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碩士論文

韓美作家李昌來《母語人士》與《漂泊歲月》中的
雙文化成長敘事

Reading the Bicultural Narratives of *Bildung* in
Chang-rae Lee's *Native Speaker* and *A Gesture Life*



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摘 要

本論文乃藉由成長小說(*Bildungsroman*)的觀點來探討李昌來《母語人士》與《漂泊歲月》中韓裔美籍人士的國族認同議題。兩書中的主角，亨利派克(Henry Park)與黑旗時露(Jiro Kurohata)，為了在美國得到歸屬感進而選擇壓抑自身韓國性(Koreanness)與自我，並利用同化策略(*assimilation*)以融入美國主流白人文化。因此，我將在此論文探討主角們的認同危機與其追尋自我的旅程。藉由此分析，我將探討李昌來對韓美認同議題的看法並重新定位韓/亞美人在美國的社會地位，進而提出於國族認同議題中取得平衡以達雙文化並存層面的可能性。全文共分四章。第一章旨在探討韓美文學的變遷與成長小說的特色並藉此導入李昌來此兩小說的基本架構。第二章與第三章則分別探討《母語人士》與《漂泊歲月》中主角的成長教育過程(*the process of Bildung*)。第二章企圖從語言認同方面切入主角亨利派克的國族認同觀點，在一段自我探尋後亨利不再堅持自己的美籍身份，也不會為了單一美國文化而排斥自身的韓國性。第三章則希望藉由少數族裔模範(*Model Minority discourse*)與創傷(*trauma*)的交互影響，帶進主角黑旗時露的國族認同議題。最後，於第四章總結全文。透過兩主角的成長教育，李昌來於書中指出韓/亞美人不該以同化為最終目標，進而喪失原民族的文化特色，而是須將韓/亞美人視為一種新的身份，一種能同時包容兩種甚至多種不同文化層面的身份別。

關鍵詞：成長小說、成長教育、語言認同、少數族裔模範、創傷、《母語人士》、
《漂泊歲月》、李昌來

Reading the Bicultural Narratives of *Bildung* in Chang-rae Lee's
Native Speaker and *A Gesture Life*

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ABSTRACT

The thesis aims to explore how Chang-rae Lee deploys the genre of the *Bildungsroman* to discuss the dilemma with respect to ethnic and national identity in his *Native Speaker* and *A Gesture Life*. In order to get a sense of belonging, the two protagonists in the novels, Henry Park and Jiro Kurohata, choose to suppress their Koreanness as well as selfhood, and embrace mainstream white culture in America through assimilation. I would like to explore their identity crises and journeys of searching for their selfhood in this thesis. Via the analysis, I delve into Lee's thinking toward identity, along with his suggestion for Korean/ Asian Americans to relocate their social status in the US. That is, being a bicultural person is very possible for them to solve the dilemma between ethnic and national identity.

The thesis includes four chapters. Chapter One investigates the transition of Korean American literature and the features of the *Bildungsroman*, both of which constitute the framework of the two novels. The following two chapters discuss the processes of the protagonists' *Bildung* in *Native Speaker* and *A Gesture Life* respectively. In Chapter Two, I attempt to explore Henry Park's viewpoints about the issue of ethnic and national identity from the linguistic identity. After his process of *Bildung*, Henry does not insist on the American identity, nor does he reject his Koreanness in order to be a real American. Moreover, he grasps the significance to be what he is. In Chapter Three, I examine the change of Jiro Kurohata's attitude toward the issue of ethnic and national identity under the interweaving effect of his traumas and the model minority discourse. During the process of his *Bildung*, Hata gradually realizes the model minority discourse is nothing but an illusion. It is impossible for him to turn into an American with the help of the discourse. Finally, I make a conclusion in Chapter Four. With the *Bildungs* of the two protagonists, Chang-rae Lee suggests that Korean/ Asian Americans do not need to lose their ethnic culture due to assimilation. Instead, they should regard "the Korean/ Asian American" as a new identity, a kind of identification that contains two or even more cultures at the same time.

Keywords: *Bildungsroman*, *Bildung*, linguistic identity, model minority discourse, trauma, *Native Speaker*, *A Gesture Life*, Chang-rae Lee

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Reading the Bicultural Narratives of *Bildung* in Chang-rae Lee's

Native Speaker and A Gesture Life

Chapter 1

Introduction:

From Korean American Literature to the *Bildungsroman*

[T]he “dominant culture” is far from monolithic. . . . [T]he concept of the “mainstream” as monolith is a strategy employed to maintain the power of those who see themselves as members of that mainstream; such “unity” forms the foundation for the myth of universalism. (339)

——Donald C. Goellnicht, “Blurring Boundaries”

For immigrants and their descendants, to be well assimilated into the dominant culture in the new country seems to be top on the list of their aspirations. Only by doing so, they can really view themselves as authentic members of the country. However, many contemporary immigrant writers, such as Chang-rae Lee, do not think so. Now they are trying to figure out a new meaning for their living and identity in the immigratory country. As Shirley Geok-lin Lim states, “[t]he literatures being produced today by immigrant populations reflect, address, express, and reconstruct the late-twentieth-century preoccupation with and interrogation of concepts of ‘identity,’ ‘home,’ and ‘nation’” (294). Indeed the novels written by Chang-rae Lee, a Korean American writer, are mostly concerned with the very issues of identity, home, and nation as well. The protagonists in his books—Henry Park as a Korean American in *Native Speaker* (1995) and Franklin Hata as a Japanese American in *A Gesture Life* (1999)—strive to find a home for themselves in the new country. With a view to achieving the goal, both Henry and Hata choose to suppress their original ethnicity and selfhood, and embrace mainstream white culture in America. Nevertheless, even with this determination to assimilate, they still have to face family crises, to

interrogate their status in society, and ultimately to come to an identity that is not fixed but flexible to a certain extent. To be more specific, in order to survive in the US, Henry constantly ignores his Korean identity, hoping to be taken as a common American through assimilation. His wife, though, cannot endure his philosophy of life and leaves him. Similarly, to integrate into the American life, Hata is proud to be a model minority and to be accepted by the people in Bedley Run, only at the cost of his self. His adopted daughter does not appreciate his good-man mindset anymore and leaves home as well. These family crises force Henry and Hata to rethink their stances regarding ethnic as well as national identity. Eventually, they come to a reconciliation between nation and ethnicity. This process of the awakening of their self characterizes the narratives of *Bildung* in *Native Speaker* and *A Gesture Life*. In this thesis, I would like to explore Henry's and Hata's identity crises and journeys of searching for their selfhood.

Furthermore, Henry and Hata actually put more emphasis on national identity than on ethnic identity. As long as they have a fixed national identity, it seems to them, they can have a sense of belonging which they always long for. As Jan E. Stets and Peter J. Burke point out, "a social identity is a person's knowledge that he or she belongs to a social category or group. A social group is a set of individuals who hold a common social identification or view themselves as members of the same social category" (225). Both Henry and Hata hope to get a fixed and secure national identity by means of social identity. Therefore, they struggle to be well assimilated into the white social category. However, assimilation greatly influences their racial identity because the identity of a person is something that is "self-assigned and assigned by others" (Berner 10). For nonwhite immigrants and their offspring who long to be identified with the mainstream society in America, their racial identity is very likely to

be affected by white people, and may change with “psychological variation” (Carter 6). That is to say, “[a] member of a cultural or racial group may or may not identify with membership in that group” (Carter 6). This is because Henry and Hata want to be treated equally like whites, only at the expense of their original ethnic identity. In their cases, they would like to be regarded as ordinary Americans and live in the US without being racially discriminated against and alienated. Thus, they try to accept white culture and ignore their original ethnicity and self, for they believe this is the best way to become like a white. Through identifying with the white and accepting white culture, they think they can be viewed as white Americans, which enables them to identify with America, to own an “American” identity. However, their family crises urge them to reconsider this premise.

Moreover, as Carter mentions, racial and national identity represents “ego differentiation of the personality” (7). In other words, once Henry and Hata change their attitude toward identity and rescue their selfhood, the characteristics of their personalities will become more distinguished and unique. The development of racial and national identity can be affected by external factors, such as influences from peers, family, or institutions. Compared to these, more developing and differentiated racial and national identity will be “internally derived through a personal process of exploration, discovery, integration, and maturation” (Carter 7), which refers to self-education as *Bildung*. Through the process of their personal *Bildung*, Henry and Hata have a different perspective on the issue of identity. In the meantime, their attitude toward their original ethnicity and self has changed in the long run. They will not despise their birth community or ignore who they are. Actually, their situations can account for the embarrassing situation of the Asian Americans. Just as Young-oak Lee criticizes, “Asian Americans face perhaps a perennial dilemma of whether . . . they ever will be able to assimilate into American society” (146). Nevertheless, with

Henry's and Hata's *Bildungs*, Chang-rae Lee also provides his viewpoints and solution for Asian Americans to rethink their location in American society. Thus, I intend to explore how Lee deploys the genre of the *Bildungsroman* to discuss the dilemma with respect to ethnic and national identity in this thesis. I will also delve into Lee's thinking toward identity, along with his suggestion for Asian Americans to relocate their social status in the US.

The very first issue to be explored is the reason why Chang-rae Lee feels like taking the topic of identity as the major theme in his writing. In addition to identity, his fiction also involves the issues of war, sociopolitical circumstances, Korean American history, sex/ sexuality, and multiculturalism, all of which are significant concerns in the tradition of Korean American literature. More specifically, what follows will focus on the connection between Korean American literature and Lee's novels. At the same time, I will provide a literature review concerning Lee's novels and explain why I want to read the novels as *Bildungsromans*. After this, I will delve into the tradition of *Bildungsroman* and discuss how the genre is deployed in the novels. Mainly I argue that by using the genre, Lee successfully combines the issues of identity with other features of Korean American writing.

1.1 Chang-rae Lee and his Writing Career

Chang-rae Lee was born in 1965 and immigrated with his family to the United States from Korea at the age of three. He graduated from Yale University with a B. A. in English, and then received an M. A. in creative writing from the University of Oregon. So far, he has published three novels, including *Native Speaker* (1995), *Gesture Life* (1999), and *Aloft* (2004). His latest book, *The Surrendered*, has been

released on March 1, 2010.¹ Lee has won numerous awards, such as the Hemingway/PEN Award, QPB's New Voices Award, Barnes & Noble Discover Great New Writers Award, Asian American Literary Award for Fiction, and one of the twenty best American writers under forty selected by the *New Yorker*.² Now he serves as the director of the creative writing program at Princeton University.

On the faculty website of Princeton University, Lee states that he is fascinated by “people who find themselves in positions of alienation or some kind of cultural dissonance.” Thus, the characters in his novels are always related to those “who are thinking about the culture and how they fit or don't fit into it,” which seems to be his own doubt as well. When interviewed by Pam Belluck, Lee revealed that he had an English name “Chuck” once, but changed it back to “Chang-rae” soon because all of those English names felt wrong except for his Korean name. What is more, he mentioned that his mother wished and pushed him to learn English well. She wanted him to be successful in every aspect so that he would not be seen as an alien. His mother's opinion appears to have had a great effect on him and even on his writing career. “I wonder now, did I become a writer because I was just so afraid I wouldn't fit in?” said Lee, for “his very fear of inadequacy with the language and the culture drove him to master English in its most challenging form, literature” (Belluck). With writing, he starts on a searching journey “for his own ethnic definition of himself” (Belluck). Identity, consequently, becomes the central issue in his writing.

In Lee's fiction, however, we can observe not only query about identity but also some contemporary concerns of Asian/ Korean American literature, such as sex/ sexuality, diaspora, or heterogeneity. More precisely, his writing is closely connected

¹ The information of *The Surrendered* (2010) comes from *Books Online Bookstore* on May 6, 2010. The keyword is *The Surrendered* or Chang-rae Lee. Please browse the website below: <www.books.com.tw>.

² These award-winning records can be found from Lee's faculty profile at the website of Princeton University <http://www.princeton.edu/arts/arts_at_princeton/creative_writing/> and an interview by Ron Hogan posted online <<http://www.beatrice.com/interviews/lee/>>.

with the main issues of Asian/ Korean American literature, which induces the discussion on identity. Therefore, in the following, I will explore the tradition and the innovation of Asian/ Korean American writing, and then scrutinize how they are related to Lee's conception of identity.

