cocksure and grinning, he sits next to an older Asian man (Clyde Kusatsu) and says, "You speak English? I'm practicing my English. Going to America!" Brandishing a large black-and-white poster of James Dean that had earlier hung in his Hong Kong bedroom, Lee continues, "I've always wanted to go to America. James Dean! French fries. . . . Sky's the limit, that's what they say." Jaded, the older man replies, "Not a Chinaman's chance. They say that, too. You ever hear that?" "No," Lee answers. "You know, the Chinese, we built the railroads there. The Americans, the *gweilo*, would lower Chinaman over the cliff in baskets to set the dynamite. Get pulled up too slow. Bang! Rope break. Bye. . . . Americans say, 'Not a Chinaman's chance.' And a round-eyed *gweilo* would laugh. We're not human to them."¹¹ Defiant, Bruce responds, "Well, things are different now. It's today!" "Sure, sure, maybe," the man replies. The scene cuts to hands dumping dirty dishes into hot water. Panning up, the camera reveals a solemn and sweating Lee. It is 1962 and he is another invisible Chinatown dishwasher in the city of his birth. Lee's earlier words have betrayed him.¹²

In subsequent scenes (as in real life), Lee achieves a measure of assimilationist success in the United States. He attends the University of Washington; marries Cadwell, a white US American woman; and establishes one of the first martial arts schools in the country.¹³ After repeated rejections in Hollywood, however, Lee pursues his film career back in Asia. In a scene in Hong Kong, Lee explains to his homesick wife why he will not return to his birthplace: "I worked in America for ten years, and what did it get me? They got such a good line of bullshit. Come and get it, America the mountain of gold. It's for everybody. Yeah, it's for everybody white! But they don't tell you that. You got to read the small print. If you can read." Pushed by Cadwell to return to the United States, Bruce explodes, "This place [Hong Kong] is giving us a life. I'm somebody. I'm special. Back there, I'm just another gook! Just another wetback, Charlie Chan, slopehead coolie dishwasher in a stinking chinky restaurant!"¹⁴ Consumed by unresolved rage, Lee smashes a closet door while screaming, "Is that who I am? Is it? Tell me that's who

I am?” Shocked, his wife answers, “I don’t know who the hell you are anymore. Do you?” Within a few years, Lee would come to represent a certain kind of aspirational masculinity for Asians and non-Asians alike. But his journey toward such immortality, as evidenced in this scene, was marked by larger structures of power and inequality made legible by his transnational presence.

Lee’s story (as stylized through filmic conventions) addresses the central theme of this article: how race, nation, gender, and sexuality uniquely function for men of Asian descent. It also recognizes the imperative to analyze how racial formation emerges through cisheteronormative masculinity outside the United States. Noting these analytic intersections challenges the claim that studying Asian masculinities vis-à-vis ostensibly bounded white Western ones is necessarily an Orientalizing trope that ignores seemingly untouched epistemological layers of Asia-based masculine subject formation.¹⁵ Recognizing indigenous understandings of men and masculinities in Asia is crucial. Nevertheless, my study suggests that this view may function to reproduce a fixed distinction between masculinity constructions in Asia and the West (or, similarly problematic, the idea of a symmetrical form of hybrid Asian/white Western hybrid masculinity) rather than recognizing the historically imbricated and contentious nature of both. As Lisa Lowe argues, “There has been an important continuity between the considerable distortion of social relations in Asian countries affected by US imperialist war and occupation and the emigration of Asian labor to the United States throughout the last century.”¹⁶ In a similar vein, Gary Okihiro asserts that ethnic studies must be anchored to critiques of the United States while also adhering to its earlier post-1968 ethos to remain “necessarily global.”¹⁷ Consequently, I aim to extend the analytic boundaries and potentials of ethnic studies within the context of transnational South Korea.

This article argues two points: first, South Korean men aiming to restore perceived affronts to their masculinity and South Korea’s self-perceived lower global rank reveal novel ways gendered racism and cisheteronormativity consolidate through globalized nationalism. Second, despite possessing subversive potential, these new modes of cisheteronormative Korean masculinity reconfigure and largely reinscribe normative hierarchies around race, nation, gender, and sexuality under the gloss of interracial/international/intraethnic appreciation (i.e., *damunhwa*, or multiculturalism) in contemporary South Korea.

Methodologically, this article draws on media analysis and select ethnographic vignettes that I gathered when I was in Seoul, South Korea, as an English-language instructor, Korean nongovernmental organization worker, and freelance journalist (2006–2009), as well as a dissertation fieldworker (2014–2015) befriending outwardly cisgender, heterosexual middle-class Korean men in their twenties to forties.¹⁸

“The Closest Friends”: Koreans and “The Beautiful Country”¹⁹

Frequently heralded for its spectacularly swift economic development, South Korea has embraced and escalated a state-sanctioned campaign to globalize its economic, political, and cultural influence. Much of the urgency behind this national(ist) project is attributable to three factors: South Korea’s early 1990s government-sponsored globalization policy (*segzehwa*), its late 1990s neoliberal restructuring precipitated by the 1997 Asian financial crisis, and its late 2000s Global Korea campaign. Regarding *segzehwa*, South Korea was one of only a few countries to initiate a globalization policy expressly proposed and directed by the state.²⁰ The stated objective of *segzehwa* was to project a new national identity of South Korea as a “world class advanced nation” (*sŏnjin’guk*) instead of a backward country (*hujin’guk*).²¹ On July 26, 1995, then president Kim Young-sam (1993–1998) communicated this transformation to a joint session of US Congress as a natural progression. He described South Korea as “a country which began with nothing but bare hands and courage, but managed to achieve democratization and industrialization in a short period of time, a country now proudly marching out toward the world and into the future.” Drawing on the familiar motif of the country’s miraculous postwar success, Kim positioned the United States as having “always stood beside [Koreans]” to “buil[d] Korea into the country it is today, with blood, sweat and tears.”²²

The Asian financial crisis signaled an even greater direct influence by the United States in Korean affairs, this time under the guise of neoliberal reforms. Despite recording unprecedented economic growth since the end of the Korean War (1950–1953)—enough to earn a place as one of the region’s “Asian Tiger” economies—South Korea experienced what most Koreans consider the most traumatic national crisis since the Korean War. On December 3, 1997, the nation that had had the world’s eleventh largest economy became the recipient of the largest bailout in International Monetary Fund (IMF) history.²³ IMF-imposed structural and institutional reforms sought to discipline capital against the seemingly inevitable outcome of what David Kang deems “irrational” Confucian (or more pejoratively crony) capitalism.²⁴ Equally profound, the crisis paved the way for the culture industries of the United States, especially Hollywood, to penetrate a once resistant Korean consumer market via favorable trade agreements. More recently, the foreign policy initiative Global Korea boosted South Korea into worldwide focus. Initiated by former right-wing president Lee Myung-bak (2008–2013), Global Korea (not unlike its ideological forerunner, *segzehwa*) represented an assemblage of institutions, ideas, images, and people around ideas of global Koreanness.²⁵ But critics of the policy viewed the campaign as an elitist, state-led reappraisal of South Korea’s national interests that rested its objectives on securing sustained economic growth in Asia.²⁶ This meant subimperial economic and cultural infiltration—chiefly through ideo-

logical tactics like the Korean Wave (*Hallyu*) culture industries—into Southeast (and to a lesser degree, South) Asian countries deemed inferior.²⁷

Such state-led impulses are decipherable through discourses of cishetero-normative Korean masculinity, which link masculinities to the strength of a nation to reproduce nationalist imperatives.²⁸ Within this schema, Korean masculinity's prowess vis-à-vis the world becomes possible through the regulation of other racialized, gendered, and sexualized subjects, such as women, LGBTQ-IA+ communities, international migrants, and the disabled.²⁹ Today, “global” (*külloböl*) has become a metonym for *sönjin'guk* status, two Korean keywords whose combined usage binds certain ways of seeing places and people in the world as desirable or undesirable.³⁰ Discourses of modernity and progress on the peninsula have a long-standing association with an imagined West, predominantly the United States. Yoo Sun-Young writes how during Korea's period of colonization under Japan (1910–1945), modernization meant almost by definition a link with the United States:

In Korea during the colonial period, modernization meant an aspiration for the wealth and power of nation and was hence identified with westernization itself. The desired change was to create a new life-world that included, on an individual level, copying and mimicking new “modern” bodily gestures, ways of speech, facial expressions, languages and outlooks. In a colonial situation, however, models of mimicking the significant other had to come from the West, the authentic origin of modernity, and secondly it had to continuously provide such ideal types of models for mimicking. The two conditions were best met with American modernity during that time in Korea. With its unprecedented and miraculous success of Protestant evangelism in Korea, with its well-known prosperous “New World” image, with its modern sense of jazz music, and with its compelling and most favoured entertainment of Hollywood movies to the colonized Koreans, America continuously provided, although it was fragmented, the way to visualize the modern—gestures, expressions, body movements, and poises and accents—as well as how to express it with new terms, human relations and values.³¹

This model of the United States as an object of respect (but also of periodic resentment) exists throughout Korea's twentieth-century modern history.³² For instance, after World War II, the United States symbolized the victory of capitalist might, ostensibly saving the southern portion of a recently partitioned Korea from the evils of a Soviet-backed communist North. The United States as a metonym for heroically saving a war-torn South Korea from a brutal Japanese colonial aggressor remains a recurrent political theme within Korean-US relations.³³ Today, many older Koreans recount stories of friendly

Racial Desire

Unlike earlier representations of aspirational Asian masculinity, restricted to emblems of brute physicality—Lee’s aggrieved fighting or Korean soldiers’ savagery—today’s depictions of exemplary Korean men are softer. This reflects the country’s capitalist evolution from developmental production to consumption, a trend made stronger after late capitalist reforms in the 1990s. Specifically, South Korea has elevated itself through neoliberal visions of cosmopolitan cool, entrepreneurial freedom, and power by association. The dynamics of cisheteronormative Korean masculinity today made global are progressively evoked through a reconciliation of select racial/national differences. In a gesture reminiscent of former President Kim’s fraternal tone with the United States, the following example of global Korean masculinity extends the durable Korean association of modernity and progress with the West and its fantasy incarnations.

It was late December 2017 and I was arriving in Incheon International Airport, South Korea’s award-winning monument to (ambivalent and contradictory) modernity.⁴⁵ Around me were other non-Korean foreigners, mostly US Americans and Canadians. In line for the customs inspection, I noticed multiple flat-screen TVs designed by Samsung.⁴⁶ A commercial for the latest Samsung Galaxy Note 8 phone was showing on a loop.

The advertisement features a romance of sorts between two men, one ostensibly Korean and the other white Western—both presumably straight.⁴⁷ It is part of a growing media trend of depicting South Koreans mingling with phenotypically identifiable Westerners (i.e., whites). The commercial opens with a black screen with a dim light in the center. The scene cuts forward to reveal a small LED lantern held by a young white man wearing camping gear. The sound of rain around them, a young Korean man holds a Samsung smartphone as he watches his foreign companion cook on a portable burner. Soothing piano music plays in the background as the Korean man stares at his phone screen. Stylus in hand, he crosses off “sleep in a tent” from many other items on his “Faroe Islands Bucket List.”⁴⁸ Subsequent scenes show the two men engaging in homo-social bonding: backpacking along scenic European roads, savoring local meals, photo-hunting puffins with their phone cameras, and enjoying island vistas. In the final scene, the two observe the verdant cliffs around them. The Korean man writes Korean text on a picture of himself on his phone: “In a bigger world, we can dream bigger dreams” (*Tö k’ün sesangesö tö k’ün kkumül kkunda*).⁴⁹ The camera pans out to display the resplendent lake Leitisvatn. The Korean man shouts in triumph. Uplifting music swells and more Korean text is shown: “In all moments, be the most you can be” (*Modün sun’ganül kajang nadapke*). In English, the final tagline appears: “Do bigger things: Galaxy Note 8.”

The likely cisheteronormative Korean figure featured in the Samsung commercial is a man of the world. In contrast to Lee’s feeble claim (“Things are dif-

ferent now. It's today!"), *this* Asian man has materialized a once unobtainable Asian dream. Whereas Lee was a tragic Hong Kongese American figure of a less developed time, this modern Korean man freely moves through a singularly developed present. The technological marker of modernity he carries (his Korean phone) is buttressed by his proximity to manifest Westernness: his rugged white friend.⁵⁰ While the stakes are lower than for the Korean soldiers seeking to prove their superiority over other physiognomically similar Asian (Vietnamese) men, Korean men can now ascend a globalized hierarchy of cisheteronormative masculinity by corroborating their manhood via the validation of higher-ranking white (and sometimes what Mia Tuan calls "honorary white") Western men.⁵¹ In the commercial, the juxtaposition of a Korean man and a white Western man is not surprising. As Nancy Abelmann observes, "Associations of enlightenment and modernity with the West [chiefly, the United States] are old stories in the modern history of East Asia, and particularly so for postcolonial South Korea, asserting its place in the world in the aftermath of Japanese colonialism and in relation to the imperial presence of the United States."⁵² Westernness embodied by white (or at times proximate white: e.g., diasporic Western people of color) bodies materializes as the teleological direction toward which fantasies of individual escape and national progress credibly follow.⁵³ That other subordinate countries in the region have begun designating global *Koreanness* through Korean bodies as a sign of aspirational desire—for example, Korean media describing a Korean Dream among brown color-coded Southeast Asian male migrant laborers and female marriage migrants—evidences the global stratification of racialized developmental desire.

During South Korea's postwar economic development, projecting an image of prosperity that privileged big business at the expense of the masses helped to maintain popular consent to the authoritarian regime.⁵⁴ Borrowing from the developmentalist and nationalistic discourse of government propaganda, advertisements by government-colluding conglomerates were an effective means of projecting the fantasy images of an "affluent, equitable future" where entrepreneurship was a patriotic activity.⁵⁵ Today, the economic and political context is different. In contrast to the earlier Lee era, markers of desirable Asian masculinity express themselves more in terms of sophisticated leisure and conspicuous consumption than in overt displays of virility and defiance (i.e., Lee's kung fu fighting). That is, the Galaxy Note 8 commercial promotes the market-driven fantasy that South Korea's select dominance within the global smartphone industry can transfer its power to smart consumers who affectively invest in and identify with the nation's products. In turn, a once valorized masculinity attributed to the crude state-mandated manufacturing and production ethos of South Korea's industrial era has shifted to the country's market-driven, postdevelopmental-era climate of entrepreneurial flexibility and investment. Brute displays of manliness still manifest, particularly in Korean media performances of men

that replicate the staging of tough-guy bravado. But since the late 1990s, the legacy of South Korean *segyehwa* neoliberal reforms emphasizes more malleable traits like individual pleasure and leisure over collective patriotism and labor.

The power of globalized, cisheteronormative Korean masculinity depends on marginalizing certain identity categories surrounding race, nation, gender, and sexuality, namely cisgender women, LGBTQIA+ communities, and international migrants. This theme of selective visibility and invisibility of certain groups deemed desirable or undesirable is increasingly common in Korean media. The Korean TV show *The Heirs/The Inheritors* (*Sangsogjadeul*) is one example.⁵⁶ A hit among Koreans and one of South Korea's most successful shows across Asia, *The Heirs/The Inheritors* rode the (Korean) wave of *Hallyu*, the state-sanctioned, soft-power strategy of mass popular cultural exports. The show dramatizes familial conflicts among competing conglomerates (*chaeböl*). Representing youthful incarnations of South Korean global exports like Samsung are attractive male and female protagonists. But from the opening scene there is little doubt that Korean success is imagined in androcentric, cisheteronormative terms. Energetic rock music sets the scene while quick edits cue California clichés: the Hollywood sign, a packed Santa Monica beach, and a trio of handsome male surfers. One of the most talented surfers is Kim Tan (Lee Min-ho), tall, muscled, and effortlessly manly. On his right are two broad-shouldered white male surfers. Two attractive bikini-clad white women next to him round out this mesmerizing multicultural ensemble. Here, the audience witnesses an uncommon transracial twist on the cliché of the cool Californian as blonde and blue-eyed. Kim exudes a cocksure self-assurance evocative of Lee's earlier misplaced confidence on the US-bound freighter. However, *Korean* Kim is an evolved representation: he is the apotheosis of Asian (realized here as Korean) success in the United States.

In a voiceover, Kim explains that he was exiled to the United States, away from his brother, who conspires to take over the family business. In this narration, he distinguishes himself from the many less desirable Korean youth economically compelled to seek mobility by studying or working in the United States (as well as in Canada and Australia).⁵⁷ Likewise, unlike the similarly exiled Hong Kong native Lee, who failed decades prior, *Korean* Kim effortlessly translates, indeed consolidates, his cisheteronormative (man)power beyond Asia.⁵⁸ The series follows Kim's US adventures, mainly his supposedly saving a poor, broken-English-speaking young Korean woman, Cha Eun-sang (Park Shin-hye). Correspondingly, Cha herself is in Los Angeles to save her older sister from an abusive white US boyfriend. In several scenes, Kim is depicted helping a homeless Cha from the corrupting dangers of racialized, gendered, and sexualized US life. For example, Kim comes to the rescue when an African American male police officer interrogates Cha over a suspicious white powder (actually, a Korean grain mix) in her possession, as well as when sexually aggressive white

US American men try to seduce her. Here, Korean cisheteronormativity manifests in the preservation of pure ethnic/racial categories and feminine morality while encountering the seemingly contaminating qualities of foreign male influence. In these instances, Kim's construction of his masculinity in the United States is outwardly agentic. As exemplified in that first scene at the beach, Kim is the protagonist of his global story. No longer the envy of only his Korean peers, he has become a "public consumer object available for visual consumption by [an audience of global] others."⁵⁹ His cisheteronormative Korean masculine authority is enhanced by his proximity to embodiments of "authentic origin[s] of modernity"—white male and female US Americans—while concomitantly sanctioning the boundaries of this enhancement so it is the terrain only of men like himself.⁶⁰ Sustaining this gendered policing adds to the precarity of his aspirational manhood. Except for Kim's incredible wealth, he can reap the cisheteronormative benefits of his imagined global masculinity only insofar as Western men and women, predominantly white, find him attractive. Likewise, Kim's ostensibly positive chivalry toward Cha is instantiated only within his role as her consistent protector in a West that historically emasculates Asian men. I turn to this theme next.

Racial Disappointment

The Galaxy Note 8 advertisement and the fictional character of Kim visually represent—and symbolically affirm—the modernizing (currently globalizing) ambitions of a surrogate white Western, subimperial nation in Asia.⁶¹ The juxtaposition of masculine-assigned Korean bodies with markers of familiar spatial (e.g., US and European) and corporeal (e.g., identifiably white) Westernness aligns with ongoing South Korean-US economic, political, and military interests. For example, then president Kim remarked at the dawn of *seggyehwa* policies in front of the US Congress in 1995,

The success of [South Korea's] republic is a joint victory of the people of Korea and the United States. . . . This has been made possible by the U.S. long-term maintenance of stability and peace within the region. For the Asia-Pacific era to fully blossom, the United States must continue to play this role. . . . I am certain that you will recognize these sentiments, for they are the same as those which forged the American spirit and built such a great nation in the New World. Let us march forward together, shoulder to shoulder.⁶²

Kim's deferential tone, representing the United States as a necessary, even favorable, foreign presence in South Korea, is not entirely surprising. More consequential, however, is his invocation of the legacy of US American settler colo-

nialism, sanitizing it of its historical violence and rhetorically positioning South Korea as a staunch supporter (even student) of US empire.

In the last decade, representations of Westerners (predominantly white American but also white British) have proliferated. Along with the ubiquitous imported Hollywood blockbusters and arthouse actors, South Korea has produced its own homegrown foreign Western celebrities. Most have emerged out of a genre of popular reality, travel, and talk shows showcasing Western foreigners (usually white and male) mingling with Korean celebrities. Most famously, recent shows like *Gossiping Beauties* (*Minyödürüi Suda*) and *Non-summit* (*Pijöngsanghoedam*) demonstrate a noticeably gendered dynamic of racial and national representation in the country.⁶³ Staged in the spirit of a vibrant variety show, *Gossiping Beauties* features rows of non-Korean women discussing their foreign experiences in South Korea with an accompanying panel of Korean women and men as well as audience members. Although framed primarily as a groundbreaking show discussing cultural differences, the publicized spectacle of so-called beautiful foreign women speaking in Korean was arguably the show's greatest appeal. In contrast, *Non-summit* is a more solemn affair. Featuring an all-male cast of Koreans engaging with men from around the world, the show presents formally dressed panelists sitting at a T-shaped table, evoking the atmosphere of a United Nations–sanctioned conference. Multiple flags from around the world surround the all-male celebrities as they discuss issues as broad as differing modes of transportation to inter-Asian relations; significantly, no larger audience and accompanying laugh-track is present, unlike in the lighter-fare *Gossiping Beauties*.⁶⁴ The multiseason *Non-summit* was praised for raising the level of intercultural discussion in the country while simultaneously confronting racial stereotypes. Yet both *Gossiping Beauties* and *Non-summit* served a similar neoliberal multiculturalist role in allaying national anxieties over racial and national others encroaching into South Korea. They projected a postracial, color-blind fantasy that minimized racism by North Americans (as well as Europeans and Australians) against transnational Koreans. In turn, Koreans could project their country (particularly its stereotypically chauvinistic men) as the vanguard of growing multicultural tolerance. Yet the experiences of the cisheteronormative Korean men I met deviated from this positive projection.