1.2 Korean American Literature and Chang-rae Lee's Novels

Asian American literature, as King-Kok Cheung explains, emerged from the impact of the Civil Rights movement in the late 1960s, and can be defined as works written by people of Asian descent born in or immigrating to North America (1).³ Cheung goes on to indicate that Asian American writing, to this day, has had several significant shifts. The main concern for Asian American writers in the past—such as Carlos Bulosan's *America Is in the Heart: A Personal History* (1943), Milton Murayama's *All I Asking For Is My Body* (1959), and Maxine Hong Kingston's *China Men* (1981)—was to claim America, to stress race and masculinity, and to delve into social history as well as communal responsibility. Nevertheless, for the younger generations—like Sara Suleri's *Meatless Days* (1989), David Mura's *Turning Japanese* (1991), and Ginu Kamani's *Jungle Girl* (1995)—the focus has changed to writing about diaspora and developing multiple interests in ethnicity, class, sex/sexuality, postmodernism, poststructuralism, along with multiculturalism (Cheung 1-17). The younger generations of Asian American writers do not always, more specifically, stick to the subject of being Americans, yet attend more to the theme of their family roots, that is, the original ethnicity. In this regard, Korean American

³ As Ronald Takaki expounds in "From a Different Shore: Their History Bursts with Telling," the roots of Asian Americans are so diverse and can be traced back to China, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, India, Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia (4). However, I am of the opinion that Takaki omits some countries which also could be considered Asian, such as Thailand, Indonesia, or the countries in South Asia and the Middle East, like Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Saudi Arabia, and so on. For further information, please consult Takaki's *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (1998).

literature seems to follow the paradigm shift in Asian American literature, which also could be observed in Chang-rae Lee's works. In the following discussion, I would like to elaborate on the variance and the significant characteristics in Korean American literature.

Korean American literature, according to Elaine H. Kim, is particularly rooted in and circumscribed by Korean American social history and sociopolitical circumstances ("Korean American Literature" 157). Early Korean American authors illustrate Asian or Korean Americans as aliens because of their discernible ethnic features. Sometimes they write to claim America so as to express how wonderfully and successfully they have become westernized or Americanized. Most of the novels in this period are largely autobiographical and written by Korean immigrant intellectuals. Aside from this, Japanese colonization of Korea also plays an important role in the development of Korean American literature, for it stimulates "the particular anguish of the exile deprived even of the sustaining illusion of a triumphant return 'home' after a life of toil in a country where she/ he felt hated" ("Korean American Literature" 158). In this phase, Younghill Kang (1903-72), a pioneering Korean American novelist, could be the best representative. The setting of his first novel, *The Grass Roof* (1931), is in colonial Korea, and the protagonist, Chung-pa Han, is imprisoned briefly by the Japanese for his political participation in Sam Il Oondong.⁴ He dreams to flee from Korea to the US, never relinquishing his hope to find acceptance in American life, only to fail in his American dream. Nevertheless, in Kang's second novel, *East Goes West* (1937), Han and other Korean exiles finally arrive in America. Via these characters, Kang tries to "[call] into question U.S.

⁴ According to Elaine Kim's footnote 7, "Sam Il Oondong was a series of massive peaceful demonstrations protesting Japan's colonization of Korea that began in Korea on March 19, 1919, and lasted for several months, during which thousands of Koreans were killed and imprisoned" ("Korean American" 183).

American nationalist narratives of progress, quality, assimilation, and upward mobility with his portrait of Korean immigrants' endless wandering" ("Korean American Literature" 159).

Nevertheless, recent Korean American writers in Hawaii present a different facet in terms of Korean American identity and literature. As Elaine Kim states, Korean heritage for them is significant but not the only identity they possess. More concretely, it is possible for them to claim to be Asian, Korean, and American all at once, to be increasingly hybrid and heterogeneous ("Korean American Literature" 170-71). Take Gary Pak's *The Watcher of Waipuna* (1992) for instance. It is a collection of short stories in which the characters belong to numerous races. Nevertheless, they are "not defined exclusively or even primarily by their ethnicity. . . . [Instead], their ethnicity describes them" ("Korean American Literature" 171), which appears to resonate with the change of Asian American literature mentioned earlier, that is, multiculturalism, heterogeneity, and peculiarity. Nowadays, the trend of Korean American literature, as Elaine Kim analyzes in "Roots and Wings," is no longer mainly about the connection between Korea and Korean Americans. The key elements for younger Korean American writers are "US imperialism in Korean history, racism in immigrant life, and issues of gender and sexuality in family and society. At the same time, there should be more focus on different ways of being Korean in America" ("Roots and Wings" 15).

Furthermore, in terms of the perspective on gender and sexuality, "[m]ale writers who have dominated Korean-American literature up to the late seventies have rarely attempted to create multi-dimensional female characters in their works" (Kyhan Lee 26). More specifically, they are male-centered and accustomed to accepting or objectifying women as the subaltern ("Korean American Literature" 165-66). In order

to change the unfair situation, more and more female writers, such as Sook Nyul Choi, write for Korean and Korean American women so that they can really know and remember Korea with its war history. In Chang-rae Lee's novels, we can observe the features of early and recent Korean American literature. Meanwhile, we can also see that female characters are important in his novels.

Chang-rae Lee, viewed as the most prominent contemporary Korean American writer by Heinz Insu Fenkl in 2004 (20), could be thought of as the best representative for the transition of Korean American literature I mentioned above. The settings of his books are still surrounded by war, Korean American history, and sociopolitical circumstances. However, his novels also address the issues of racism in the community or society and of sex/ sexuality in family, which are two points mentioned by Elaine Kim as characteristics of works by younger Korean American novelists. Aside from these, he blends the Hawaiian writer's thinking toward being Korean or Asian in the US within the story, namely, to claim to be Asian, Korean, and American at the same time. Most important of all, Lee tries to tell readers that one's selfhood is significant for one's life: we should be the masters of our life instead of being controlled by it.

Among his first three novels, all written in first-person narration, I have chosen *Native Speaker* and *A Gesture Life* as my primary texts for analysis because of the numerous analogies between them.⁵ The heroes—Henry Park in *Native Speaker* as well as Franklin Hata in *A Gesture Life*—are Asian American outsiders who eventually acquire similar insight into identity. Both of them would like to start a family in America, and long for a successful fulfillment of their American dreams. Nonetheless, their American life appears not to go so smoothly. Henry hopes and

⁵ His latest book, *The Surrendered*, has been just published so I will not take it into consideration in this thesis.

strives to be a well-assimilated American, but gets confused gradually when working as a spy. Hata also dreams to be thought of as an American, but everyone still calls him Hata instead of Franklin owing to his apparent “Japaneseness.” They both experience a journey of searching for selfhood, nationality and ethnicity, along with a sense of belonging. Most significantly, the female characters in the novels—Lelia, Sunny, and Kkutaeh—are not just suffering women or the disadvantaged but are set as decisive turning points for Henry’s and Hata’s life journeys. Nevertheless, as we can know from the endings of the stories, both Henry and Hata step on a more distinct road in life than before. Henry eventually reunites and lives with his wife again, whereas Hata leaves his daughter, grandson, and the familiar American town in the long run. Moreover, in the two novels, Lee successfully combines the conventions and the innovation of Korean American literature. In *Native Speaker*, Korean American social history is subtly written into the storyline, while the memories of World War II and the Korean comfort women are finely inserted into *A Gesture Life*. On top of history and war, Lee pays much attention to the multidimensional and heterogeneous society in both books. He expresses concern about racism, marriage, and transnational adoption. Meanwhile, he also takes advantage of multiculturalism, and arranges various characters with different ethnic backgrounds to strengthen his belief in unmatched racial peculiarity.

Unlike *Native Speaker* and *A Gesture Life*, in *Aloft*, Lee explores identity issues based upon an insider’s perspective. The protagonist in his third novel is Jerry Battle, an Italian American whose family is a diluted mix of Italian Asian and Latin American. According to Philip Culbertson’s review of *Aloft*, Lee writes brilliantly “about identity and relationships, about the every-dayness of our regular lives, and about the fears and anxieties that characterise our inner dialogue.” Through interacting with his grown children, late wife, and girlfriend, Jerry comes to an understanding of himself better.

However, Lee mainly focuses on interpersonal relationships, family identity, and human nature that are different from what interests me in the other two books, namely, national and racial identity. Hence, I choose to analyze *Native Speaker* and *A Gesture Life* in this thesis. Furthermore, in addition to the traits of Korean American literature, his novels are highly concerned with the form of the *Bildungsroman*. With the genre, he successfully narrates the dilemma of the Asian American in between two different cultures. In the following section, I will dwell on the literature review with reference to the two novels.

1.3 Literature Review

So far numerous scholars have studied the issue of identity in the two books based on distinct perspectives. In terms of *Native Speaker*, the issue of identity has been discussed from the perspectives of history, politics, ethnicity, and invisibility. For instance, in “A Diasporic Future? *Native Speaker* and Historical Trauma,” Min Hyoung Song takes advantage of shared historical trauma to define the location of Korean American identity. Through the analysis of John Kwang and Henry Park, Song considers that the present-day Korean American is indeed a group different from Koreans or Americans, but is ultimately burdened by the Korean, as well as Korean American, history. In “Citizen Kwang: Chang-rae Lee’s *Native Speaker* and the Politics of Consent,” Betsy Huang argues that the absence of Asian Americans in American political systems highlights the fact that the Asian American is a disadvantaged minority. Out of the failure of Kwang’s mayoral campaign, Huang thinks that it is still hard to imagine a solution to stable identity between Asian and American (264). In “Ethnicity as Cognitive Identity,” Sămi Ludwig’s main concern is that body identity, or biological determinism, must be acknowledged, but cannot satisfactorily explain “a person’s experiencing ‘identity’” (222). As a result, Ludwig

tries to explicate identity from another viewpoint on the basis of cognitive psychology. In “Impersonation and Other Disappearing Acts in *Native Speaker* by Chang-rae Lee,” Tina Chen mentions that “[Henry’s] invisibility is both a matter of the refusal of others to see him and the logical effect of his [spy] occupation” (638). At the same time, the spy task also symbolizes “his cultural dilemmas as a Korean American” (Chen 661). Hence, by means of Henry’s invisibility and his job, Chen further delves into his query of identity. Moreover, most of the researches on this novel focus only on Henry and Kwang. Nevertheless, in my thesis I will probe into Henry’s oscillatory identity not only through the eyes of Kwang, but also through the eyes of Henry’s father and wife. Meanwhile, I will discuss Henry’s attitude toward linguistic identity, concentrating on how he bridges Korea and America.

Researches on *A Gesture Life* are comparatively fewer than those on *Native Speaker*. In “Passing, Natural Selection, and Love’s Failure: Ethics of Survival from Chang-rae Lee to Jacques Lacan,” Anne Anlin Cheng attempts “to nuance the politics of vision in the context of social assimilation and to explore the problem of objecthood for theories of subjectivity” (557). In “Gender, Race, and the Nation in *A Gesture Life*,” Young-oak Lee strives to explore “the layers of Hata’s ideologies that seem to have interfered with his ultimate goal of attaining an American national identity” (147). In “Traumatic Patriarchy: Reading Gendered Nationalisms in Chang-rae Lee’s *A Gesture Life*,” Hamilton Carroll pays more attention to the topics of sex/ sexuality, trauma, along with assimilation. He argues that there is “a shift in perspective from a nationally oriented, patriarchally centered, narrative of immigration and cultural assimilation to a fragmented, transnational narrative driven by the stories of Kkutaeh and Sunny” (593). Similarly, in my thesis I will delve into Hata’s racial and national identity through the perspectives of assimilation and trauma. Furthermore, Carroll holds that “*A Gesture Life* cannot be understood as a

Bildungsroman proper because . . . the novel becomes a traumatic narrative that consistently displaces Hata's tale of successful assimilation" (593). However, I hold a different stance from Carroll's. Even though the novel involves Hata's traumatic experience, it still cannot cover the truth of his assimilation. More specifically, his trauma and successful assimilation are interwoven with each other. For example, due to being abandoned by his Korean birth parents, Hata makes up his mind to thoroughly melt into the Japanese society, being docile and obedient to the wishes of his Japanese adoptive parents. Through his narration, he reveals the relationships between his traumas and his will to assimilation, while gradually realizing that successful assimilation still cannot erase his racial uniqueness, which could be considered a process of *Bildung*. Likewise, in *Native Speaker*, Henry experiences a chaotic identity crisis, eventually comprehending that people cannot get rid of their original ethnicity but have to accept it instead, which could be viewed as a process of his *Bildung*. With the two narratives of *Bildung*, both Henry and Hata change the whole view of racial and national identity. Thus, I would like to read the two novels as examples of Asian American *Bildungsroman* and further probe into the insights that Henry and Hata get.

1.4 The *Bildungsroman* and Chang-rae Lee

The *Bildungsroman* allegedly first appeared in 1795 with Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Lehrjahre* (*Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*) (Feng 2; Hardin ix). According to the definition in *Oxford English Dictionary*, a *Bildungsroman* is "[a] novel that has as its main theme the formative years or spiritual education of one person." Aside from this, in the introduction to *Reflection and Action: Essays on the Bildungsroman* (1991), James Hardin also roughly defines the *Bildungsroman* as "a type of novel, usually autobiographical (and sometimes hardly

distinguishable from that nonfictional form), and principally concerned with the spiritual and psychological development of the protagonist” (ix). Nevertheless, Jeffery L. Sammons criticizes that such an elucidation of the *Bildungsroman* seems too broad and sketchy (26). In fact, Hardin himself, after the general definition of the word, also points out that “there is no consensus on the meaning of the term *Bildungsroman*” (x). As a result, in addition to the above definitions, I will try to delve into the relationship between the *Bildungsroman* and Chang-rae Lee’s fiction based on the narrative pattern, the plot, and the denouement. Via the genre, Lee successfully depicts the ambivalence of the Asian Americans about their identity oscillating between “ethnicity” and “nation.” During their *Bildungs*, however, the main characters gradually change their attitude toward identity. Actually, they do not need to give up their racial identity in order to own national identity. Instead, they can have both, which is the main message that Lee wants to convey to the Asian American and those who are bothered by the same situation.