I arrived in Seoul, South Korea, in the summer of 2005, first as a Korean language learner and later as an English language teacher. I quickly learned that George Lipsitz's acute observation that "whiteness has cash value" had literal significance in Asia.⁶⁵ "English fever," coupled with a loosely regulated private education market, had produced new classes of preferential difference in the Korean labor market.⁶⁶ Although the complexity of their experiences inspires further analysis, white Westerners occupy the highest rungs of the foreign labor market due to their emblematic power to instantiate South Korea's global aspirations.⁶⁷ The borders of this racialized "white privilege" extend to many opti-

cally Korean American (*chaemigyop'o*), Korean Canadian, Korean European, and Korean Australian cisheteronormative men. Korean American men like myself have benefited the most from generally positive perceptions, as well as visa policies that blatantly favor North American and European “overseas Koreans” (*tongp'o*).⁶⁸ This financial and social incentive is unavailable to most other diasporic Koreans, especially those from lesser-appraised countries like China, Russia, or Japan.⁶⁹ Similarly, my privileged status as a US American–accented, native English-speaking, cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied *chaemigyop'o* man afforded less tangible benefits like presumed Korean cultural fluency (following Korean logics of belonging based on myths of ethnoracial pure blood), and therefore, greater imagined cultural connection with Koreans in comparison with non-Korean foreigners. Ambiguously inhabiting a Korean emic category between full and partial Korean membership, *chaemigyop'o* men can avoid scrutiny and stigmatization as recognizable, and therefore sometimes threatening, non-Korean foreign men. The benefits of this quasi-Korean native passing often translate into social and sometimes sexualized admiration (from various gender and sexuality identities in South Korea). These *chaemigyop'o* male privileges were inaccessible even to white Western men, further complicating the contingent mechanics of privilege based on race, nation, gender, and sexuality in South Korea.

At the time my roommate was a forty-something, cisheteronormative, middle-class Korean man named Peter.⁷⁰ He explained that he had temporarily separated from his Korean wife to dedicate himself to intensive English language study. Knowing me and receiving my sporadic English lessons were integral to his aspirational project of gaining fluency in the English language and US culture. Frequently, Peter related the details of his daily life as a middle-management employee at the Seoul-based US embassy and consulate. Save for a thick Southern Gyeongsang-do accent, his English was flawless.⁷¹ But Peter expressed deep insecurities about his fluency—linguistic and cultural—around the mostly white (and occasionally Black) US staff and officers at his “American” job. During an impromptu English lesson on the topic of travel, he abruptly asked, “Is it true Americans think Asian guys have pencil dicks?” Taken aback, I asked why he asked. “Some American guys at the Embassy were joking about ‘tiny Korean pencil dicks,’” he said. “In porn [white] Western guys are bigger. . . . So maybe it’s true?” Years later, I do not recall how I responded, although it probably resembled sympathy. Clear in my memory, though, is the distinct mix of earnestness and dejection on Peter’s face when he inquired. It was as if he sought proof to contradict an image he secretly feared was true. In the context of such conversations, Peter’s desperation to master English arguably indexed a deeper anxiety. Becoming fluent in English, as nearly every Korean is, disclosed his cosmopolitan cravings. But Peter’s concerns over his language ability also revealed a broader male lament over having to perform

against globalization's all-too-often unforgiving currents. In Peter's case he was a relatively low-ranked Korean employee in the transnational (some might argue, occupied) space of the embassy and consulate. Performing occupational compliance under supposedly stronger white (and several Black) US American male co-workers ostensibly there to protect his home country engendered considerable self-doubt.

Kyung Hyun Kim writes how South Korea's rapid and violent historical transformations have produced visual and material manifestations of national anxiety mapped onto figures of crisis-ridden heterosexual men.⁷² In the context of debilitating Japanese colonialism, authoritarian regimes, and most recently global capital integration (dictated in large part by the United States), the metaphorical motif of Korean men reclaiming their "limp" phalluses has surfaced.⁷³ Yet as Kim asserts (following Jacques Lacan), reclamation only can exist in "an imagined form because its very attainment is not possible."⁷⁴ Hence, Peter's question and reaction present an important window into how US-identified ideologies around race, nation, gender, and sexuality—like the trope of figuratively castrated Asian or Asian American men—operate through and against comparable ideologies in Asia.⁷⁵ Notably, Peter never asked me if the phallic stereotype applied to ethnic national identities beyond Korean men. He was incensed that *Korean* men like himself could be marked with such an irrational label. I explained that the negative stereotype was ascribed to nearly all Asian men in the United States (and arguably, as I had observed through my travels, in much of the world outside Asia). Peter was open but expressed little interest in cultivating broader solidarity and resistance with men of other ethnicities. For him, being rendered phallus-less—his manhood diminished—resonated most significantly within the more local registers of Japanese colonialism, Cold War autocratic violence, and extant US neocolonialism.

In another example, the Korean film *Single Rider* (*Sing-geul ra-i-deo*) frames a similar foreign encounter as the backdrop of a crisis affecting Korean men.⁷⁶ Here, however, the outcome is unforgiving in its global, gendered outcome for cisheteronormative Korean men. Kang Jae-hoon (Lee Byun-hun) has been the figure of familial success. In his mid-forties, he has been the wealthy fund manager of a global financial firm and a successful husband and father. But the film's opening scene depicts Kang in crisis. The foundation of his success is a fraud. His company has been exposed for stock manipulation and deception. Kneeling in a tailored black suit, Kang sits in silent humiliation before a crowd of enraged investors. A woman approaches Kang, sobbing, "Please help us! You said it was safe. You said [the firm] wouldn't file for bankruptcy." "I have done wrong," Kang replies immediately, before a man slaps him to the ground. Forlorn, Kang returns to his empty luxury apartment. Flashbacks reveal a different man. Kang confidently advises his dutiful, conservatively dressed wife, Soo-jin (Kong Hyo-jin), to move to Australia with their son, Jin-woo (Eugene Young). Despite Soo-

jin's initial reluctance, Kang tells her: "You and Jin-woo . . . both need to learn English. People fluent in English are in a whole other economic sector."

Now distant from his heteronormative nuclear family, Kang sits alone, quietly sobbing. A whiskey in hand, he books a flight to Sydney online. Subsequent scenes play out like a silent movie. Kang walks the streets of Sydney amid a sea of tanned bodies, blond hair, and casual clothing. He is visibly out of place in the formal black suit. Kang and his family are nearly the only Asian characters onscreen.⁷⁷ Ji-na (Ahn So-hee), a lone Korean female in Australia through a dubious working holiday job, is the sole other Asian character, whom Kang initially rejects but later assists. After initially failing to find his family in their Sydney home, a beautiful cottage in a wealthy suburb, Kang hears two people talking through an open bathroom window. "I've never smoked cigarettes before," says a Korean-accented woman in English. "Why am I laughing like that?" A commanding but casual male voice answers, "Guess how much time has passed. . . . You are adorable." Panning back, the camera reveals a Korean woman: Kang's wife, Soo-jin. She is smoking marijuana with a ruggedly handsome white Australian man, Kris (Jack Campbell). Kang's previous hold on his masculine power—embodied in his calm authority over his wife—has been shattered by an outsider. As during his first scene in crisis, Kang emotes powerlessness to fight back. Crestfallen, he silently backs away. The following scenes witness him walking empty Sydney streets at dusk. "Who's there?" an older white female Australian resident asks him. "I'm lost," Kang responds.

Far from the apotheosis of Asian success represented in the versatile and virile Korean men of the Samsung Galaxy Note 8 commercial and *The Heirs/The Inheritors*, Kang, like Lee in the 1960s, has tasted the bitter promise of the West—this time cinematized as Australia. Throughout its narrative, *Single Rider* maintains this figurative and literal motif as Kang silently stalks his estranged family from afar. His overly formal suit and foreign Korean demeanor—timid and restrained—are markedly out of sync with Sydney's atmosphere of easygoing, casually dressed residents. Kris continues to seduce Soo-jin and Jin-woo away from Kang with his white Australian charm.⁷⁸ Robbed of what supports his masculinity in Asia—his lucrative occupation and nuclear family—Kang has devolved into a gelded version of himself. He is unable to consummate his shortsighted vision of cisheteronormative manhood outside South Korea. This is in stark contrast to *The Heirs/The Inheritors'* Kim, who masterfully mingles with foreigners of all colors while ably protecting the virtue of women like Cha. Ironically, outside the hyper-patriarchal confines of South Korea, Kang's wife has blossomed. No longer the earlier image of somber suffocation, Soo-jin now wears bright and welcoming colors. More significantly, she successfully reignites her earlier career as a professional violinist to fulfill her hopes of *supporting* Kang's eventual immigration to Sydney. Preoccupied with his own crisis, Kang is unaware of (and likely uninterested in) Soo-jin's plan, as well as in the

nuances of her gendered struggle more generally. Instead, he is blinded by his newly enfeebled state: his invisibility (to everyone outside South Korea) and his irrelevance (to his Korean family) in Australia. Kang finds power only vis-à-vis a more vulnerable racialized and gendered subject, Ji-na. In the film's twist ending, Kang learns that he committed suicide after the first scene's fraud scandal. The entire time, he was observing his wife from beyond the grave. He confesses to Ji-na (also a ghost, who earlier had been murdered as a working holiday laborer by deceitful Korean Australians), "I was so proud of all my success, but it meant nothing in the end." Failing to negotiate the rigid terms of cisheteronormativity undergirding both Korean masculinity and white Western masculinity abroad, Kang quietly surrenders to this seemingly intractable global order in a move reminiscent of Peter's. Through voiceover, he apologizes to his wife and son for failing to make them "happy every single day." Now a ghost, Kang is at peace with his existential place *out* of this world. There is no point in fighting literal death. Implicitly, he also stands no chance against the figurative loss of his cisheteronormative Korean masculine power. Standing at the edge of Tasmania's ocean cliffs, still in his black suit, he readies himself to jump into the abyss. The film fades to black.