In terms of the narrative pattern of the *Bildungsroman*, according to Pin-chia Feng’s analysis of Wilhelm Dilthey, two essential elements are a linear progression toward knowledge and social integration as well as a “spiral”⁶ upward movement toward spiritual fulfillment (2). However, Lee, in both of the novels, creates a dual spiral depiction not only in spiritual achievement but in the chronological progression as well through inter-weaving the past and the present. On the basis of Elaine Kim’s “Roots and Wings,” the amalgamation of the past and the present is crucial, for it could be thought of as a significant linchpin to realize the present (2). In *Native Speaker*, Henry always recalls past memories in his daily and working life. For instance, he remembers his childhood in which he lived with his parents. He thinks

⁶ Feng indicates that the spiral concept comes from Mary Anne Ferguson’s “The Female Novel of Development and the Myth of Psyche.”

that his father was too stubborn and cowardly to fight for his own right. Thus, even though a customer took a small bite of an apple and did not buy it, he just smiled as if nothing had happened. However, it is not until Henry grows up that he understands it is the way his father chooses to protect his family and their life from bullies. Through his narration, it can be sensed he feels sorry for his father and acknowledge that his thinking was immature then. More importantly, by means of his father, he understands the grief of being a Korean immigrant, which is why he strives to integrate into the white society. In *A Gesture Life*, Hata always retrieves the past whenever he sees any reminders or people reminiscent of his past recollections. For example, the pictures in a dusty box in the storeroom remind him of his adopted daughter Sunny and her childhood. In the meanwhile, the slightness of her build reminds him of Kkutaeh, the comfort woman in wartime. Through Sunny's photographs and slender figure, Hata recalls the past, eventually comprehending that he views Sunny as a substitute for Kkutaeh. Accordingly, with Lee's dual spiral of narrating progression and upward spiritual accomplishment, the two novels indeed have a unique pattern for the protagonists' *Bildungs*.

As for the plot, "most *Bildungsroman* novels adopt the majority of the genre's principal elements: childhood, the conflict of the generations, provinciality, the larger society, self-education, alienation, and ordeal by love. Also, the child will normally be an orphan or fatherless or repelled by a living father" (Selinger 38-39).⁷ In Lee's fiction, most of these conventional points can be found as well. In *Native Speaker*, Henry as the narrator talks about what has happened from his childhood to adulthood. After graduating from a university, he becomes a provincial spy, caring nothing but his family. Generally speaking, a spy needs to always stay calm and maintains

⁷ Selinger paraphrases Jerome Hamilton Buckley's remarks in his *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding* (1974).

multiple identities so that s/he can carry out a task with precision. Because of these traits, he is forced to face alienation in a society filled with racism against nonwhites. Moreover, As Bernard Selinger observes, “the secondary characters principally act as models for the protagonist, models which he can accept or reject. This modeling is central to the development of the *Bildung*, who attains individuality by, paradoxically, becoming like someone else” (50). Henry is asked to spy on John Kwang, a Korean American candidate for the mayor of New York. However, due to Kwang’s excellent performance in all respects, Henry thinks of him as a perfectly-assimilated American and a role model. Thus, with Lelia’s ordeal by love and John Kwang as a model, Henry realizes and re-conceptualizes ethnic and national identity. In *A Gesture Life*, Hata reveals what happened mainly in and after his youth. From his narration, we can know he is a Korean adoptee endeavoring to make others recognize him as an American. As a result, he becomes a model minority both in Japan and in America. Much to his amazement, though, his desire to be a model minority gives rise to the conflict with Sunny. Nevertheless, he also gets a different insight into ethnic and national identity via Kkutaeh’s ordeal and a yearning for Sunny. Hence, the plots of the two novels correspond to the conventions of the *Bildungsroman*.

Furthermore, the change of the perspectives on ethnic and national identity that Hata and Henry experience could be regarded as the outcome of their processes of *Bildung* respectively. According to the early nineteenth-century critic Karl Morgenstern, “a work will be called a *Bildungsroman* first and primarily on account of its content, because it depicts the hero’s *Bildung* as it begins and proceeds to a certain level of perfection” (Berman 77).⁸ As a result, the protagonist’s *Bildung* is a key component for a work as a *Bildungsroman*.

⁸ Karl Morgenstern’s remarks in this section are cited by Russell A. Berman from Hildegard Emmel’s *History of the German Novel*, which is translated by Ellen Summerfield.

In the eighteenth century, *Bildung* meant formation, “transferring the formation of external features to the features of the personality as a whole” (Koepke 130). Later, in the early nineteenth century, the term implied “‘cultivation,’ education and refinement in a broad, humanistic sense” (Hardin xi). To put it another way, *Bildung* has two important connotations, namely, “cultivation” and “formation.” As Sammons mentions, “the *Bildungsroman* should have something to do with *Bildung*, that is, with the early bourgeois, humanistic concept of the shaping of the individual self from its innate potentialities through acculturation and social experience to the threshold of maturity” (41). For the concept of *Bildung*, Sammons further points out that “[it] is intensely bourgeois; it carries with it many assumptions about the autonomy and relative integrity of the self, its potential self-creative energies, its relative range of options within material, social, even psychological determinants” (42). Thus, *Bildung* could be defined as a process for the formation of one’s self from immaturity to maturity via self-education. And, the process of *Bildung* highly affects and relates to the development and the outcome of one’s selfhood and identity.

When it comes to the concept of *Bildung* in fiction, it is applied to the main character who undergoes a series of discouragements and encouragements, finally getting a more positive attitude toward self and the world (Hardin xii-xiii).⁹ In this regard, however, Sammons hold a different viewpoint. He argues,

Bildung is not merely the accumulation of experience, not merely maturation in the form of fictional biography. There must be a sense of evolutionary change within the self, a teleology of individuality, even if the novel, as many do, comes to doubt or deny the possibility of achieving a gratifying result. (41)

⁹ For further information, please consult *Der deutsche Bildungsroman: Gattungsgeschichte vom 18. bis zum 20. Jahrhundert*, edited by Jürgen Jacobs and Markus Krause in 1989.

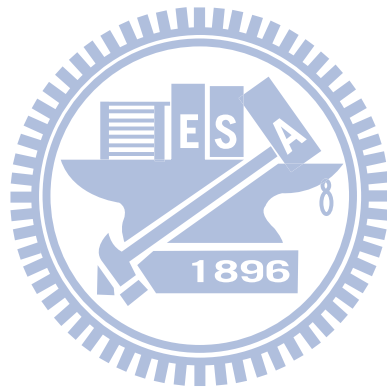
In other words, for a *Bildungsroman*, “[i]t does not much matter whether the process of *Bildung* succeeds or fails, whether the protagonist achieves an accommodation with life and society or not” (Sammons 41). Instead, it is more important for the hero to gain a sense of evolutionary or revolutionary change in thought during the process of *Bildung*, even though s/he does not get a more positive understanding of self and the world.

At the end of *Native Speaker*, Henry finally gets together with his wife again, trying to be himself more positively. On the contrary, in the ending of *A Gesture Life*, Hata departs from everything familiar to him, traveling alone without specific destinations. Even so, both of them—as outsiders of white culture—get to understand themselves and change their attitude toward racial and national identity. For Henry, he becomes more enthusiastic about people instead of being indifferent. For Hata, he does not insist on being a model minority anymore. They eventually realize that it is more important to be what they are rather than being what others hope them to be. In addition, they comprehend that assimilation, just like hallucination, can never camouflage the fact that they are nonwhites. They should not evade their original ethnicity, but try to face and identify with it instead. On the other hand, it is also a fact that they are Americans now. Even though Henry still cannot solve his identity problem in the long run, he is not trapped within it. This is because he has realized that it is more significant to be who and what he is. As for the query of identity, Chang-rae Lee tries to solve it in *A Gesture Life*. The final insight that Hata has achieved is to come to a reconciliation among the identities of Korea, Japan, and America.

Based on the above analyses, we can reach three key points in regard to the connection of the *Bildungsroman* and Lee’s novels. First, Chang-rae Lee not only employs the conventional elements of the *Bildungsroman* in his novels, but also

makes a breakthrough in the traditional discursive development in the genre. Second, by writing these narratives of *Bildung*, he ultimately comes up with his answer to the problem of the identity crisis at the ends of both novels. Third, through deploying the elements of the *Bildungsroman*, Lee successfully creates a typology of the genre “based on the protagonist’s participation in the social mainstream or his identity as an outsider” (Hirsch 297). For such a typology, Marianne Hirsch stresses that in recent times, “[the] manifestations of the genre seem to explore primarily the fate of outsiders, [such as] women, minority groups, [and] artists (i.e., spiritual outsiders)” (297). In this regard, Henry and Hata are such outsiders. In addition, Morgenstern further points out that “[the genre of the *Bildungsroman*] promotes the *Bildung* of the reader to a greater extent than any other type of novel” (Berman 77). Through these *Bildungsromans*, Chang-rae Lee not only conveys his viewpoints toward the oscillating identity of the Asian American, but urges the reader like me to (re)think about it as well. Therefore, I would like to conclude with my *Bildung* and argue that “A Part” or “Apart” is only a matter of option at the end of the thesis. In the following two chapters, I will discuss Henry’s and Hata’s narratives of *Bildung* respectively. In *Native Speaker*, I will focus on the idea of linguistic identity and how Henry bridges the worlds and the cultures of Korea and America. Similarly, in *A Gesture Life*, I will concentrate on the relationships between Hata’s traumas and the ideology of model minority, and further analyze how they are interwoven with each other, which could be considered constituting the process of his *Bildung*. Finally, through reading the *Bildungs* of Henry and Hata, I would try to delve into the different lifestyle between the first and second Korean-American generations. After this, I would like to explore Lee’s understanding as well as thinking toward ethnic and national identity, and further scrutinize his reply to the identity crisis in the last chapter. Meanwhile, I will scrutinize my *Bildung* after reading and writing about the two novels as well. With the

thesis, I hope to offer another exit, another solution for those who are troubled by two or more identities.



Chapter 2

Who Am I? : A Spy's Identification in

Chang-rae Lee's *Native Speaker*

You are surreptitious, B+ student of life, first thing hummer of Wagner and Strauss, illegal alien, emotional alien, genre bug, Yellow peril: neo-American, great in bed, overrated, poppa's boy, sentimentalist, anti-romantic, _____ analyst (you fill in), stranger, follower, traitor, [and] spy.

————Chang-rae Lee, *Native Speaker*

It is significant to know exactly who one is. Yet, Henry Park seems to omit or neglect this because of his desire to be assimilated into the white society. Lelia Boswell, Henry's wife, leaves him with the list above, which triggers a process of self-inquiry for Henry. Through his *Bildung*, Henry grasps the significance to be what he is.

According to Sämi Ludwig, “this is a false identity that he [Henry] has assumed for himself; she [Lelia] has taken the initiative to provoke him by showing him this mirror of himself” (224). On top of the very above identities, Lelia adds one more—a “[f]alse speaker of language” (*Native Speaker* 6). Language epitomizes the culture and acculturation of a nation, especially in terms of the usage of slangs and idioms. For immigrants, it is hard to internalize these linguistic practices, especially for those who have never touched the language before. Yet, it is essential for them to learn to be fluent in a new tongue in order to survive and adopt well in the new environment. Even Henry, an American-born Korean, also undergoes a bitter process of learning English because its pronunciation is markedly different from that of Korean. Nevertheless, through Lelia, Henry realizes and sees more because “[she] acts as a window for Henry to reflect on the lives of struggling immigrant laborers and

their children” (Yoo 58). She is a speech therapist for children, helping those who have problems speaking English, including ESL kids. Among her students, two Laotian boys and their fathers catch Henry’s eyes. While listening to the fathers and sons communicating with customers in broken English, Henry “knows all too well that the boys will soon break their association with their native language in hopes of adopting and assimilating the new language” (Yoo 58). Nonetheless, Jane Yoo also comments that compared with those second-generation children, their parents are more reluctant to acquire the new language and embrace the new culture; instead, they are more willing to stick to their native roots (58). It could be the reason why the old Korean au pair in Henry’s home is not so friendly to Lelia. All in all, throughout the novel, the power of language is the key to “shape success, failure, acceptance, [and] rejection” (Belluck, “Being of Two Cultures”). That is, for immigrants, and even the American-born Henry, English is a requisite to live well in America.