Since the 1997 financial crisis, South Korea has witnessed a rise in unemployment, a decline of regular jobs, and the withdrawal of the welfare state. Yet as Jong Bum Kwon asserts, "anxiety and repeated bouts of 'crisis' regarding [men's] identity and place in society" are not new.⁷⁹ They have recurred throughout South Korea's modern history of industrial and developmental change. Not surprisingly, fictional men like Kang (and real-life ones like Peter) find the cisheteronormative values of masculinity they had invested in under repeated threat. Ideologies of men as breadwinners, biological and social reproducers, and pillars of moral strength, or what Jesook Song refers to as "heteronormative familism," conflict with neoliberalism's emphasis on individual freedom and self-reliance—to say nothing of globalization's exacerbation of extant inequalities.⁸⁰ Fictionalized Kang confronts the potentially devastating realities of heteronormative familial fantasies under global duress. In fact, even the Samsung Galaxy Note 8's related fantasy of triumphal cisheteronormative masculinity via cosmopolitan consumption of Korean and Western-marked commodities (smartphones and white bodies) falls flat. Without the economic and cultural means (e.g., English language ability and Western societal fluency) to buy in to such a modified, modern system, once-reliable figures like Kang find themselves gradually lost. Such crises of masculinity, Kwon states, signify "a political-cultural articulation that constitutes and reproduces the very normative ideals that are ostensibly in jeopardy."⁸¹ As a result, rather than productively critiquing the cisheteronormative foundations of a confined (however globalizing) Korean masculinity that victimizes them, Kang and Peter acquiesce to these hegemonic conventions. The next section outlines how these foiled aspirations can produce

violent effects but also subversive possibilities through and against nonnormative men in South Korea.

Racial Dislike

Like a Virgin (*Ch'önhajangsa Madonna*) is a story about Oh Dong-ku (Ryu Deok-hwan), an assigned male Korean high school student and devoted fan of the US icon Madonna.⁸² Dong-ku's father (Kim Yoon-seok) is a laid-off construction worker. Throughout the film, the father tempers his societal impotence through verbal and physical abuse against people he deems weaker, including his unmanly son. Although uncomfortable to watch, this film is exceptional in that it includes cinematic depictions of racialized, gendered, and sexualized violence against non-Koreans in South Korea. For example, in one scene, after being fired from his job at a makeshift outdoor bar, the father unleashes his rage at a predictable target: perceptibly brown Southeast Asian male foreigners. "Yo, you fuckers! You're in Korea, so speak Korean. Okay? Fuckers. . . . Get out! You from Vietnam? The Philippines? Go back to your own country. This place is fucking messed up enough for us Koreans." Angry but in control, one of the Southeast Asian men responds in fluent Korean and matching cisheteronormative manliness, "Hey, fucker! With one punch I'll knock you out." Withdrawing back to his seat, the father grumbles to his friend, "I'm going to get back to work soon." His experience is not unique. Ethnographically charting the failed protest movement of laid-off Daewoo factory men, Kwon notes the prevalence of layoffs after the 1997 financial crisis. Citing the protesters' own words, Kwon notes that the experience was more than losing a job: it was akin to being "severed" from "normal life," a life rooted in values of heteronormative familism like having a regular occupation and being a sole breadwinner. "Like the failure to get married," Kwon writes, to be severed was "to be stricken with social stigma, an accusation of personal failure and deficiency."⁸³ In effect, this means personifying the losses Kang experiences in *Single Rider*: failing to meet cisheteronormative Korean masculinity's restrictive terms of being an ideal man.

Neoliberal reforms of the late 1990s made it harder for men to fulfill normative scripts promising lifelong employment, middle-class life, and heteronormative familial rule. A confluence of factors constituted obstacles to this once-obtainable gendered postwar dream: the liberalization of market and labor regulations; the reduction of state welfare and corporate employment expectations; the relaxation of trade, finance, and once-stringent travel restrictions; the advent of private education industries like English language teaching; and changes to immigration policy to meet changing domestic labor demands. Accordingly, perceived affronts to a once more secure cisheteronormative masculinity have had a bifurcating effect in South Korea. As a response, cisheteronormative Korean masculinity has reconfigured, treating racialized embodiments

of the West mostly positively—as a telos of desirable (or unavoidable, depending on who one asks) development. Groups within this paradigm are marked as Western: as consistently white and as North American, European, or Australian, bearing the traces of linguistic, cultural, and phenotypic Westernness. They include select mixed/biracial/multiracial/Eurasian/Amerasian (*honhyöl*) and Korean diasporic subjects from the same *sönjin'guk*-rated regions.⁸⁴ Conversely, perceived affronts lead to negative actions toward color-coded groups whose economic and social conditions mirror an image of *hujin'guk* status that South Korea fights to escape: the brownness of South and Southeast Asian (and occasionally Arab) migrants, as well as the Blackness of African nationals.⁸⁵

Segyehwa (and more, recently, *Hallyu*) had succeeded in promoting South Korea as an attractive brand in Asia. In the late 1990s these policies attracted foreign laborers from Southeast and South Asian countries whose economic and social conditions mirrored South Korea's earlier postwar economic poverty. Today, Korean civil society typecasts this new migrant group in gendered and sexualized terms. For example, cisgender, heterosexual Southeast Asian women (commonly referred to as marriage migrants) married to older, rural Korean men tend to be framed as potential threats to both social cohesion and racial purity. Marriage migrants are also commonly labeled as socially weak and vulnerable along with other stigmatized groups, enumerated by EuyRyung Jun as “homosexuals, the homeless, the disabled, ethnic Chinese, and North Korean defectors.”⁸⁶ These groups are viewed as social threats to an ethnically homogeneous body politic progressively afflicted with racial, national, and religious difference. Multicultural, colorblind (*damunhwa*) tolerance is billed as the remedy. In recognizing only those foreigners marked by color (i.e., nonwhites and non-Western Korean diasporics), *damunhwa* delineates an underprivileged and thus inferior population within the nation in need of help and acceptance from the dominant South Korean population.⁸⁷ Predictably, *damunhwa* logics fail to meet their more utopic intentions. As with African Americans in the United States, class privilege has done little to allay overt forms of racial discrimination against marginalized groups like Southeast and South Asians in the country. For example, Nur Kholis of the UN National Commission on Human Rights (Indonesia) once told me, “Koreans look at even me as a [stigmatized] migrant worker. It is not fair. Korean people will try to learn from the white [*sic*] but if [someone] come[s] from [a] poor country, [Koreans] say: ‘You cannot teach us anything.’”⁸⁸ One of the most infamous cases of recognized anti-brown racism has been that of Indian national scholar Bonojit Hussain. Bringing international attention to one of the first Seoul Central District Court cases on racial discrimination, Hussain described two attacks. The first occurred when he was violently berated by an older Korean man for sitting on a subway train with a Korean female companion.⁸⁹ During the second incident, a male Samsung employee sitting next to Hussain in a taxi suddenly attempted to strangle him. Stories of Koreans (nearly all cisgender heteronormative men)

verbally and physically abusing brown men have become more routine. Other notorious cases have been foreign-catering bars barring African nationals “due to the Ebola virus,” leisure spaces denying entry to African American patrons, and Korean celebrities practicing blackface minstrelsy on popular television.⁹⁰

Distinct from and overlapping with its formations in the West, racism in South Korea is a complex product of Japanese colonialism; Cold War partition; US military, political, and cultural presence; economic development; and diasporic solidarity around the notion of Korean ethnic/racial purity. But as Hyun-mee Kim astutely notes, racism in South Korea is still strongly rooted in internalized white supremacy.⁹¹ Likewise, Nadia Kim writes how the initial arrival of occupying US military troops during and after the Korean War helped to crystallize Koreans’ sense of inferiority to white racialized bodies, so much so that “Western-style whiteness and facial features became the Korean ideal” in the wake of the Korean War.⁹² “Whiteness is everywhere . . . but it is very hard to see,” according to Lipsitz.⁹³ The commanding but concealed position of whiteness, including its subtler, multivalent physical manifestations (e.g., nonwhite but Westernized people of color) within frontline discourses and analyses of race and racism in South Korea, constitutes its very ontology.⁹⁴ Consequently, *damunhwa* reveals itself less as a state-sanctioned project to combat racism than a strategy aimed at reproducing and disguising relationships of power in society—what Pierre Bourdieu terms “strategies of condescension,” where a mode of domination is presented as a form of egalitarianism.⁹⁵ Whiteness is “discursively privileged” because it is rarely, if ever, beholden to the same discursive and material logics of multiculturalism that govern certain populations.⁹⁶

Notwithstanding these unfavorable assessments, globalization in South Korea may still signal certain progressive possibilities. That *Like a Virgin*’s Dong-ku draws identificatory inspiration from genre-bending, US-born Madonna is a case in point. The sweet and chubby Dong-ku dreams of saving enough money to secure a gender confirmation surgery. To win the prize money of a regional tournament, Dong-ku joins their high school’s male wrestling (*ssireum*) team. Initially, Dong-ku’s masculine male teammates object to their atypical new member. But Dong-ku wins them over with humanity and humor. As a feminized Korean male-assigned subject whose sexuality remains ambiguous throughout the film, Dong-ku’s humor and humanity encourage an imagined Korean audience (particularly cisgender heteronormative men) to rethink the fixity and function of expected gendered and sexualized scripts. The character of Dong-ku defies simple categorization—self-identifying and being identified by the viewing audience as both/either/neither a “masculine woman” and/or a “feminine man.” As a result, unlike the often anguished quality of this article’s cisheteronormative Korean men, Dong-ku seems quite comfortable with inhabiting fluid, nonidentificatory labels.

Yet this is a position Dong-ku must fight for throughout the film. In one of

the movie's most powerful scenes, Dong-ku demands recognition for who they are from their father. That morning, the father figuratively regained his cisheteronormative manhood when his former job reinstated him. Dong-ku blocks their father's way to work on his first day after reinstatement. Dong-ku thus interferes not only with their father's occupational reclamation but also the latter's reinstated manhood. Standing defiant in a dress, Dong-ku remarks, "Do you know how painful it is to me? It's not that I want to become something. I just want to live a life. Father. Please look at me. Can't you see? This is me." Enraged, the father exacts retribution. Fists in the air, he barks, "Piece of shit. Fine. If you need to talk . . . let's do it the man's way." He proceeds to brutally beat Dong-ku. Through it all, Dong-ku is unwavering in their dissent: literally, in Dong-ku's refusal to move out of their father's way, and figuratively, in Dong-ku's subverting expectations of cisnormative masculinity in South Korea. In a twist that epitomizes Dong-ku's growing power, Dong-ku eventually hurls their father across a yard. Displaying the same puckish determination they displayed throughout the film, Dong-ku says nothing but a plain description of the wrestling move they performed on their father: "This is over-head throw." The following scene shows Dong-ku (still bearing the physical scars of their recent beating) making it to the *ssireum* competition and winning first prize—ironically, against the very cisheteronormative male team leader who first had rejected Dong-ku and their hidden talents. Far away among the crowded stands and cheering audience is Dong-ku's father. This quiet expression of acknowledgment by Dong-ku's father suggests something mildly hopeful. The audience can hope that Dong-ku's persecution for being different no longer will continue—at least from their self-loathing, abusive father. The final scene witnesses Dong-ku's post-surgery concert debut, singing Madonna's "Like a Virgin" to the accolades of their teammates and new Korean fans.