In addition, the spy job for Henry is critical to his awakening. Pam Belluck in a *New York Times* interview delineates Henry as a spook “for shadowy, private clients, whose duty to blend into various roles forces him to suppress vital parts of himself.” On account of the employment, he always needs to change identities, like a master of disguise, a chameleon, in order to protect himself. Nevertheless, not until shadowing John Kwang—a Korean American candidate for New York’s mayoral position—does Henry waver and begin to question his life and himself. Kwang actually becomes a special person. According to John Whittier Treat, Kwang for Henry is a role model who “can admire as well as battle, because Kwang is to all appearances a perfectly assimilated Korean American” (339). Henry also longs to be a well-assimilated American, just as his father wishes him to be. He struggles to learn English well, enters a good university, and marries a white woman and has a lovely Korean-Caucasian son, all of which help him maintain the image of a model minority

until the demise of his son. The son's passing away, according to what Lee explains in his interview with Belluck, stands for the end of "a way of thinking about the future," compelling Henry into a messy life. Nevertheless, after knowing Kwang, his humanity seems to awake gradually. At the same time, he holds a different view concerning identity.

In this chapter, I will dwell on Henry's query of identity problem and the process of his *Bildung*. As Tina Chen points out,

Henry experiences as a Korean American whose American birth does not preclude his grappling with linguistic fluency and a cultural legacy of silence; as a man who woos his speech therapist wife without truly fathoming the mysteries of how to make himself heard and understood; and as a spy whose professional success is predicated upon his ability to impersonate someone else, to speak a story not his own. (639)

Sandwiched between Korean and American cultures, Henry struggles to be identified as a native, only at the expense of his self. His problem lies in the loss of selfhood. Accordingly, in the latter part of the chapter, my concern will focus on the influence of linguistic identity to Henry and how he goes through a process of development from his spy assignment and encounter with Kwang.

2.1 Enchantment of Language

Members of small minorities are more likely to acquire the culture and language of the majority than members of large minorities. . . . The incentives are greater for any individual to learn the majority language when only a few persons in the country speak his or her native language. (113-24)

———Edward P. Lazear, "Culture and Language"

I didn't know what a difference in language meant then. Or how my tongue

would tie in the initial attempts, stiffen so, struggle like an animal
booby-trapped and dying inside my head. Native speakers may not fully
know this, but English is a scabrous mouthful. (233)

———Chang-rae Lee, *Native Speaker*

For minority immigrants in America like the Parks, it is far better to “be assimilated in order to survive in the society” (Lazear 99). For the purpose of being well-assimilated, English becomes a crucial means of survival and communication. In *Native Speaker*, Henry’s father cannot serve as an industrial engineer in the US due to his limited English competence, even though he graduates from the best university in Korea. Moreover, via the successful fruit business, he also realizes that “[t]rade between individuals is facilitated when all traders share a common culture and language” (Lazear 97). He even asks Henry to recite the “Shakespeare words” so as to show off his well-assimilated and well-educated child to his friends and other natives, as he considers the performance is “good for business” (*Native Speaker* 53). This is because they can be accepted more easily through a show of assimilation, which also implies they can be part of the American melting pot. In spite of his diligence and successful business, nevertheless, Henry’s father is still not recognized as “‘authentic’ American political agent,” but just as “a legal alien” in America, for his poor “language abilities cast him as a failed national subject within the territory of the US” (Narkunas 336). Similarly, Henry’s mother does not speak English well, and can only communicate with other Koreans, which makes her life a small and narrow circle. Through the examples of his parents, Henry learns the significance of English if he wants to survive in the US.

What is more, the sense of invisibility reinforces his sensibility toward the language as well. Daniel Y. Kim indicates that “[*Native Speaker*] attempts to cast light on the psychic costs of the invisibility imposed on a minority community by white

Americans and of the invisibility that prevents those within a minority community from recognizing each other” (232). Due to his minority identity, Henry himself has discerned a sense of invisibility among the whites since his childhood. “[I]f I just kept speaking the language [Korean] of our work,” as he narrates, “the customers did not seem to see me. I wasn’t there. They didn’t look at me. I was a comely shadow who didn’t threaten them” (*Native Speaker* 53). Aside from this, Henry is ridiculed as “Marble Mouth” (*Native Speaker* 234) for his inarticulate predicament in kindergarten owing to his minority identity again. With the triple influence—his parents’ lived experiences and the internal fears of being neglected as well as of making linguistic errors—Henry pays much more attention to his own pronunciation, for just like what he says: “I will always make bad errors of speech” (*Native Speaker* 234).

In addition to his speech, Henry becomes very sensitive to other people’s pronunciation, which can be sensed from his first encounter with Lelia. As he recounts,

I noticed how closely I was listening to her. What I found was this: that she could really speak. At first I took her as being executing the language. She went word by word. Every letter had a border. I watched her wide full mouth sweep through her sentences like a figure touring a dark house, flipping on spots and banks of perfectly drawn light. (*Native Speaker* 10-11)

Besides his wife, he also notices that John Kwang speaks “beautiful, almost formal English” (*Native Speaker* 23). He is not only attracted by those who can speak English perfectly but envies them as well, for he is “always thinking about still having an accent” (*Native Speaker* 12). Lelia, as a speech therapist, also observes the fact that Henry cares too much about his words. Judging from his speech, she says, “[y]ou look like someone listening to himself. You pay attention to what you’re doing. If I had to guess, you’re not a native speaker. . . You’re very careful” (*Native Speaker* 12).

Nevertheless, Ludwig has reminded us that “language is a key; it tells you more about a person than the person’s face or ‘ethnicity’ in the sense of origin” (234). Henry seems to be firmly convinced that if he cannot have a good command of English, he will be regarded as a non-native speaker because language tells a lot unconsciously. For him, speaking English perfectly stands for the affirmation of his American identity. Therefore, well though John Kwang speaks English, Henry still feels something wrong with his “errant tone, the flag, the minor mistake that would tell of his original race” (*Native Speaker* 179). Furthermore, as far as phonology is concerned, Henry’s Korean accent is much worse than Eduardo Fermin’s.¹⁰ Actually, Henry even “could not read the Korean well” (*Native Speaker* 345). He lays far more stress on English than on Korean even though he is of Korean descent. This is because he hopes to strengthen his American-born identity via acquisition of fluent English. In this way, he expects to avoid facing the state of invisibility due to his ethnic origin. However, as Daniel Kim criticizes, “Henry’s utter linguistic alienation from an immigrant vernacular that nonetheless draws out of him a sense of desire, loss, and guilt” (252). His linguistic identity manifests his desire to be a well-assimilated American, only at the cost of his Koreanness. Overemphasizing pronunciation and articulation paradoxically makes Henry’s foreign blood more prominent, which directly leads to his identity crisis. In addition, as J. Paul Narkunas indicates, language abilities and cultural history also turn into the cause of Henry’s inauthenticity (333). Due to the spy job, he temporarily gets out of the identity crisis caused by his Koreanness and linguistic problems. This is because the sense of inauthenticity toward his identity cloaks who and what he is. However, it as well pushes him into a state of uncertainty for his identity during the execution of the assignments.

¹⁰ Eduardo Fermin is a Hispanic college student working as a part-timer at Kwang’s office.

2.2 A Good Performer in His Life?

Just stay in the background. Be unapparent and flat. Speak enough so they can hear your voice and come to trust it, but no more, and no one will think twice about who you are. The key is to make them think just once. (44)

——Chang-rae Lee, *Native Speaker*

Henry met Dennis Hoagland outside the career services office by chance.

Hoagland is the head of Glimmer and Company, a firm that shadows and investigates people. The company indeed provides Henry a good excuse to live with inauthentic identity. As Tina Chen comments, “Henry’s spying is a metaphor for his uneasy position as a Korean American trying to figure out his place in American society” (638). Regardless of his American birth, Henry still hopes to make himself more American via assimilation, yet he is constantly bewildered by his Korean ethnicity, which leads to a sense of disorientation for his identity. Hoagland and his company miraculously appear on the horizon to relieve his inner hesitation and anxiety. As Henry narrates, “the firm had conveniently appeared at the right time, offering the perfect vocation for the person I was . . . I found a sanction from our work, for I thought I had finally found my truest place in the future” (*Native Speaker* 127). He feels destined to go into the spy business, for “he considers his marginal position in American culture as one that easily translates into the spy’s marginalized status as ‘the secret observer.’” (Chen 645). By means of the spook task, he can not only take advantage of his outsider status as a Korean American but also evade his identity problem for the time being. This is because the job trains him how to play multiple roles and, more importantly, how to neglect “how others perceive him and how he sees himself,” just through the effect of theatrical realism (Chen 638).

In her article, Chen points out the result of the potential situation of realism employed in any performances. She states,

In theatrical performance, realism has been decried as a dangerous practice, primarily because of its potential to interpellate an audience into a passive subject position. The potential of realism to imprison a spectator's imagination stems both from the vision of authenticity and authority that it presents to an audience as well as from the methods of representation it employs. Thus, critics have identified the dramatic conventions associated with realism as ones that subtly compel the spectator to occupy a viewing position that implicitly accepts the 'truth' of that which is presented. (651-52).

Henry's work in the company is to primarily investigate those who are ethnic Americans like him, focusing on Koreans and other Asians. Owing to the fact of his yellow appearance and minority identity, the people whom he investigates will easily believe in the roles he enacts, just like what he narrates—"I had always thought that I could be anyone, perhaps several anyones at once" (*Native Speaker* 127). However, the false truth he creates not only "command[s] the belief of his witnesses, witting[ly] and unwitting[ly], [but] also manages to lose himself in his roles" (Chen 652). Here "lose himself in his roles" is a pun. In order to have his assignment favorable and successful, Henry does nothing but well convince others of his impersonation, that is, he can melt into the life of each and every one character that he has created. What is more, living with a fake identity and a different name makes him ignore how others think about his Asian blood, which is mentioned by Tina Chen. She argues that "Henry's position as a minority subject compels his awareness of the ways in which his professional voyeurism shadows how he himself is observed and defined" (646). In the meantime, living with an imaginary identity also gets him to overlook the query of his identity. Namely, he melts into his own identity, truly losing himself in the created roles. "[A] good spook," according to his explanation, "has no brothers, no

sisters, no father or mother. He's intentionally lost that huge baggage, those encumbering remnants of blood and flesh, and because of this he carries no memory of a house, no memory of a land, he seems to have emerged from nowhere" (*Native Speaker* 173). Out of these words, he implicitly explicates that his Korean descent seems to be an oppressive burden. It is only through the spy work that he can forget what he is and that he is liberated from the ambivalence of his "Korean" or "American" identity.

After getting married to Lelia, he still keeps the job, and continues with his inauthentic life. Due to this marriage, nevertheless, he appears to integrate into the white mainstream more. Won Yong-Jin has mentioned that "[t]he increasing number of intermarriages between white Americans and Asian-Americans is applauded as an ultimate marker of whiteness" (59). When telling his father with regard to their marriage, Henry is so astonished by his father's calm approval. This is because he always thinks that Henry should find a mate of their own race (*Native Speaker* 58). Yet, his father changes his mind after he has encountered the language barriers, the bullies at his store, along with other acts of discrimination from other whites. He learns that it is better for their life to have relationship to a white society. This is because having a connection with whites symbolizes that they are indeed accepted by and melt into this white society. As a result, he is used to telling his friends proudly in English that Lelia is his daughter. And he likes to show her around at the store because she is white (*Native Speaker* 57-58). As far as their marriage is concerned, Henry's father even reads it as a tactic for his smooth future life, which can be sensed from Henry's narration—"I think he had come to view our union logically, practically, and perhaps he thought he saw through my intentions, the assumption being that Lelia and her family would help me make my way in the land" (*Native Speaker* 58). However, for Henry, the marriage seems to be a union simply for love, a connection between

two different races. The product of their love, Mitt, can be thought of as a bridge of the two nations, Korea and the US. Based on Ludwig's interpretation, "[Mitt is] the living being who overcame ethnic, racial, cultural, and language barriers, the perfect synthesis that couldn't be" (237). Aside from this, he can be considered a link between the older and the newer generations as well. Mitt gets along well with his grandfather. His grandfather also takes advantage of the chance to pass down Korean traditions so that he can know something about his father's land.¹¹ This would be viewed as a sort of acculturation to make sure that within American education some Korean traditions can be still kept in Mitt's mind. However, the bridge topples after the demise of Mitt. At the same time, the bereavement causes Henry's alienation as well (Ludwig 236). Mitt's passing away seems to make Henry lose the future aim he needs to struggle for. After Mitt's death, he still pays attention to his spy task and lives with false identity, without letting Lelia know what he does. His wife also feels something wrong with his job, but he does not want to reveal anything to her at all. Thus, she cannot endure anymore and chooses to leave him. "Lelia's departure," as Ludwig comments, "triggers a certain instability in Henry Park's professional performance" (226). That is, Lelia can be comprehended as a significant factor for Henry's *Bildung*. In addition to Lelia, Emile Luzan and John Kwang are also critical to the development of Henry's awakening, which further pushes Henry to wonder if he should quit the spy job.

2.3 The Emile Luzan and John Kwang Assignments

After Lelia leaves, Henry is assigned to spy Emile Luzan, a psychoanalyst. In this assignment, he plays a successful mortgage broker with emotional and

¹¹ Henry delineates that how much Mitt cherishes a silver coin because of the Bronze Age Korean mythology told by Mitt's grandfather (*Native Speaker* 102).

psychological problems. In the beginning, he still plays the role very well, yet later he has “nearly blown cover” (*Native Speaker* 21). Owing to Lelia’s departure and the list she leaves, however, he starts getting more depressed and confused about his identity and who he is. Accordingly, when meeting Dr. Luzan, he cannot avoid releasing his perplexed mind. As he delineates, “for the first time I found myself at moments running short of my story, my chosen narrative. . . I began stringing the legend back upon myself. . . . I was becoming dangerously frank, . . . and in moments I felt he was the only one in the world who might comfort me” (*Native Speaker* 22). Under Dr. Luzan’s guidance, he gradually draws his real life into the fictitious world. For Henry, Luzan is not only a client but his friend and counselor as well. Additionally, during the sessions, he appears to stray away from his spook task, completely losing himself. Hoagland even sends in Jack Kalantzakos, another spy, to “retrieve [his] remains, [his] exposed bones” (*Native Speaker* 23).

Based on Ludwig’s reading, “[t]he emphasis on himself as a set of body parts implies that Henry is mentally dead, some kind of zombie” (227). Because of the very family crisis and bewilderment toward his identity, he easily shows a slip in front of Luzan, “the good doctor,” and turns into a zombie-like man without a soul (*Native Speaker* 134). Henry calls Luzan “good doctor” not only because of his kind treatment and friendship but also because of the fact that Luzan breaks the camouflage of a spy, inducing himself to expose his true self and problems under the multiple roles. As Luzan tells him, “perhaps only a small part of your difficulties is attributable to biochemical issues, if at all. I don’t think medication is in order . . . Certainly like all of us you have traditional issues to deal with. Parentage, intimacy, trust” (*Native Speaker* 133). Luzan learns that Henry’s problems cannot be controlled and cured by medicine because they are psychological obstacles. In the light of his realization toward Henry, his problems lie in parentage, intimacy, and trust. Parentage here can

be understood as his Korean origin that Henry would like to discard. Intimacy signifies his longing for the marital relationship with Lelia again. He hopes to solve the family crisis with regard to the departure of Lelia, and restarts their life. Besides, trust here can be realized as the fact that Henry can be accepted and treated like a local American. He hopes that he would not be discriminated against due to his Korean descent. After several sessions, Henry begins to hesitate whether it is correct to reveal Luzan's information to Hoagland. Eventually, he even wants to warn the good doctor to watch out for everything beside him at the end of the mission, which, unfortunately, is in vain. After this failed mission, he cannot stick to this job very well. "It is in this encounter that for the first time he starts seriously questioning his professional occupation" (Ludwig 227).

In the following assignment of shadowing John Kwang, Henry further gives up his professional trick, and gradually discovers who and what he is, with the help of Lelia. When first meeting Kwang in person, Henry is so impressed by his geniality and attractiveness to the public. Looking at Kwang, Henry cannot help but associate him with his late father from the appearance, the mode of behavior, and even the difference between them. Both of them are always clean-shaven, paying attention to their appearance in front of people. Kwang wants to show his confidence in public, and Henry's father also wants to show his to the customers, neighbors, and friends. Moreover, both of them, even Henry, always choose to solve the problem with silence. Near the end of the novel, Kwang's office is bombed and burned down. Three people are dead because of the bombing, including his close friend Eduardo. The bombing probably arises from a political intrigue. For the purpose of evading from the press, Kwang and his partners move to his house, figuring out the solution to face the difficulty together. For the sake of safety, he temporarily sends his family to his other house without televisions and radios, for "[t]hey don't need to see their father like

this” (*Native Speaker* 296). Henry continues to narrate his thoughts on Kwang as follows:

I think John Kwang would be a man to keep his boys close, keep May [Kwang’s wife] even closer, that he would collect the four of them in one shut-away room and have them sleep and eat and bathe all together until the tempests subsided. His move is more what my father would do, what I have learned, too, through all of my life. To send people away or else allow them to go, that what is most noble to me is the exquisite gift of silence. My mask of serenity and repose. (*Native Speaker* 296)

For Kwang, Henry and his father, family are important, and silence becomes the best policy to protect them from any trouble and worry. Thus, Kwang chooses to stay away from the press and not to let his family know anything about what is going on.

Henry’s father does the same to his family. He never talks about his grocery work at home, even though he is bullied by the blacks. Likewise, Henry does not tell Lelia his spy work so as to avoid extra anxiety.

More significantly, unlike Henry’s father, Kwang is much braver to “thriv[e] in cultural spaces where his father would never dare to tread” (Huang 248). As Henry discerns, Kwang is “[n]ot just a respectable grocer or dry cleaner or doctor, but a larger public figure who was willing to speak and act outside the tight sphere of his family. . . . [H]e didn’t seem afraid like my mother and father, who were always wary of those who would try to shame us or mistreat us” (*Native Speaker* 139). In Henry’s eyes, Kwang possesses what his parents lack, that is, courage. He dares to express his thoughts and feelings without being afraid to be taunted. For Henry, Kwang indeed is regarded as “a kind of surrogate father” (Daniel Kim 235). Nevertheless, Kwang in fact is considered not only a substitute father but also a perfectly-assimilated man, who speaks fluent English, knows the white culture very well, and speaks for ethnic

minorities. Accordingly, he becomes a wonderful model for Henry to admire and emulate.

Furthermore, “Henry’s identification with and admiration for Kwang begin to compromise his effectiveness [of his career as a professional spy]” (Chen 649). Actually, Henry has secretly recorded every movement of Kwang and his partners from the very beginning of the assignment. However, when transmitting what he records to Hoagland, Henry only gives some unimportant profiles. This is because he starts to waver in his job. As he narrates, “[Betraying Kwang] seemed like an unbearable encroachment. . . as if I were offering a private fact about my father or mother to a complete stranger” (*Native Speaker* 147). In addition, he even loses the mental calmness a spy should have. Originally, he is trained to deal with any emergencies calmly. However, after the bombing, he worries about Kwang and his partners a lot. He delineates, “I will not rid my expression of the sudden worry and weight. I will not hush or so handle my heart” (*Native Speaker* 249). In the assignments of Luzan and Kwang, Henry cannot enact his make-believe roles well, but expresses his real feeling toward them. Rather than simply substituting reality with fiction, Henry’s impersonations in both tasks “are neither totally ‘real’ nor totally ‘illusion’ but share aspects of each” (Carlson 53). He is sandwiched between his own story and the fake stories he makes up. In other words, he is “no longer able to distinguish between ‘real’ and ‘fake’ performance” (Chen 650). “[O]nly by first losing himself in his performances with Luzan and Kwang can Henry ‘find’ himself” (Chen 654).

In Henry’s hesitation about his spy work, it is Lelia who helps him get rid of the burden of fake identities with the power of love. Jack Kalantzakos, one of Henry’s spy colleagues, tells Lelia that he worries about Henry very much, for he appears to have something on his mind, which makes him down and confused. Therefore, at the house

of Henry's late father, Lelia tries to talk about his job again. She tells him, "[y]ou obsess. . . You live in one tiny part of your life at a time" (*Native Speaker* 224). This is because he does not want to share his problems or trouble with others, including his wife. He is used to a state of silence, which he believes is the best way to keep his family from any unnecessary worries and hazards. As a result, his thinking and his mind are restrained and make him bewildered. Nevertheless, due to her tender concern and induction, he does not keep silent as usual but reveals some part of his spy work. He gets out of the mode he used to, which could be viewed as a change, a progress in his thinking. Moreover, he also promises Lelia that he will quit the job after this assignment.

3.4 The *Bildung* of A Spy

According to Tina Chen's reading of the novel, "[f]or Henry there is no 'solution' to the dilemma of his [Korean and American] identity" (660). As Henry recalls, when he was young, he used to awake before dawn and step outside on the front porch. At that time, everything was so quiet, and he seemed to get away from the hubbub made by his Korean parents, the taunting kids, and his English teacher showing how to pronounce his American name. "I'd then run back inside and look in the mirror," says Henry, "desperately hoping in that solitary moment to catch a glimpse of who I truly was; but looking back at me was just the same boy again, no clearer than before, unshakably lodged in that difficult face" (*Native Speaker* 323). Henry himself also considers that he still cannot figure out his true identity and appears to be trapped in the ceaseless struggles of identification. Even so, however, he still has a more different view on the Korean and American culture than he did before. Meanwhile, he changes his attitude toward national and ethnic identity as well. Above all, he is supposed to be a cultural bridge of Korea and America. All of these urge him to be

himself more, which I consider can be thought of as the result of Henry's *Bildung*.

Toward the close of the novel, Kwang tells Henry that Eduardo is a traitor in his team. He betrays his trust and their friendship. As a matter of fact, he works for De Roos, Kwang's opponent in the mayoral election. Out of disappointment and abhorrence of Eduardo's disloyalty, Kwang confesses to contriving the bombing, which indeed has a great effect on Henry. Henry used to admire Kwang very much and even view him as a paradigm of wonderful assimilation. As he narrates, "[John Kwang] was how I imagined a Korean [in the US] would be, at least one living in any renown" (*Native Speaker* 304). Nevertheless, because of the crime, Kwang's image of a perfect assimilationist is broken, which makes Henry lose the respectable and imitating object. Initially, he is firmly convinced that immigrants or people of foreign descent in America can be well-assimilated as natives due to Kwang as well as his positive attitude different from other Korean immigrants, just like what Henry says: Kwang is "such a natural American" (*Native Speaker* 326). With the failure of Kwang, however, Henry's thinking has changed. After the bombing and the money club scandal, he goes to Kwang's house again. A realtor guides and introduces him to the house. When asked who lived in the house before, the realtor just answers that the house was once owned by foreigners, and they have gone back to "their country" (*Native Speaker* 347). Kwang has been a political celebrity, a legal citizen; nevertheless, the realtor still views him as an alien. From the reply, Henry seems to realize that it is impossible for people like him to become a "real" American regardless of any kind of assimilation. For the whites, they are forever immigrants, forever foreigners. Even though he still cannot unravel the dilemma of his Korean and American identity eventually, he "resolve[s] his identity crisis by unwittingly casting himself as a white manqué" (Engles 45). That is to say, now he at least understands it is out of the question for him to be or become like a white. In addition, because of Kwang and his

children, he can accept his Koreanness more.

At Kwang's house, Henry meets his two children, Peter and John Jr., and reminds him of Mitt. He further comprehends that it is unnecessary for him and his son to discard the Korean culture in order to reside in America. After the birth of Mitt, he is surprised that Mitt looks more Korean than Caucasian. As he narrates, "I was the one who was hoping whiteness for Mitt, being fearful of what I might have bestowed on him" (*Native Speaker* 285). He does not want his son to have a minority identity and to experience an identity crisis like his. Moreover, Henry is always cautious with his son's education, especially English the language. He even does not want to read his son stories due to his over heedfulness of speech. He fears that he "might handicap him, stunt the speech blooming in his brain" (*Native Speaker* 239).

Nevertheless, Peter, a ten-year-old boy, changes Henry's thinking and further pushes him to rethink the Korean culture. The child is very polite, and constantly pays attention to Korean courtesy. He even communicates with Henry in Korean. Similarly, his younger brother, John Jr., also watches out for his manners, and speaks Korean to his father and Henry. Both Peter and John Jr. still keep their Koreanness and are well-behaved even though they live in the US. On the contrary, Henry and his father do not think so. They let Mitt "raucously trample over all [their] custom and ceremony" (*Native Speaker* 266). Henry continues to narrate, "[o]ur Mitt, untethered. He'd tug at my father's pant legs during church sermons, roam the shadows of restaurant tables, publicly address his mother by her given name: all these spoils of our American life" (*Native Speaker* 266). Compared with the politeness and punctiliousness of Peter and John Jr., Mitt is much freer. As described, he is untethered from the constraint of the Korean culture. On top of this, Henry even hopes that his son "would never learn [Korean] the old language, this was never in question, and . . . that he would grow up with a singular sense of his world, a life univocal,

which might have offered him the authority and confidence that his broad half-yellow face could not” (*Native Speaker* 266-67). He wants his son to know English only, for in this way, he can become more American in spite of his half-Korean blood. Henry firmly believes that Koreanness would be an obstacle for his son’s future and identification.

Nevertheless, after meeting Kwang’s children, Henry sighs, “this is [just] assimilationist sentiment, part of my own ugly and half-blind romance with the land” (*Native Speaker* 267). In fact, it is he himself that rejects Koreanness, which makes him feel more American. Ironically, Mitt does not think so. Instead, he can appreciate the difference among Henry, Lelia, and his grandfather. Henry recalls, “he [Mitt] could mimic the finest gradations in our English and Korean, those notes of who we were, and perhaps he could imagine, if ever briefly, that this was our truest world, rich with disparate melodies” (*Native Speaker* 240). He finds that Mitt does not favor either English or Korean. He can actually roam between the two languages, savoring them, even possibly taking it for granted that it is natural to have the tongues surround him. Aside from Mitt’s education and cultivation, Henry seems to ignore that he is a connection between two worlds, two nations, two races, along with two cultures. As Jane Yoo criticizes, “Henry will never be a ‘native speaker,’ either from the viewpoint of his Korean roots or American upbringing. He will serve as a bridge between both worlds” (58). Henry himself indeed can also be viewed as a cultural hybrid of Korea and America. As far as education is concerned, he is cultivated with “Confucian upbringing” (*Native Speaker* 314) but educated in the American way. For their interracial marriage, Henry and Lelia transgress the ethnic boundaries of the yellow and the white. Their marriage symbolizes a possibility of the eradication of racial discrimination. What is more, when it comes to language, Henry can be viewed as a bilingual even though he cannot pronounce English words very perfectly and cannot

speak Korean well, either. All in all, for him, it is not until knowing the Kwangs that he realizes “one individual can belong to two cultures” (Lazear 97).