A skeptical interpretation of *Like a Virgin* might suggest that Dong-ku represents a mainstream attempt to promote an existing, hybrid mode of Korean masculinity known as *kkonminam* (literally "flowery beautiful man")—a trope of representation in advertising, TV, and cinema that is popular across Asia. This hybrid form combines elements of traditional Korean *sŏnbi* masculinity (embodied in the figure of a loyal Confucian scholar), Japanese *kawaii* (cute) masculinity, and Western metrosexual masculinity (exemplified in the gender-fluid, liberal urbanite).⁹⁷ Some scholars have argued that *kkonminam*'s fantastical depictions of gay male characters as "oversexed, immature, or mentally unstable" alienate many in the Korean LGBTQIA+ community.⁹⁸ Hence, one could criticize *Like a Virgin* for its ultimately celebratory tone and seemingly pat conclusion to the complexities of transgender life and representational politics. These are valid critiques that bespeak the need for greater filmic representations of differently gendered bodies and subjectivities in South Korea. In the end, however, for a moderately successful commercial release, *Like a Virgin* is effective in presenting a welcome alternative to stifling cisheteronormative mas-

culinity. That Dong-ku's identity is so unconventional (by contemporary Korean standards) presents a viable challenge to the more chauvinistic expressions of gendered and sexualized Korean masculine identity typified by Dong-ku's father. Dong-ku's reconfiguration of cisheteronormative Korean masculinity, feminized entry into a traditionally masculine sport, and later embrace of a transgender subjectivity delineates the subversive (albeit sometimes superficial) potential of globalizing influences. This includes questioning why "male femininity" and "female masculinity" remain such a stigma.⁹⁹ Finally, in its fleeting depiction of Dong-ku's father's compensatory violence against brown foreigners in South Korea, the film prompts Korean and non-Korean audiences to ponder the analytic boundaries and potentials of international, interethnic, and intraracial solidarity within and outside South Korea.

Conclusion

At the dawn of a new decade, self-styled Global Korea offers some hopeful signs for a more egalitarian, less discriminatory future. This was most apparent when I befriended younger Korean men like Jin-wook while conducting dissertation fieldwork in 2014. Jin-wook was a Gyeongsangdo-raised, Seoul-based, middle-class cisheteronormative Korean man in his late twenties. His thoughtful personality and helpful nature made him immediately likeable. As a healthcare worker, Jin-wook imparted his longstanding commitment to caring for others, Korean and non-Korean alike. He believed in globalization's progressive capacity, especially for men like himself who could not afford to travel extensively. During a meeting over coffee he explained his thinking. This included a contextual response to the stereotype that Korean men were irredeemably less progressive than their supposed Western counterparts:

Over time, I have met more foreigners from various countries in [South] Korea, as well as seeing more of them on TV. I've been able to think about many topics, including very serious subjects like racism and cultural diversity. These experiences have given me the opportunity to lessen my prejudice about foreign countries, so I like it. Korea didn't have a long enough history to necessarily have "equality"—from a Western perspective—between men and women. Especially during the 1960s and 1970s, almost all resources which were available were focused on transforming the country's industrial structure from light industry to heavy chemical industry for Korea to become a developed country. Korea "needed" a lot of men to work hard and women to care for their own family. This was the current of the times back then. Now, we are changing by challenging classic gender roles. This is something continually introduced in the media. So, gender roles are dependent on social pressures and the moods

that surround them. Today, our society is getting increasingly diversified, and this should be respected.¹⁰⁰

Jin-wook's comments are complex. On one hand, his seeming complacency in rationalizing cisheteronormativity and patriarchy during South Korea's traumatic predemocracy developmental period suggests his possible ignorance of or investment in reifying traditional gendered and sexualized roles, regardless of his stated claims for societal parity.¹⁰¹ Jin-wook's final commentary on the need for "respecting" cultural diversity also is reminiscent of the language of multicultural tolerance, which masks categories and relations of unequal power. On the other hand, rather than apolitically acquiescing or violently reacting to a global order asymmetrically arranged around categories of race, nation, gender, and sexuality, Jin-wook demonstrated thoughtful reflection. When I mentioned the challenges and contradictions of cisheteronormative masculinity and multicultural acceptance, he largely agreed: "I'm willing to respect any kind of sexuality and can concretely say that Hong Seok-cheon is the most popular gay celebrity. He brought a much softer atmosphere about gay people derived from his coming out about a decade ago."¹⁰² I asked Jin-wook about the lack of more gender-plural identities, namely transgender, and bisexual women in South Korea. Remaining contemplative, he replied, "I think unlike gay men, these identities might find more obstacles to come out. Their positions in South Korea are more subtle and maybe more vulnerable." Asked what most Korean men thought about these issues, he responded, "I don't think Korean men want to change really. But I think they should. You can think of that as an axiom for me."

A large part of masculinity's modalities and meanings are mediated through movement: real, relational, and reactive. Whether and how individual agency plays into these global processes is contentious. Through their staged presentations of superior Asian masculinity within Asia and the West (envisioned in this article as the United States, Europe, and Australia), cisheteronormative Korean men increasingly confront the relational boundaries of their aspirational manhood. Responses, filmic and factual, vacillate along a spectrum of adulation, acquiescence, and anger. Such transnational phenomena, I argue, evince broader national aspirations of a Korean state zealously aspiring to shed its image as a *hujin'guk* tarnished by postcolonial legacies of imperial-racial dispossession into a global hub of cosmopolitan maturation via selective racial desire and dislike.¹⁰³ Nevertheless, Jin-wook's words about the media's role, social pressures, and surrounding moods are insightful. His openness to new futures made possible by the increased movements of signs ascribed as US American, Korean, global, masculine, feminine—among innumerable others—speaks not only to the quintessential neoliberal quality of rationalizing away enduring inequalities through the language of progressive change but *also* the political potential, however constrained, behind globalization's myth of individual freedom.

The persona that Jin-wook exudes is uncommon in a group—cisheteronormative Korean men—whose portrayals by scholars of Korea routinely border on caricature.¹⁰⁴ Whether more Korean men can cultivate Jin-wook’s willingness to question deep-rooted systems of racialized privilege and cisheteronormativity is uncertain. But they must. The global significance and regional dominance of Koreanness inscribed onto cisheteronormative Korean manliness emerges externally through the nation’s globalizing culture industries and mobile citizens. It also registers internally through the flourishing immigration and tourism industries. Accordingly, Koreans risk not only reproducing but strengthening racialized and color-coded hierarchies around transnational and transregional categories of race, gender, and sexuality. How might we avoid getting lost amid unremitting change? In his book *American Studies in a Moment of Danger*, Lipsitz provides guidance:

Approaches that imagine purely national or purely transnational solutions to problems of unequal power and unjust social relations are sure to fail in the present era, but approaches able to imagine other kinds of identities contain considerable promise. . . . All political and cultural problems are now both local and global at the same time. The increasingly indecent order of globalization compels us to envision more than we can currently enact. We need to develop new ways of knowing as well as new ways of working together to generate a social warrant suited to the circumstances of the twenty-first century. Within national boundaries and across them, we now confront many dangerous crossroads—places of conflict and creativity where we, the people of the world, find ourselves paradoxically both closer together and farther apart than ever before.¹⁰⁵

As the examples in this article illustrate, retaining a fixed distinction between masculinity constructions in Asia and the West is not only impractical but detrimental. We must highlight connections and distortions between Asia and the West, both as they are imagined and as they really exist. Every day, new crossroads of visible and invisible inequality are being created. But as this article illustrates, these crossroads are increasingly not place specific but rather “both local and global at the same time.” Whether they will lead to greater equality and understanding in a globalizing world is unclear. But with luck, the perils of today might just lead to the possibilities of tomorrow.

NOTES

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1. Defining “the West” is difficult but important. As my case studies illustrate, ostensibly bounded notions of Western race and racialization often exhibit greater salience in seemingly non-Western contexts. Scholars have noted the term’s multivalent and sometimes empty signification. Here I define it largely in relation to the United States, following Nancy Abelmann and John Lie’s argument that “the role of the United States in Korean history is paramount.” See Michael Herzfeld, *The Social Production of Indifference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Nancy Abelmann and John Lie, *Blue Dreams: Korean Americans and the Los Angeles Riots* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 51.

2. Citing the Queer Resource Center at Amherst College, I define cisheteronormativity as “a pervasive system of belief (on an individual, systemic, and ideological level) that being cis-gender and heterosexual (straight), and associated ways of being in the world (life-path, material desires, family/kinship structures, political/social goals, etc.) are the default, and ‘normal.’” This does not mean to suggest that all figures described in this article as “cisheteronormative” share this belief system, although most who do not challenge it likely benefit from its privileges. See Amherst College, “Queer Resource Center, Terms & Definitions,” <https://www.amherst.edu/campuslife/our-community/queer-resource-center/terms-definitions>, accessed May 20, 2019. My thanks to John Bum Kwon, associate professor of anthropology and expert on anthropologies of modern Korea, labor, and gender, for first suggesting the analytic framework of ranked races and nations.

3. With the exception of well-known historical figures (e.g., Kim Young-sam), well-known celebrities, and certain fictional characters, all Korean words follow the conventions of the McCune-Reischauer system of romanization. At times, however, I adhere to other conventions like the Revised Romanization of Korean system (e.g., Gyeongsang-do instead of Kyŏngsang-do) or the personal preferences of interlocutors (e.g., how they spelled their own names in English). For more on *hujin’guk* and *sŏnjin’guk*, see Jongtae Kim, “The Discourse of *Sonjin’guk*: South Korea’s Eurocentric Modern Identities and Worldviews” (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2011).

4. Xiaodong Lin, Chris Haywood, and Mairtin Mac an Ghaill, eds., *East Asian Men Masculinity, Sexuality and Desire* (London: Palgrave Macmillan 2017).

5. Sharon Bird describes these practices as nonsexual interpersonal attractions. See Sharon Bird, “Welcome to the Men’s Club: Homosociality and the Maintenance of Hegemonic Masculinity,” *Gender and Society* 10, no. 2 (1996): 120–132.

6. Rob Cohen, dir., *Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story* (Raffaella De Laurentiis Productions, Universal Pictures, 1993).

7. Lee Jun Fan (Bruce Lee) was born in San Francisco, California, on November 27, 1940.

8. People in Canada, South America, and Central America also rightfully claim the label of “American.” See Jeanne Ballantine, Keith Roberts, and Kathleen Korgen, *Our Social World: Introduction to Sociology* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2015), 83. Henceforth, I refer to “America” as “the United States.”

9. In the film, Lee is introduced at a Hong Kong dance as a young, muscular (and even shirtless) man fighting a group of drunk white British sailors, saving a young Hong Kong woman from them, and later sleeping with her. According to lore, Lee was sent to the United States for getting into too many street fights.

10. Research on men and masculinities is characterized by a diversity of perspectives and approaches. Michael Kimmel, Jeff Hearn, and Raewyn Connell provide a working definition of masculinity as “an internalized role or identity, reflecting a particular (in practice often meaning United States or Western) culture’s norms or values, acquired by social learning from agents of socialization such as family, school, and mass media.” See Michael S. Kimmel, Jeff Hearn, and Raewyn Connell, “Introduction,” in *Handbook of Studies on Men and Masculinities*, ed. Michael S. Kimmel, Jeff Hearn, and Raewyn Connell (London: Sage, 2005), 5. Another influential concept has been the idea of hegemonic masculinity, as developed by Connell. Here, hegemony invokes power by “consent rather than coercion” and secures social power by “defining and legitimizing a certain definition of the situation, framing the way events are under-

stood and morality is defined”; as a result, “the organization of society around certain gender norms appears natural, inevitable, and ordinary.” See Mike Donaldson, “What Is Hegemonic Masculinity?” *Theory and Society* 22, no. 5 (1993): 64. In this article, I approach gender as a system of power rather than merely a set of stereotypes or observable differences between women and men, wherein what constitutes masculinities and femininities are less objective biological truths than performative actions. See Harry Brod and Michael Kaufman, eds., *Theorizing Masculinities* (London: Sage, 1994), 4; Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990).

11. A contentious term meaning “ghost man,” *gweilo* is a common and sometimes derisive Cantonese slang term denoting white Westerners in Chinese contexts. See Yonden Lhatoo, “Is ‘Gweilo’ Really a Racist Word? Hong Kong Just Can’t Decide,” *South China Morning Post*, September 8, 2018, <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/society/article/2163361/gweilo-really-racist-word-hong-kong-just-cant-decide>.

12. Undoubtedly, progress has been made since the 1960s. How much, though, is debatable. Most recently, Quentin Tarantino’s film *Once upon a Time . . . in Hollywood* (Bona Film Group, Sony Pictures Entertainment, 2019) filmically resurrects Lee. Upon viewing her late father depicted in a fight with a fictional stuntman, Cliff Booth (Brad Pitt), Lee’s daughter Sharon told media outlets, “[Lee] comes across as an arrogant asshole who was full of hot air, and not someone who had to fight triple as hard as any of those people did to accomplish what was naturally given to so many others. . . . I understand they want to make the Brad Pitt character this super bad-ass who could beat up Bruce Lee. But they didn’t need to treat him in the way that white Hollywood did when he was alive” (quoted in Emily Todd VanDerWerff, “Once upon a Time in Hollywood’s Many, Many Controversies, Explained,” *Vox*, August 15, 2019, <https://www.vox.com/culture/2019/8/15/20759084/once-upon-a-time-in-hollywood-controversy-bruce-lee-sharon-tate-women-explained-tarantino>).

13. Scholars have examined the complexities of cisgender, heterosexual Asian American female and white male couples (Nadia Kim, “‘Patriarchy Is So Third World’: Korean Immigrant Women and ‘Migrating’ White Western Masculinity,” *Social Problems* 53, no. 4 [2006]: 519–536; Julie AhnAllen and Karen Suyemoto, “Influence of Interracial Dating on Racial and/or Ethnic Identities of Asian American Women and White European American Men,” *Asian American Journal of Psychology* 2, no. 1 [2011]: 61–75). But parallel studies of cisgender, heterosexual Asian or Asian American male and white female couples are rare (see Kumiko Nemoto, *Racing Romance: Love, Power, and Desire among Asian American/White Couples* [New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009]) and merit further study.

14. Lee here lists an extensive list of racial/ethnic slurs historically directed toward Asians in the United States.

15. Kam Louie argues that scant attention has been given to the study of Asian masculinities, asserting that studies that do explore the subjectivities of Asian men tend to concentrate on “minority masculinities in white America”—a “standard concession in men studies to understand ‘men of color.’” What is needed instead, he insists, is an archaeological approach to masculinities in Asia in which “superficial layers of identity formation [are] dug up and put aside, and the deeper layers exposed.” See Kam Louie and Morris Low, *Asian Masculinities: The Meaning and Practice of Manhood in China and Japan* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 2.

16. Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 7.

17. Gary Okihiro, “The Future of Ethnic Studies: The Field Is under Assault from Without and Within,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 4, 2010, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/The-Future-of-Ethnic-Studies/66092>.

18. I cannot assume to know the true personal gendered and sexualized identities of my interlocutors. From my participant observation and interviews, however, I did not get the impression that any of my interlocutors presented themselves as anything other than the normative, cisgender identity of Korean heterosexual men that was ascribed to them—at least publicly. Short of asking my research subjects directly about their sexual orientation, I observed that

most displayed characteristics that adamantly suggested their heterosexual affiliation (e.g., boasting about courting women). To state what gender and sexual identities my interlocutors subscribed to, negotiated with, or contested privately would be speculative.

19. In Kim's address to a joint session of the US Congress on July 26, 1995, the Korean president referred to South Korea's longtime geopolitical backer as a close friend. See *C-Span*, "South Korean President Address," July 26, 2012, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?66319-1/south-korean-president-address>. The Korean term for the United States—"Miguk," derived from the Chinese "Meiguo"—literally means "the beautiful country." See John Pomfret, *The Beautiful Country and the Middle Kingdom: America and China, 1776 to the Present* (New York: Henry Holt, 2016), 5.

20. Carl Saxer, "Foreign Direct Investment in Korea's Globalization Experience," *Journal of Comparative Asian Development* 11, no. 2 (2012): 298–319.

21. See J. Kim, "The Discourse of *Sonjin'guk*," 273.

22. *C-Span*, "South Korean President Address."

23. On December 3, 1997, South Korea received a \$57 billion bailout package. See Seung-Ho Joo and Tae-Hwan Kwak, eds., *Korea in the 21st Century* (Huntington, NY: Nova Science Publishers, 2001), 36.

24. David Kang, *Crony Capitalism: Corruption and Development in South Korea and the Philippines* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), quoted in Jong Bum Kwon, "In the Crucible of Restructuration: Violence and Forging 'Workers of Iron' in the Transition to a Neoliberal Democracy in South Korea" (PhD diss., New York University, 2005), 12.

25. Heike Hermanns, "National Role Conceptions in the 'Global Korea' Foreign Policy Strategy," *Korean Journal of International Studies* 11, no. 1 (2013): 55–82.

26. Thomas Kalinowski and Hyekyung Cho, "Korea's Search for a Global Role between Hard Economic Interests and Soft Power," *European Journal of Development Research* 24, no. 2 (2012): 242–260.

27. Jin-kyung Lee, *Service Economies: Militarism, Sex Work, and Migrant Labor in South Korea* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

28. Rachael Miyung Joo, *Transnational Sport: Gender, Media, and Global Korea* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 102.

29. Following the Gender and Sexuality Student Services Center at the University of Illinois, Springfield, I use "LGBTQIA+" to stand for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, and other sexualities. See "Gender and Sexuality Student Services," University of Illinois, Springfield, <https://www.uis.edu/gendersexualitystudentservices/about/lgbtqa-terminology/>, accessed May 20, 2019.

30. Raymond Williams quoted in Lizzie Eldridge and John Eldridge, *Raymond Williams: Making Connections* (London: Routledge, 1994).

31. Yoo Sun-Young, "Embodiment of American Modernity in Colonial Korea," trans. Francis Lee Dae Hoon, *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 2, no. 3 (2001): 225.

32. To be fair, significant cases of anti-Americanism still exist in South Korea (although I argue that their contemporary expressions are muted or marginalized, especially among younger Koreans). Most famously, visible anti-Americanism has emerged within perceived and real instances of externally instilled violence. For example, several incidents related to the US military have significantly fueled anti-American sentiment, such as the 1950 No Gun Ri massacre, the 1992 murder of US military-base sex worker Yun Geum-i, and the 2002 Yangju highway incident wherein a US armored vehicle killed two Korean girls. Arguably, the fiercest display of anti-Americanism was the massive Seoul-based demonstrations in summer 2008 protesting the importation of US beef deemed ridden with mad cow disease. Chris Suh convincingly demonstrates how historically Korean perceptions of the United States have been multiplex. Specifically, transnational Korean American figures like Yun Ch'i-ho during Japanese rule (1905–1945) evince the historic complexities of South Korea's stereotypically subordinate relationship to the United States. Yun was a Christian and early nationalist born in Korea, trained in Japan, employed in China and the US South, and later married to a Chinese woman. Most significantly, Yun's experience at southern universities Emory and Vanderbilt shaped his eventual "intellectual engagement with the predicament of African Americans."

His knowledge of the inherent contradiction between proclamations of universalist Christian ethics and US racism toward African Americans inspired him to recognize the nuances of racialized US exceptionalism and identity. Critical of how prominent white US Christian figures drew eugenicist comparisons between African Americans (under Jim Crow laws) and Koreans (under Japanese colonialism), Yun believed that Koreans could “prove to the world that they were capable of ‘developing’ themselves on their own without depending on the tutelage of a more ‘civilized’ [white American] people.” See Chris Suh, “What Yun Ch’i-ho Knew: U.S.-Japan Relations and Imperial Race Making in Korea and the American South, 1904–1919,” *Journal of American History* 104, no. 1 (2017): 89.

33. Eleana Kim, *Adopted Territory: Transnational Korean Adoptees and the Politics of Belonging* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 51. Ironically, the partition of and eventual conflict on the Korean peninsula were the result of arbitrary Cold War logics made possible by greater powers like the United States and the Soviet Union.

34. Herbert Mitgang, “Books of the Times: Korean’s Novel Is Anti-war but Not Anti-American,” *New York Times*, February 21, 1990, <https://www.nytimes.com/1990/02/21/books/books-of-the-times-korean-s-novel-is-anti-war-but-not-anti-american.html>.

35. Transnational adoption paralleled other humanitarian performances of the United States, such as US soldiers purportedly protecting Vietnamese refugees in the waning days of the Vietnam War. See Yen Le Espiritu, *The Vietnam War and Militarized Refugees* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 35.

36. Quoted in Mitgang, “Books of the Times.”

37. *Ibid.*

38. Charles Armstrong, “America’s Korea, Korea’s Vietnam,” *Critical Asian Studies* 33, no. 4 (2010): 535. Scholars contend that Korean involvement in the Vietnam War was a means of winning favor from a United States that had sacrificed a record number of soldiers during the Korean War. It also boosted South Korea’s developmentalist ambitions through the profits of combat. Relatedly, the backdrop of intensified US wartime involvement in Asia may help to explain Bruce Lee’s global popularity at the time—not only among Asians but among other people of color. See Vijay Prashad, *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002).