Furthermore, as far as national and ethnic identities are concerned, Henry tends to identify with nation first. He strives to let himself melt into the white society even though he is American-born; however, he is always nervous about his Korean identity. He is afraid that people do not accept or identify with him due to his yellow face. He hopes to be regarded as a “true” American by means of speaking English perfectly. He even feels ashamed and angry at those ridiculous accents of his father and other immigrants. He cannot endure “all that Konglish, Spanglish, Jive” (*Native Speaker* 337). But now, after experiencing the departure of Lelia and the assignments of Luzan and Kwang, he changes his thoughts and can accept his Koreanness more. As he narrates, “I think I would give most anything to hear my father’s talk again, the crash and bang and stop of his language, always hurtling by. I will listen for him forever in the streets of this city. I want to hear the rest of them, too” (*Native Speaker* 337). This is because he has known New York the city, “a city of words” (*Native Speaker* 344). In other words, this is a city of multi-languages. A city shows its multi-cultural features through the multiplicity of languages. Now he knows “[h]is marks, contoured on his face and lodged in his over-careful speech, are ones that cannot be voluntarily relinquished” (Chen 646). Since he cannot erase these physical marks, all he has to do is to accept them.

At the end of the novel, Lelia says goodbye to her students, calling out their names in their own mother tongues. As Henry says, these names represent “who we are” (*Native Speaker* 349). It is only through these names that these students from various ethnic backgrounds, including him, can feel his true self. By doing so, “[n]o matter what immigration background, every student is recognized” (Ludwig 238). Accordingly, I consider though Henry does not completely solve his identity dilemma,

he still achieves certain sort of *Bildung*. This is because he finally gives up the spy career that requires him to live under fake identity, and tries to be himself. More importantly, he can accept the Korean culture more. As for the query of identity, though Chang-rae lee does not figure out a concrete answer in *Native Speaker*, he solves the puzzle in his next novel *A Gesture Life*, through the life of Jiro Kurohata.



Chapter Three

Beyond Perfection: The *Bildung* of a Model Minority in

Chang-rae Lee's *A Gesture Life*

[F]or many in contemporary culture[,] truth resides in the traumatic or abject subject, in the diseased or damaged body.

——Hal Foster, “The Return of the Real”

Assimilation, which appears to be an excellent method for immigrants to melt into a foreign society, is nothing but self-deception. In *A Gesture Life*, Jiro Kurohata, or Franklin Hata, a Korean Japanese as well as a Japanese American, always attempts to live up to the ideal of a model minority both in Japan and in America. Each of the adapting experiences is accompanied by an anguished trauma—the death of his lover Kkutaeh (or known as K) and the departure of his daughter Sunny respectively. Nevertheless, as Baret Magarian states in her book review on *A Gesture Life*, “a handful of traumatic experiences from the past can forge identity” (56). Hata takes advantage of the model minority discourse to console and heal the traumas which stem from not only the loss of K and Sunny but his childhood in Korea as well. The very first trauma of his life, I believe, originates from the abandonment of his Korean parents, which has much to do with his model minority life in Japan.

When it comes to the ideology of model minority, according to Robert G. Lee, it implies successful ethnic assimilation (145-46). Assimilation, similar to camouflage, or Roger Caillois’ law of pure disguise,¹² conceals what a person is and makes his true self invisible. This is because it is a strategy to be part of an unfamiliar

¹² Anne Anlin Cheng quotes Roger Caillois’ explication concerning the law of pure disguise from *The Mask of Medusa* (1964) as follows: “[I]n the world of living things [for both animal and humans] there is a law of pure disguise: that there is a leaning towards the act of passing oneself off as something or someone else... [that is] in no way to be accounted for by any biological necessity connected with the struggle for existence or natural selection” (554). For a person, assimilation, like disguise, functions as a means of existence, urging him to hide what he is so that he can live in the new surroundings. Accordingly, I would regard assimilation as camouflage or disguise.

environment, a way to turn visible in the new surroundings. Likewise, the ideology of model minority, just like assimilation, can function as camouflage in this regard. In order to forget the traumas, he tries his best to conceal what he is within “various forms of camouflage” (Cheng 558). In the case of Hata, for example, he is a dutiful adopted son in the Japanese family, a loyal lieutenant in the barracks, and the good Doc Hata in the neighborhood of Bedley Run. All of these positive images based on the ideology of model minority enable others to accept him easily. As Verity Ludgate-Fraser argues, “[Hata] has spent the better part of his life trying to be what he thinks others expect him to be” (19). Furthermore, for Hata, the model minority discourse not only makes his true self invisible but also obscures his Korean identity. Paradoxically, the discourse of model minority also makes him visible. Struggling to be identified as a respected citizenship, Hata gets social visibility in Japan and in America.

In addition, Hata’s traumas, which are inextricably interwoven with the ideology of model minority, are significant for his awakening. Throughout *A Gesture Life*, he constantly recalls his past. By means of his narration, the readers realize how together the trauma and the model minority discourse affect his life. In Japan, Hata’s model minority life leads to another trauma—the demise of K. To bury the agony caused by the death of K, he adopts Sunny, a Korean orphan, and restarts his life as a model minority in America. Nevertheless, his good-man mindset causes a crisis of father-daughter relationship, which finally causes the other trauma in his life. For Hata, selfhood is always screened behind the trauma as well as the ideology of model minority. Through Sunny and the recall of K, he finally comprehends that the ideology is nothing but an illusion. It is impossible for an outsider to become an insider. Instead, it is more important for him to be what he is. Meanwhile, he also changes his attitude toward ethnic and national identity, reaching a reconciliation for

his multiple identities as a Korean, a Japanese, and an American. With understanding as such, he ultimately leaves Bedley Run and disappears into nowhere as a way to once again start a new life for his “real” self, with the mature wisdom he has learned after a lifetime of apprenticeship.

The chapter aims to delve into Hata’s process of *Bildung*. First, I intend to discuss the relationship between his traumas and the ideology of model minority. Furthermore, I will scrutinize the two crucial crises in his model minority life—the death of K and the loss of Sunny. After this, I would like to examine the change of his attitude toward ethnic and national identity before and after his *Bildung*. Eventually, I hope to clarify his realization that the ideology of model minority is nothing but an illusion, a disillusionment, which could be viewed as the accomplishment of his *Bildung*.

3.1 A Reason for Living in Japan

In “Traumatic Patriarchy,” Hamilton Carroll has shown that Hata’s two assimilations in Japan and in America are strongly interwoven with and accompanied by his traumas. Carroll points out,

Hata’s narrative of successful assimilation becomes the story of a profound self-deception, the telling of which is structured around two relationships, each defined by a profound trauma, that haunt Hata despite his attempts to defray their costs by living a life free from affect. These two relationships are one with Kkutaeh (whom Hata calls “K”) . . . and the other with Sunny. (592-93)

Aside from the two relationships described above, nevertheless, I consider it is the very trauma in Hata’s childhood that triggers his gesture life. Based on Freudian psychoanalysis, Neil J. Smelser brings up the idea that a particular

psychical assault or event occurring at a particular moment would turn out to be a trauma (33). Moreover, the traumas caused by human agents would be more damaging than those caused by accidents or natural disasters (Willis 27). For Hata, the adoption by a Japanese couple in childhood has been a psychical trauma because of the unforgettable experience of being deserted by his birth parents. Nevertheless, his Korean parents may have thought his future out and therefore decide to give him up. According to Eika Tai's study, "[t]he presence of Koreans in Japan is a legacy of Japan's colonization of Korea between 1910 and 1945. Deprived of their lands and employment opportunities in the colonial market economy, Koreans moved to Japan proper in search of work" (357). Owing to the Japanese colonization, living in Korea becomes increasingly bitter and difficult. For the purpose of changing Hata's life, his birth parents may have little choice but to let the Japanese bring him up. In this way, they think that he can not only dispose of the identity of the colonized, but lead a better life in Japan. Furthermore, according to the introduction to transracial or transcultural adoption on the professional adoption website,¹³

[s]ome . . . adoptive parents feel connected to a particular race or culture because of their ancestry or through personal experiences such as travel or military service. Others simply like the idea of reaching out to children in need, no matter where they come from.

Mr. and Mrs. Kurohata, a well-to-do childless couple, want a child so much that they would rather adopt a transracial kid as soon as a chance comes. Besides, I am of the opinion that if the personal experience is taken into account, the way

¹³ *Adoption.com* is a website set up by the corporation called Adoption Media, LLC. The company also sets up some other websites relating to adoption, such as *Adoption.org*, *Adoption Blogs*, *Adopting.org*, *Adoption Information*, and the like. Now these adoption websites are the most popular adoption information destination in the world. For more information, please browse the following website: <http://transracial.adoption.com/>.

they adopt a Korean child perhaps could be regarded as a sort of redemption for Japanese colonization of Korea. Due to the colonization, the political and economic condition in Korea worsens. By adopting a Korean child, Mr. and Mrs. Kurohata can not only help the poor Korean parents and their child compassionately, but also reduce the sense of guilt caused by the ruthless invasion of the imperial Japanese army. Even so, the way in which Hata has been given up must have made him feel unwanted.

Accordingly, the experience of being abandoned turns Hata into an “emotionally scarred Korean exile,” and becomes the first inner trauma that he is desperate to forget (Bradbury, “Chang-rae Lee”). The best solution for Hata to gloss over the feeling of being unwanted is to erase his Korean identity, “a nativity that he spends most of his life renouncing” (Cheng 559). He himself comes up with an explanation for the abandonment, an excuse for his survival, which results in the denial of his Koreanness. He says,

I'd had one [Korean name] at birth, naturally, but it was never used by anyone, including my real parents, who, *it must be said*, wished as much as I that I become wholly and thoroughly Japanese. They had *of course* agreed to give me up to the office of the children's authority. (*A Gesture Life* 235-36; italic emphasis added)

The phrases of “it must be said” and “of course” account for Hata's resolution to become Japanese. He firmly believes that he is meant to be a Japanese not a Korean, and so do his birth parents. Actually, the thinking may have much to do with the notion of internal colonization. Based on Philip Altbach and Gail P. Kelly's study, internal colonization can be defined as the domination “of an independent group by another independent group of the same nation-state” (3). The internally colonized, furthermore, are “groups of people marked out as such

by power relations with the dominant culture” (Brewster 1). Hata, as an adopted Korean child in Japan alone, lives within and is surrounded by the dominant Japanese culture and society. He receives everything Japanese, including education, customs and manners, law, and so on, which makes him internally colonized. Moreover, Martin Padgett further indicates that the creation of an internally colonized situation is a process whereby a group of people are “transformed into ethnic peripheries set against a . . . core culture” (35). Padgett continues to state that ethnic peripheries are “more or less subsumed by new forms of labor, law, religion, kinship, skills, and language associated with the dominant national culture” (35). Due to the effect of internal colonization, Hata goes into a state of ethnic periphery which can be assimilated into the core or new culture. In other words, his Koreanness can be diluted and replaced by Japaneseness and the new core culture. Such an idea urges him to live up to the image of a model minority so that he could integrate into the Japanese society well, which he believes is also the hope of his birth parents.

In addition, “models, which by definition construct ideals for people to follow,” as Won Yong-Jin mentions, “standardize reality by prescribing moral and ethical criteria to control the ‘unacceptable’ modes of social life” (58). Namely, being a model means having to follow higher moral criteria than other people. Besides, a model man also needs to be outstanding so that others can emulate him. With the aim of burying his first trauma and surviving in Japan, Hata as a Korean Japanese struggles to be thoroughly assimilated into the new country so that he can resemble the Japanese more. As it is, he successfully manages to live within model images as a filial son and a patriotic lieutenant. Either as a pupil or a military officer, he serves as a good exemplar for other children and soldiers. To be the pride of his adoptive parents, he studies hard and

enters a medical school. As Hata narrates,

I feared it would be especially shaming to mine, for as adoptive parents they might shoulder the burden of my vices even more heavily than if I had been born to them, blood of their blood, as there would be no excuse but their raising of me. (*A Gesture Life* 155)

He does not want to let his adoptive parents have any burden of shame because of him. Accordingly, doing everything well becomes a good way to avoid any embarrassing situations for his adopters. Additionally, to win the trust of his comrades, he is amiable to everyone and strictly complies with the discipline in the barracks. Due to the special minority identity, his loyal image in the barracks can be a paragon of patriotism during wartime. This is because he is not a native Japanese, but can devote himself to the Japanese army. His behavior becomes the most forceful argument to convince those who cannot accept their military duty. As a Korean minority in Japan, Hata turns into a model Japanese for those who know him. Through the ideology of model minority, he successfully becomes an outstanding person, completely melting into the Japanese life. However, such an image of model minority collapses owing to K the comfort woman, who is vital for the awakening of his selfhood and Koreanness.