39. *Ibid.*

40. This included documented cases atrocities like the immediate precursor to the My Lai Massacre, the Phong Nhị and Phong Nhất massacres, systematic rapes, and the abandonment of so-called “mixed blood” children (Lai Đại Hàn) in Vietnam by Korean male soldiers. See Justice for Lai Dai Han, 2019, <https://www.laidaihanjustice.org/ko/%ed%99%88%ed%8e%98%ec%9d%b4%ec%a7%80/>.

41. Homi Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,” *MIT Press* 28 (Spring 1984): 130.

42. *Ibid.*

43. Ironically, South Korea continues to demand global recognition and retribution from Japan’s colonial and wartime atrocities (including reports of US-backed South Korean “comfort women” operations) while remaining mostly silent about own its legacy of transgressions during the Vietnam War.

44. The “state” is a salient, albeit elusive, category to define. Following Timothy Mitchell, I approach the concept less as a bounded distinction between state and society than as something legible in its organizational and controlling effects on social processes. See Timothy Mitchell, “The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and Their Critics,” *American Political Science Review* 83, no. 1 (1991): 77–96.

45. For many years, Incheon International Airport has boasted a designation as the “World’s Top Airport” by Airports Council International. See Alice Kim, “Airport Modern: The Space between International Departures and Arrivals in Modern Korean National Imaginings” (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2013).

46. Samsung is South Korea’s most prized conglomerate (*chaeböl*) and one of the world’s leading electronics brands.

47. Korean TV Commercials Portal, “Samsung Galaxy Note 8 (*samsöng kaellöksi not’ü 8*) TV CF,” YouTube video, November 29, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cyQCbtGIS-E>. The sexuality of the two characters is not foregrounded. One can speculate with reasonable confidence, however, that in the context of South Korea, where LGBTQIA+ representations still are stigmatized, the two characters are presented as cisgender heteronormative men.

48. Korean to English translation by author. The Faroe Islands are an archipelago between Norway and Iceland. Leitisvatn is the largest lake on the Faroe Islands.

49. The bilingualism of this advertisement is likely directed at a desired international audience of general English speakers. At the same time, the imagined audience may be Koreans who interpret the message as a reflection of South Korea’s globalizing success abroad.

50. I define whiteness in George Lipsitz’s terms as the “unmarked category against which difference is constructed [and] an organizing principle in social and cultural relations.” In a process not unlike men being gendered, white people are raced through racially structured lives. At the same time, as ethnic studies scholars have argued, whiteness is a malleable category that historically defies essentialized physiognomic categories. See George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 1; Ruth Frankenburg, *White Women, Race Matters* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 1; Thomas A. Guglielmo, *White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

51. Kumiko Nemoto, “Postponed Marriage: Exploring Women’s Views of Matrimony and Work in Japan,” *Gender and Society* 22, no. 2 (2008): 219–237; Mia Tuan, *Forever Foreigners or Honorary Whites? The Asian Ethnic Experience Today* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999). Empirically, these practices sometimes manifested in contradictory ways. For example, while conducting dissertation fieldwork in Seoul, I met Yong-chul (pseudonym), a male part-time print model and bartender in his early thirties who was trying to become a flight attendant. Tall and exceptionally good-looking, Yong-chul frequently boasted about his nights successfully meeting women, both Korean and non-Korean, at Seoul’s many bars and clubs. He told me how he worried that save for his “good looks” he had no skill sets or credentials that would lead to upward mobility in South Korea (Yong-chul’s comments to the author were in Korean; Korean to English translation by the author). He went to a two-year technical school outside Seoul, worked only within the service industry as a bartender and barista, and spoke limited, heavily Korean-accented English. Consequently, leaving South Korea as a flight attendant symbolized not only a path out of his static socioeconomic position—he had never traveled outside South Korea—but also a way to see the world, including a West he said he desired. For him, my being a native-English-speaking “Korean man from America” represented just enough imagined ethnic and cultural similarity to allow him to bypass his latent animosity toward the United States and its familiar (white) personifications. He revealed his animosity in gendered and sexualized terms. Among the targets of his most severe criticisms were Korean or foreign (usually white) women who were unmoved by his courting attempts. “Korean girls want to date white guys only to learn English,” he would complain. Ironically, the bounds of his paternalistic yet pained critique did not extend to my own imperial Americanness—at least not directly in my presence. However, the fact that his personality toward me wavered so dramatically between friendliness and flippancy during our short encounters made me wonder whether he also was using me simply to learn English. Not surprisingly, we lost touch after only a few months of interaction.

52. Nancy Abelmann, *The Intimate University: Korean American Students and the Problems of Segregation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 8.

53. John Tomlinson, *Cultural Imperialism: A Critical Introduction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991); Jin-kyung Lee, *Service Economies: Militarism, Sex Work, and Migrant Labor in South Korea* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

54. Olga Fedorenko, “South Korean Advertising as Popular Culture,” in *The Korean Popular Culture Reader*, ed. Kyung Hyun Kim and Youngmin Choe (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 349.

55. *Ibid.*

56. *The Heirs/The Inheritors (Sangsojjadeul)* (DramaFever, Hwa and Dam Pictures, Seoul Broadcasting System, 2013).

57. See Jennifer Jihye Chun and Ju Hui Judy Han, "Language Travels and Global Aspirations of Korean Youth," *Positions: Asia Critique* 23, no. 3 (2015): 565–593.

58. This trend of male actors of Asian descent returning to movie markets in Asia after encountering Hollywood racism is not uncommon. For example, despite some early success in Hollywood films like *Battle Creek Brawl* (dir. Robert Clouse; Golden Harvest Company, Warner Bros., 1980), Jackie Chan also returned to Hong Kong after failing to be considered anything other than an Asian sidekick (see Jackie Chan and Jeff Yang, *I Am Jackie Chan: My Life in Action* [New York: Ballantine Books, 1998]). Chan's breakthrough role in *Rush Hour* (dir. Brett Ratner; New Line Cinema, Roger Birnbaum Productions, 1998) would not occur until nearly two decades later (ironically, as another Asian sidekick to actor Chris Tucker). Even then, his asexual, nice-guy Hollywood persona significantly contrasted with his more controversial, womanizing image in Asia. Empirically, this gendered transnational phenomenon also exists. A Chinese graduate school colleague in his early thirties once expressed to me his wish to finish his doctorate back in China, commenting, "I feel more like a man in Asia [than in the United States]." Another colleague, a Korean male in his late twenties, once dramatically lamented to me, "Asian men in the US are treated lower than dogs." To be fair, more than a few international Asian male students I met during graduate school expressed indifference. One even surmised that because masculinity was so hard to define it might be unrelated to the issues analyzed in this article. For more on the transnational dimensions of these racialized and gendered formations, see Helene Kim Lee, "Bittersweet Homecomings: Ethnic Identity Construction in the Korean Diaspora" (PhD diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 2009).

59. Rachael Miyung Joo, *Transnational Sport: Gender, Media, and Global Korea* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 103.

60. Yoo, "Embodiment of American Modernity in Colonial Korea," 423.

61. Personal communication with Jin-kyung Lee, associate professor of Korean and comparative literature at the University of California, San Diego, and expert on modern Korean literature, gender studies, and Korean diasporic cultures, March 1, 2018.

62. C-Span, "South Korean President Address." Translation by C-Span. Beyond its economic and political influence in the country, as of this article's writing, the United States maintains 28,500 troops and fifteen military bases in South Korea, one of the largest contingents in the world (see Military Bases, "US Military Bases in South Korea," <https://militarybases.com/overseas/south-korea/>, accessed May 20, 2019).

63. *Gossiping Beauties (Minyödörüi Suda)*, Korean Broadcasting System, 2006–2010; *Non-summit (Pijöngsanghoedam)*, Joongang Tongyang Broadcasting Company Productions, 2014–2017.

64. Several white Westerners, such as Sam Hammington (a white Australian) and Joshua Carrot (a white Brit) have converted their television popularity into lucrative deals endorsing everything from cup ramen to electronics. The show features a panel consisting almost entirely of white men (not diasporic people of color) from the United States, Europe, Australia, and Russia, as well as a few male Asian nationals. Despite its stated aims to diversify its cast, however, its most prominent figures have been white Westerners. Sam Okyere, a Ghana-born, award-winning Korean computer science student and later celebrity personality, is the sole exception. Adrienne Lo and Jenna Kim suggest that *honhyöl* (chiefly white US American and Korean) male celebrities like Daniel Henney fit within this reconfiguration of patriarchal norms in globalizing South Korea (Adrienne Lo and Jenna Kim, "Manufacturing Citizenship: Metapragmatic Language Competencies in Media Images of Mixed Race Men in South Korea," *Discourse and Society* 22, no. 4 [2011]: 440–457). Henney, a Michigan-born Korean American with a Korean adoptee mother and white US American father, became an incredibly popular celebrity in the mid-2000s. Lo and Kim note how the discourse on so-called *honhyöl* celebrities is bifurcated (441). Citing parallels with the discourse applied to Korean adoptees, once "pitiable" but now "enviable," the authors recall how *honhyöl* figures historically have been discriminated against as an uncomfortable reminder of miscegenation in times of war (441). Specifically, this group has suffered intense animosity as physical effects of the "Yankee whore"

(*yanggongju*, or literally, “Western princess”) stereotype traditionally weaponized against “hy-persexual” Korean women with non-Korean men (442). The advent of *segyehwa* and Global Korea policies, however, has helped to change this image. For example, despite hailing from humble origins in a small working-class town in Michigan and attending the average-ranked Albion College, Henney has typically played the roles of high-class cosmopolitan characters like wealthy businessmen and doctors (443–444). Lo and Kim help unravel the tangled inter-racial/intraethnic hierarchies among Korean Americans, *honhyōls*, and white Westerners. They write, “Henney is not usually described in the South Korean press as ‘Asian American’ or ‘Korean American,’ personas which are not highly regarded, but as the ‘son of a Korean adoptee and a British father/father of British descent,’ thereby linking him to South Korean imaginings of the aristocratic figure of the British gentleman” (443). Although their numbers are significant, biethnic/biracial/mixed children of largely rural Korean fathers and poorer Southeast Asian mothers (“Korean + Asian” or *k’oshian*) still are depicted in the media—if at all—as pitiable products of broken multicultural families in South Korea. Their media presence as entertainers and athletes is slowly growing, but their social invisibility lingers.

65. Lipsitz is careful not to essentialize whiteness as limited only to white-ascribed bodies, noting the historically constructed and contested nature of the identity category *white* (Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*, vii).

66. For more on the sociopolitical origins of the industry, see Jessica DeChamplain, “Selling English in South Korea: The Marketing of English and Uses of Foreigners in the English as a Foreign Language Industry” (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 2017); Doobo Shim and Joseph Sung-Yul Park, “The Language Politics of ‘English Fever’ in South Korea,” *Korea Journal* 48, no. 2 (2008): 136–159.

67. An emerging body of scholarship has analyzed the subjectivities and experiences of racially unmarked white foreigners in Asia, including Sealing Cheng, *On the Move for Love: Migrant Entertainers and the U.S. Military in South Korea* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); Anju Paul, “The ‘Other’ Looks Back: Racial Distancing and Racial Alignment in Migrant Domestic Workers’ Stereotypes about White and Chinese Employers,” *Journal of Ethnic and Racial Studies* 34, no. 6 (2011): 1068–1087; Kristen Hill Maher and Megan Lafferty, “White Migrant Masculinities in Thailand and the Paradoxes of Western Privilege,” *Journal of Social and Cultural Geography* 15, no. 4 (2014): 427–448; Stephanie Kim, “Western Faculty ‘Flight Risk’ at a Korean University and the Complexities of Internationalisation in Asian Higher Education,” *Comparative Education* 52, no. 1 (2016): 78–90; David Oh and Chuyun Oh, “Vlogging White Privilege Abroad: *Eat Your Kimchi’s* Eating and Spitting Out of the Korean Other on YouTube; Vlogging White Privilege Abroad,” *Communication, Culture and Critique* 10, no. 4 (2017): 696–711.

68. Personal communication with Jenny Jong-Hwa Lee, doctoral candidate in the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles, and expert in South Korean visa policies, June 1, 2019.

69. Encountering *chaemigyop’o* male privilege—marked by its closeness to and distance from performances of US American whiteness—is analytically complex, yet at times affectively simple. Cisgender, heteronormative Korean American men who bear the markings of Westernness benefit from significant, albeit contingent, privilege (see John [Song Pae] Cho, “Faceless Things: South Korean Gay Men, Internet, and Sexual Citizenship” [PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2012]). Notwithstanding the complicity of Korean American privilege within US American economic, cultural, political, and military imperial ambitions, diasporic Korean motivations in South Korea arguably run deeper. Similar to other racial minorities from the United States who seek a sense of belonging, diasporic hubs like South Korea are spaces where “people of different classes, religions, and regions [come] into contact and consider . . . each other to comprise parts of a larger single [Korean] community, one that include[s], at times, non-[Korean] Asians, as well” (Neha Vora, *Impossible Citizens: Dubai’s Indian Diaspora* [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013], 81). Conversely, these affective pleasures are strongly shaped by official and everyday disparities based on national origin, visa status, gender, and sexuality—among innumerable other factors. As a scholar, I aspire to combat these inequalities through a critical, feminist lens. Therefore, attempts at

reconciling my own cisheteronormative Korean American male privilege in certain beneficial contexts exist on a continuum of guilty pleasure and self-reflexive aversion. For more on Korean American gendered subjectivities, see Adrienne Lo and Heidi Fung, “Language Socialization and Shaming,” in *The Handbook of Language Socialization*, ed. Alessandro Duranti, Elinor Ochs, and Bambi Schieffelin (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell), 169–189; Alex Jong-Seok Lee, “Global Identifications: The Social Identity behind the Globalised Sociocultural Anthropologist,” *Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 19, no. 3 (2018): 214–230.

70. All names are pseudonyms. Peter’s quotes to the author were in English.

71. Gyeongsang-do is a southern province of South Korea stereotyped for its macho men and right-leaning politics.

72. Kyung Hyun Kim, *The Remasculinization of Korean Cinema* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

73. *Ibid.*, 2.

74. *Ibid.*, 14.

75. Academic reports strongly suggest that this stereotype also is prevalent within LG-BTQIA+ communities in the United States. See Judy Tan, Felicia Pratto, Don Operario, and Shari Dworkin, “Sexual Positioning and Race-Based Attraction by Preferences for Social Dominance among Gay Asian/Pacific Islander Men in the United States,” *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 42, no. 7 (2013): 1233–1239; Sonali Patel, “‘Brown Girls Can’t Be Gay’: Racism Experienced by Queer South Asian Women in the Toronto LGBTQ Community,” *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 23, no. 3 (2019): 1–14. Anecdotally, gay-identifying male friends living in Asia have told me that these stereotypes also exist, though usually in ethnicized form (e.g., East Asian gay men occupying a higher status than Southeast Asian men). For more on this emerging phenomenon, see Dredge Byung’chu Kang, “Eastern Orientations: Thai Middle-Class Gay Desire for ‘White Asians,’” *Culture, Theory and Critique* 58, no. 2 (2017): 182–208.

76. Lee Joo-young (dir.), *Single Rider (Sing-geul ra-i-deo)* (Perfect Storm Films, 2017).

77. In contrast, according to the 2016 Australia Census, 39.7 percent of residents identified as Asian, which included people from India, Pakistan, Georgia, Philippines, China, Maldives, Japan, Nepal, Uzbekistan, Malaysia, Armenia, and Afghanistan (see Charis Chang, “How Asian Are We Really? What Australian’s Census 2016 Showed Us,” *News Corp Australia*, June 29, 2017, <https://www.news.com.au/national/how-asian-are-we-really-what-australias-census-2016-showed-us/news-story/2f055e32e74cbe4341953006379b6394>). Like the other media examples in this article, the ostensible globality of the West featured in *Single Rider (Sing-geul ra-i-deo)* is co-constituted by the sole presence of *Koreans*—instead of other resident or touring national/racial/ethnic representations.

78. In one scene, very disturbingly, Jae-hoon finds himself prepared to strangle his wife as a love-struck Kris embraces Soo-jin in her bedroom. In another scene, Kris literally saves Jin-woo by carrying him to a hospital after the latter falls unconscious from acute pancreatitis.

79. Kwon, “In the Crucible of Restructuration,” 140.

80. Cho, “Faceless Things,” 4.

81. Kwon, “In the Crucible of Restructuration,” 138.

82. Lee Hae-young (dir.), *Like a Virgin (Cheonhajangsa Madonna)* (CJ Entertainment, 2006).

83. Kwon, “In the Crucible of Restructuration,” vi, 86.

84. The histories and politics behind identificatory labels like mixed, biracial, multiracial, Eurasian, and Amerasian are complicated and contested. Moreover, they are very personal. For the purposes of this article, however, I use the common—though highly problematic—term employed among Koreans: *honhyöl*, which translates as “of mixed blood,” “half-blood,” or “half-breed.”

85. Despite the nation’s small but significant population of Arab and Muslim immigrants (largely in the foreigner enclave of Itaewon, Seoul), many Koreans vehemently opposed the 2018 arrival of approximately five hundred Yemeni citizens seeking asylum on the resort island of Jeju. According to media reports, many protests veered toward Islamophobia, claiming that many asylum seekers were “fake refugees” who were potential “terrorists.” See Jeeyun Kwon, “South Korea’s ‘Yemeni Refugee Problem,’” *Middle East Institute*, April 23, 2019, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/south-koreas-yemeni-refugee-problem>.

86. EuyRyung Jun, *Virtuous Citizens and Sentimental Society: Ethics and Politics in Neoliberal South Korea* (PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2011), 6.87. Hilary Finchum-Sung, "The Rainbow Chorus: Performing Multicultural Identity in South Korea," *Seoul Journal of Korean Studies* 25, no. 1 (2012): 129–130. Darker-skinned, optically brown and Black subjects of multicultural policies are frequently infantilized in Korean media. Advertisements urge Koreans to donate to these communities, usually brown or Black children who surround charitable Korean celebrities, via organizations like the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. These ads dot a varied landscape of Korean television commercials, bus stop billboards, and even convenience-store donation coin banks.

88. Quoted in Alex Jong-Seok Lee, "South Korea: Migrant Workers' Rights Clouded by Race, Class," *Inter Press Service*, December 18, 2007, <http://www.ipsnews.net/2007/12/south-korea-migrant-workers-rights-clouded-by-race-class>.

89. The *New York Times* covered this story with the predictable title "South Koreans Struggle with Race." See Choe Sang-hun, "South Koreans Struggle with Race," *New York Times*, November 1, 2009, <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/02/world/asia/02race.html>.

90. Ok Hyeonju, "[From the Scene] Korean-Only Bars Trigger Controversy," *Korean Herald*, February 21, 2016, <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20160221000207>.

91. Claire Lee, "Defining Racism in Korea," *Korean Herald*, September 4, 2014, <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20140904001088>.

92. Nadia Kim, *Imperial Citizens: Koreans and Race from Seoul to LA* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 53.

93. Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*, 1.

94. Claire Jean Kim quoted in Eric Tang, "A Gulf Unites Us: The Vietnamese Americans of Black New Orleans East," *American Quarterly* 63, no. 1 (2011): 122.

95. Ghassan Hage, *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 87.

96. Deirdre Howard-Wagner, "Multiculturalism and Culture as a Technique of Whiteness," in *On Whiteness*, ed. Nicky Falkof and Oliver Cashman-Brown (London: Oxford Interdisciplinary Press, 2012), 293–302.

97. Sun Jung, *Korean Masculinities and Transcultural Consumption: Yonsama, Rain, Old-boy, K-Pop Idols* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011).

98. Pil Ho Kim and C. Colin Singer, "Three Periods of Korean Cinema: Invisible, Camouflage, and Blockbuster," *Acta Koreana* 14, no. 1 (2011): 128.

99. Jack Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 269.

100. Jin-wook's comments to the author were in Korean. Korean to English translation by the author.

101. Hagen Koo (*Korean Workers: The Culture and Politics of Class Formation* [Cornell University Press, 2001]) argues that South Korea's modern labor movement from the 1970s to the 1980s was spearheaded by women workers (namely, those in the country's emerging textile industries) despite severe sexism by unionists and management alike.

102. Hong Seok-cheon is arguably the most recognizable gay male figure in South Korea. Originally a popular model, actor, and comedian, Hong was initially ostracized for answering that he was gay when questioned on a Korean variety show. In recent years, he has become a respected and regular presence on the Korean media landscape as a successful restaurateur and prospective politician. Relatedly, Jin-wook told me that although he was open to the experience, he had yet to meet any openly gay Koreans.

103. My thanks go to Jeffrey Martin for introducing me to this phrasing of South Korea's postcolonial condition. Personal communication with Jeffrey Martin, assistant professor of anthropology at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and expert on East Asian policing, law, and security, May 18, 2018.

104. Personal communication with Jong Bum Kwon, May 18, 2018.

105. George Lipsitz, *American Studies in a Moment of Danger* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 313.