3.2 Power of Love

In the parking lot, a group of Middle Eastern men dismantling their temporary Halloween store draw Hata's attention. A teenage boy and girl sit at chairs, working beside each other. The boy seems more naughty and fidgety, constantly talking to the girl, kicking the boxes next to him with the side of his foot. Then he even hinders and messes up the girl's work. However, the girl is not annoyed. Instead, she keeps on working, neglecting the boy's practical joke until he leaves. She repels the boy "by

making herself in some measure disappear. As if to provide the means of her own detachment” (*A Gesture Life* 222). At the sight of the girl, Hata associates her aloofness with K’s, and evokes the memories in relation to his Koreanness. In order to aid and pacify K, Hata speaks Korean and reveals his Korean identity to K. From his defensive remarks, a sense of depression could be fathomed—“I spoke some Korean as a boy. But then no more. Such things are not easily forgotten, and so I have the ability still” (*A Gesture Life* 235). At first, he is reluctant to admit the fact that he is a Korean. He even does not want to speak any Korean, and always regards his Koreanness as an abject. Nonetheless, under the influence and induction of K, Hata’s sense of depression lowers, and he seems more willing to talk about his childhood in Korea. Before long, he falls in love with K.

K indeed has affected Hata a lot. She is to humanize the man that is unable and reluctant to express emotion (Chuh 14). It is K as well who has influenced Hata enough to create a breakdown of his model minority discourse. With an eye to being trusted and identified with, Hata endeavors to be a loyal officer and just obeys the given order. He even ignores the basic human rights for the comfort women, that is, to put their clothes on after the physical examination because no one asks him to do so. Aside from this, due to his comradeship with other Japanese soldiers, he usually follows their wishes. Hence, when Corporal Endo shares the obscene pictures with him, he takes and looks at them in spite of his lack of interest in such photos. He always caters to the commands and wishes from other people as if he were a zombie without a soul. No wonder Captain Ono criticizes him that “[t]here is the germ of infirmity in you, which infects everything you touch or attempt. . . . You, Lieutenant, too much depend upon generous fate and gesture. There is no internal possession, no embodiment” (*A Gesture Life* 266). Namely, Hata lacks strong will and action, which is the evidence that he has no selfhood. Nevertheless, after knowing K, Hata changes

gradually. He has a great desire to live with K for good, and readies himself to argue with Ono about their future. This is the first time that his rebellion is exposed. Later, he even becomes an accomplice to cover up the fact that K kills Ono. All of the above result in the first collapse of his image as a model minority. He breaks away from what Ono has accused him of—his “infirmity” and “too much depending upon generous fate and gesture.” Most importantly, because of K, his repressed Korean identity topples over imperceptibly. His attitude toward Korean identity alters from negativity to positivity little by little. He speaks Korean, not denying the fact that he is a Korean, which corresponds to Anne Anlin Cheng’s critique—“Hata’s intimacy with K has ensured a secret reconnection with his renounced ethnic origin” (561). However, K still cannot escape from death eventually, as unfortunately turns into another cause of trauma for Hata.

Actually, the trauma resulting from K’s death has much to do with the adoption of Sunny. Even though there does not seem to be any direct connection between K and Sunny, based on James Berger’s analysis, “[a trauma] posits that the effects of an event may be dispersed and manifested in many forms not obviously associated with the event” (572). Hata has once dreamed to form a family with K, but the wish has gone unfulfilled with her demise. For the sake of recommencing his life, he immigrates to the US, where he adopts Sunny by chance. Nevertheless, just like what Mary Burns tells him, “it’s as if she’s a woman to whom you’re beholden, which I can’t understand. . . . You adopt her. But you act almost guilty, as if she’s someone you hurt once, or betrayed, and now you’re obliged to do whatever she wishes” (*A Gesture Life* 60). He raises Sunny to compensate for the death of K, and seems to transfer his affections toward K onto his adopted daughter unconsciously. Mark C. Jerng also mentions that “[h]is adoption of Sunny explicitly repeats his relationship with K” (52). For Hata, Sunny is thought of as K’s stand-in because she is a Korean

from Pusan, an orphan who needs help, just like K's helplessness as a comfort woman in the barracks. He is disturbed by the death of K all the time, for he cannot save his beloved out of the tormenting abyss. Owing to the lament and regret for K's death, as a result, he insists on adopting a girl. Kandice Chuh comes up with her perspective on this second adoption in the novel:

Doc Hata's motivations for wanting a girl child to adopt are explained by his life as Lieutenant Kurohata, as we discover that Doc Hata feels a sense of failure about "K"—about failing to have saved her either by vanquishing her tormentors or by ending her life. (14)

By looking after the adopted girl, Hata feels free from the trauma caused by the death of K. In the meantime, only by doing so, he could really begin a new life in America, which is explicit from his words—"I thought only of the moment of her arrival, which I had hoped would serve to mark the recommencement of my days" (*A Gesture Life* 74). The "recommencement" here implies that he has a chance not only to compensate for the demise of K, but to carry out his lost dreams of leading a joyful life with K. To sum up, the adoption of Sunny, for Hata, can be understood as a means of healing the trauma. By doing so, he hopes to have a brand-new start in the US. However, in America, he still chooses to be a model minority, and even wishes Sunny to be one like him.

3.3 New Life, Old Tricks

According to Hata's experience of successful assimilation in Japan, being a model minority appears to be the best policy for an outsider to be accepted and even respected by local people. Therefore, he again makes use of the ideology of model minority to integrate into American life. He is keen to help others, and endeavors to make a good impression on the people in the community of Bedley Run. As the owner

of Sunny Medical Supply, he becomes a bourgeois as well, and gets nicknamed as “Doc Hata,” even though he is not a real doctor but just a man with abundant medical knowledge. Hence, in the beginning of the novel Hata proudly narrates that “[w]hen I step into a shop in the main part of the village, invariably someone will say, ‘Hey, it’s good Doc Hata.’” (*A Gesture Life* 1). People greet him warmly, and even add the adjective “good” before his nickname, which seems that people in Bedley Run identify Hata as a part of them. Judging from this, we can also sense that he is really proud of his success as a model minority. In addition to the queries of identity and integration, the ideology of model minority for him is also viewed as an elixir to cope with his fright. Whether in Japan or in America, he has been afraid to become others’ burden, as can be seen from the following statement which thoroughly reveals his internal dread:

For I feared, simply enough, to be marked by a failure like Corporal Endo’s. . . one resulting in the burdening of the entire society of his peers.

I have feared this throughout my life, from the day I was adopted by the family Kurohata to my induction into the Imperial Army to even the grand opening of Sunny Medical Supply, through the initial hours of which I was nearly paralyzed with the dread of dishonoring my fellow merchants, none of whom had yet approached me, or would for several weeks. (*A Gesture Life* 229)

Being regarded as a model minority can help him alleviate the pressure from the dread as well. The moment he does everything well, he does not need to worry if he is a burden to others.

Just because of his successful assimilative experiences, therefore, Hata anticipates that Sunny can be a model minority as well. Through the model minority discourse, he hopes she could melt into the American society well and be accepted by

local people without being racially discriminated against. Thus, the way he raises her corresponds to the seven upbringing principles of the Asian American in Frank H.

Wu's *Yellow* as follows:

1. Adherence to accepted conventions of social behavior.
2. Cohesion not only within a family but also with kin and the family ancestors.
3. Discouragement of egocentricity and recognition of obligation to others.
4. Loyalty and obedience to the authorities, employers, and the state.
5. Motivation for educational achievement from first entering school until maturity.
6. Firm control, not permissiveness, from about three years up.
7. The need for hard work to gain success and honor the family. (45)

Wu summarizes the upbringing principles from Philip E. Vernon's work. He further points out that "[b]y Vernon's reckoning, these seven elements are distinctly Asian" (45). He continues to cite Vernon's explanation toward Asian Americans' success that "Asian Americans flourish because they are Asian Americans, and they continue to thrive only to the extent that they behave as archetypal Asian Americans" (45). Based on Vernon's explication, it is through the seven Asian upbringing principles that they can behave as "archetypal Asian Americans."¹⁴

As Hata's wish goes, "she stud[ies] hard and practice[s] her piano and read[s] as many books as she could bear, and of course, when there [is] free time, play[s] with her friends from school" (*A Gesture Life* 27). He hopes that Sunny could concentrate on her studies and extracurricular activities in order to be a student efficient in both brainy and physical activities. Consequently, Mary Burns tells Hata that "[n]ever have

¹⁴ For more information, please consult Vernon's *The Abilities and Achievements of Orientals in North America* (New York: Academic Press, 1982).

I know a girl of eleven to be as polite as she is. She's never said an unkind word, and she's never complained. . . . You've raised her impeccably" (*A Gesture Life* 54).

Sunny's behavior indeed honors her family. At the same time, her gesture as a model minority is thoroughly presented within Burns' remarks. Nevertheless, with the advancement of her age, she finds the ideology of model minority is nothing but an illusion.

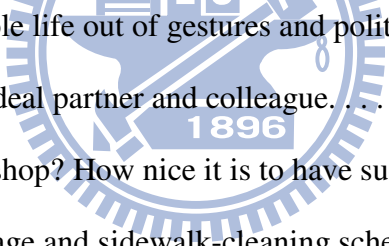
3.4 Nothing but Illusions

In America, Hata still hopes to take advantage of the ideology of model minority so that he can be accepted by the white society as soon as possible. Nevertheless, he is not aware that being a model minority in the United States is actually an obstacle to his identification. As Yong-Jin Won states, "[t]he 'Model Minority' discourse [in the US] is packed with racial meanings: conflicts between the minority and its counterpart, and the power dynamics of the society" (57-58). Both Korea and Japan primarily consist of those who are Asian descent, whereas the mainstream American society mainly comprises the white race. More specifically, Hata neglects the fact that to be a model minority in the US, he needs to take more racial pressure than when he is in Japan. A model minority in America, as Won writes, is not only "an ideal the acculturation and assimilation to the dominant white culture" (sic) but also "an ideal for other minorities to emulate" (Won 58-59).¹⁵ For both whites and nonwhites, model minorities are simply imitated objects and imitating subjects who everlastingly circle around the destiny of imitation. They are viewed as "a replica, . . . a simulacrum of a white, middle-class American" (Won 59). However, because of their excellent performance on numerous aspects, such as academics or business, model minorities become objects of the resentment of the less successful groups, especially for those

¹⁵ Won mentions that model minorities in America always refer to Asian Americans (57).

slowly-assimilated minorities (Won 60).¹⁶ Meanwhile, due to white ethnocentrism, Asian Americans are not totally accepted by whites as well. Accordingly, model minorities though Asian Americans become, they are not regarded as real American citizens (Won 61), which has been sensed by Hata's adopted daughter Sunny.

Sunny is tired of the model minority discourse and feels uncomfortable with Hata's life as a model minority, which eventually lead to her departure and a crisis for their parent-child relationship. After entering the adolescent stage, Sunny cannot avoid reacting against Hata's expectation that she should be a model minority like him. She ceases playing the piano, idles away her time with fair-weather friends, and even becomes pregnant. In fact, her resistance to the discourse comes from her awareness as an onlooker who clearly sees the result of Hata's "gesture life." In a dispute, she tells him,



[y]ou make a whole life out of gestures and politeness. You're always having to be the ideal partner and colleague. . . . You know what I overheard down at the card shop? How nice it is to have such a 'good Charlie' to organize the garbage and sidewalk-cleaning schedule. That's what they really think of you. It's become your job to be the number-one citizen. . . . [Y]ou're this nice sweet man who's given when he didn't have to or want to but did anyway. You burden with your generosity. (*A Gesture Life* 95)

He would like to be a man who is helpful to the people in Bedley Run. However, people only regard his enthusiasm as a manifestation of his desire to be accepted by them. For Sunny, what Hata does is only for his reputation. This is because the higher his prestige is, the more easily he can be identified as a citizen like local people. She even thinks that his concern and love are "fake," which can be observed from her

¹⁶ Here Won cites Ross Harano's words, a Chicago businessman active in the Democratic Party's Asian Caucus, and Eui-Young Yu's explanation about the hatred for Asian Americans in the article "Korean-American Communities and Their Institutions: An Overview."

words—“I don’t want love and I don’t want your concern. I think it’s fake anyway. . . . [A]ll you care about is your reputation . . . , and how I might hurt it” (*A Gesture Life* 94-95). Thus, she would rather choose to flee away from his life, a world of illusions composed of excellence, courtesy, and considerateness.

As a matter of fact, Hata is really concerned that she might get hurt. Nonetheless, such anxiety brings about a vicious circle instead. The more he cares about her, the further she evades him. After each quarrel, Sunny always loiters and eventually stays in a party house which alcohol and sex are abundant. Hata would like to persuade her not to degrade herself. Disappointed and discouraged, however, he leaves that party house when seeing her playing sexual games with other men in a room. It is not until she goes home to pack that Hata talks about the issue with her, only results in another quarrel. In the long run, the parent-child relationship ruptures, which leads to her final departure from home. Sunny’s leaving home symbolizes Hata’s failure in his attempt to redeem the death of K and his family dream in the US, which counts as his third trauma. After that, he starts to rethink the meaning of his life as a model minority. All in all, either in Japan or in America, the ideology of model minority for Hata is a means of gaining perfect integration into a new nation and of forgetting his previous traumas. More notably, through the model minority discourse, he gets his own consciousness toward ethnic and national identity as well.

3.5 National Identity vis-à-vis Ethnic Identity

Both in Japan and in America, Hata successfully attains a celebrated reputation and dignity in a hetero-cultural society by means of the ideology of model minority. In the meantime, the ideology affects his identity toward nation and race in both countries. In Japan, he chooses to identify with Japan because of three reasons. First, the Japanese and the Korean belong to Asian races, and it is

difficult to discern them apart simply by the appearance. As a result, he can easily assume Japaneseness without being easily recognized as an alien, just like what he claims confidently—“I am a Japanese!” (*A Gesture Life* 95). Second, due to the effect of the abandonment in childhood, he is very willing to discard his Korean identity, identifying with Japan. His resistance to Koreanness very much resembles Julia Kristeva’s exposition toward abjection. Kristeva points out as follows:

[I]oathing an item of food, a piece of filth, waste, or drug. The spasms and vomiting that protect me. The repugnance, the retching that thrusts me to the side and turns me away from defilement, sewage, and muck. . . . Food loathing is perhaps the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection. (2)

The function of food loathing is to safeguard the body by abjecting what is harmful. In terms of the above notion, the situation of food loathing is very similar to that of Hata’s rejection against his Korean identity, for the resistance to his Koreanness also safeguards his mind. The abjection for Hata not only strengthens his identification with Japan, but also shields him from the disintegration of his inner world on account of being abandoned by his birth parents. Third, the internal colonization in Japan not only urges Hata to become a model minority, but goads him to identify with Japan more. This is because he turns into an individual of ethnic periphery, which further prompts him to accept and to be assimilated into the Japanese culture. To be well assimilated in the Japanese context, Hata must get rid of his Koreanness and force it into a state of invisibility, which resonates with Todd M. Lieber’s explication—“‘invisibility’ suggests the situation of a group stripped of its native culture and forced to adhere to alien standards and values while its own cultural qualities were

ignored” (86). On the other hand, with the help of the ideology, his Japaneseness becomes increasingly perceptible instead. For the sake of melting into a foreign nation and discarding the memories in Korea, he struggles to manifest his Japanese identity and to abject his Korean nationality. His excellent Japanese assimilation, nevertheless, is wavered because of K, the first impact on his life as a model minority.

After immigrating to the US, Hata still wants to identify with America by means of the model minority discourse, which seems to be hindered by his Japaneseness. Initially, he changes his name from Jiro Kurohata to Franklin Hata because he hopes to have a name sounding like an American. Nevertheless, everyone calls him Hata instead of Franklin. His surname, Hata, becomes an obvious token of his Japanese identification. As he narrates, “my name, after all, is Japanese, a fact that seems both odd and delightful to people” (*A Gesture Life* 2). Compared with the assimilative situation in Japan, the one in America appears much more different. This is because Asians are customarily and visibly different from whites, which corresponds to Young-oak Lee’s statement that in America the skin color of the Asian American still affects their identification as an American (146). In this regard, racial visibility and invisibility would be comparatively obvious than it is in Japan. When it comes to racial visibility and invisibility, Cheng has analyzed the issue as follows:

Involving a restless and often vexing interplay between perception and projection, recognition and disavowal, the values of racial visibility and invisibility can only emerge in relation to one another even as such appearance of meaning almost always immediately problematizes the signification against which it has defined itself. “White visibility,” for instance, relies on the invisibility and assumed normality of whiteness,

while “black invisibility” acquires its shape precisely through its very visibility as difference. (553)

That is, white ethnocentrism comes into being in comparison with other races (Stets and Burke 226). Under the circumstance of white visibility, as a result, invisibility of the ethnic minority is formulated due to comparatively obvious differences, such as the appearance. Similarly, it seems very possible for Asian Americans to live under a state of “Asian invisibility.”

The sense of Asian invisibility assists in molding Hata’s social visibility in America. Jan E. Stets and Peter J. Burke observe that “[o]nce in society, people derive their identity or sense of self largely from the social categories to which they belong” (225). With a nonwhite identity, Hata is burdened by an internal fear that he is invisible and marginalized owing to his very “racial tag,” or racial difference (Bashi and McDaniel 669).¹⁷ In the beginning of the novel, Hata delineates his feeling toward Bedley Run, from strangeness to familiarity. As he says, “[t]here’s no longer a lingering or vacant stare, and . . . everyone here knows perfectly who I am” (*A Gesture Life* 1). Stares and gazes in all directions frighten him, make him worry about whether people pay much attention to his racial difference, and further push him into a state of Asian invisibility. Thus, to eliminate the menace (of a lingering or vacant stare), he takes advantage of the model minority discourse to manifest himself (so that everyone here knows perfectly who he is). This is because “[t]o not be noticed is to be known” (Cheng 559). In other words, with the help of the model minority ideology, Hata’s social visibility is strengthened and in turn overpowers Asian invisibility. In this way, his dread of marginalization stemming from racial difference would be removed transiently. Judging from the above explanation, Asian invisibility indirectly

¹⁷ Bashi and McDaniel further explain the term in their article that “[i]t is the racial label that delimits the extent of one’s assimilability in American society” (669).

induces his life as a model minority in America, which further makes him live in a state of social visibility. Moreover, Lieber indicates that “identity is to a great extent socially bestowed and socially maintained” (88). In Hata’s case, with the model minority discourse and social visibility, he believes that he can have others socially identify him as a local man in the US. However, his life in America has changed gradually due to the departure of Sunny, which is the second impact on his life as a model minority.

Based on the above analysis, accordingly, the ideology of model minority helps Hata to identify with the nation where he lives. Meanwhile, it also becomes a strategy to have others identify with him. With the ideology, he successfully makes his Japaneseness more visible, and pushes his Koreanness into the dark. Through the ideology, he hopes to be regarded as a Japanese in Japan and a Japanese American in the US. He is firmly convinced that he can be treated like native people as long as he is thoroughly assimilated. Nevertheless, as Hamilton Carroll states, “Lee constructs a doubled narrative register in which the stories of Sunny and Kkutaeh consistently undercut Hata’s assimilation narrative” (593). That is to say, the demise of K and the departure of Sunny not only make him give up his model minority life, but change his viewpoint toward ethnic and national identity as well.

3.6 The *Bildung* of a Model Minority

After the ordeals—the incidents of K’s death and Sunny’s departure—Hata’s firm attitude toward the ideology of model minority changes from optimism to pessimism by degrees. He finally comprehends the fact that it is impossible to reverse his foreign identity even with the help of the model minority mask. Regardless of his successes to gain social visibility, to cloak his Koreanness, and to melt into the Japanese and American societies, all of these are illusory indeed. After losing K and

Sunny, his beloved lover and daughter, he discovers that “[his life] has been a succession of gestures designed to insulate him from the self he never had the courage to examine. But it may not be too late for him to change,” which can be regarded as the result of his *Bildung* (Hower, “Unchained Memory”). Meanwhile, with the disillusionment of his model minority fantasy, identification appears insignificant.

In the beginning of the novel, it is evident that Hata’s attitude toward the model minority discourse tends to be positive and sanguine. As he narrates, “living thirty-odd years in the same place begins to show on a man. In the course of such time, without even realizing it, one takes on the characteristics of the locality, the color and stamp of the prevailing dress and gait and even speech” (*A Gesture Life* 1). That is, he considers that the longer one resides in a place, the more he resembles the local people there. This is all with reference to time and the effectiveness of assimilation. Furthermore, his life as a model minority impresses those who reside in Bedley Run and reinforces his social visibility so that he can proudly say that almost everyone in the town knows him. On the strength of the model minority ideology, he gains more confidence in his optimistic belief that he can be treated as a local.

However, such a positive attitude turns to be negative later. By his constant returns to and flashbacks of the past, Hata recollects the demise of K and the departure of Sunny. He gradually realizes that all of the images he has created—including a filial son, a loyal Japanese lieutenant, and Doc Hata—are only disguises covering up what he is. As a Korean Japanese, “[h]is national identification with Japan serves to erase his ethnic identification” (Cheng 559). He strives to conceal his Korean identity. Nevertheless, because of K, he could not resist presenting his Koreanness. As a Japanese American, he seems to successfully integrate into the American society, just like what he tells Sunny—“You have no idea what my position is and how people heed my words” (*A Gesture Life* 95). Nevertheless, due to Sunny,

he becomes aware of the fact that people still do not view him as a local man, even though he is a model minority. People treat him well just because of his generosity, friendliness, as well as enthusiasm. Unfortunately, it is after losing K and Sunny that he truly realizes the facts. Had he not lost his self covered by the ideology of model minority, perhaps he would have more courage to escape with K so that she would not have been killed brutally. Had he been what he is earlier, he would have kept a warm family with Sunny. In this way, she would not have fled away from him in disappointment. The two events (or traumas) on account of K and Sunny push him to rethink whether it is correct and necessary to be a model minority. Accordingly, after meeting Sunny again in Renny's ward,¹⁸ Hata tells her,

I can't think of another time in my life that I have been as hopeful as I am now, and I am sure it is because you have come back here with your son. I will take that over everything else. So you see how you could have told Renny whatever you wished or felt compelled to, and it would be all right with me. (*A Gesture Life* 337)

From his words, it could be sensed that he is not so persisting in abiding the ideology of model minority anymore because no one is faultless, and he is no exception. Hence, he tells Sunny that she can say anything to Renny, including complaints and what might hurt his fame. For him, family now is much more important than reputation or all the things in the world.

Moreover, after taking off the camouflage of a model minority, Hata gains the power to change but loses social visibility. He has once revealed the reason why he would not like to leave Bedley Run. As he narrates, “[I] have always wished to be in a situation like the one I have steadily fashioned for myself in this town, where, if I

¹⁸ Renny is Hata's friend. He is having a heart attack while rescuing Tommy Hata's grandson in the water. As a result, Hata and Sunny would go to see him individually.

don't have many intimates or close friends, I'm at least a quantity known, somebody long ago counted" (*A Gesture Life* 21). He dislikes staying in unfamiliar surroundings because of his worry to be neglected. He endeavors to live in a state of social visibility for fear of being ignored through the ideology of model minority. After making up his mind to desert his life as a model minority, as a result, he knows very well that he may probably lose social visibility. In addition, after he gives up the ideology, he does not stick to national identity anymore. Originally, he always hopes to behave and look like a native in the foreign land. Aside from this, either in Japan or in America, he does not want to mention his Korean origin at all. Due to K and Sunny, nevertheless, he is truly aware that ethnic identification cannot be easily erased or altered. He cannot always hide his Koreanness because someone like K will see through it. Similarly, he cannot turn into a local person in a foreign country as well no matter what he does, which is too obvious for Sunny. Learning how to accept his ethnic identity is far better than cloaking or changing it. Therefore, he says, "[I]et me simply bear my flesh, and blood, and bones[;] I will fly a flag" (*A Gesture Life* 356). "A flag" here not only implies a reconciliation of his triple identity as a Korean, a Japanese, and an American, but also symbolizes Hata's resolution to present what he is. In this way, he does not need to hide his Koreanness or manifest his Japaneseness. In the meantime, he does not need to cater to others so as to ask for his identification with natives. From now on, he will only fly a flag for himself, a personal flag for who he is. With the flag, he becomes more willing to step out his familiar circle, traveling everywhere he likes. Eventually, Hata loses his social visibility, but completes his *Bildung* upon leaving Bedley Run, for he now realizes that it is impossible for him to turn into a native, in Japan or in America, which is an unconvertible fact even through the model minority discourse. On the other hand, he also understands that he cannot be viewed as a thorough outsider in both nations. This is because he stands for a new identification, a kind of

identity belongs to two or even more countries simultaneously. In other words, national identification is not unitary anymore. Instead, it is multidimensional, taking one's ethnic identification into consideration, which can be regarded as another connotation of Hata's "flag."



Chapter 4

Conclusion:

Becoming a Bicultural Person

In this chapter I would like to summarize my findings in the previous chapters, and to map out the differences between Korean immigrants and their descendants. Through the mapping, I will try to dwell in the issue of Korean or Asian identity that Chang-rae Lee intends to convey in his novels. In the meantime, I will share my *Bildung* after reading the novels as the end of the thesis.

4.1 The Tears of the Aliens in America

That we believed in anything American, in impressing Americans, in making money, polishing apples in the dead of night, perfectly pressed pants, perfect credit, being perfect, shooting black people, watching our stores and offices burn down to the ground. (52-53)

——Chang-rae Lee, *Native Speaker*

The above citation thoroughly presents the agony of the first-generation immigrants in the United States. They are not totally accepted by the white society even though they faithfully abide the ideology of model minority. In *Native Speaker*, Henry's father strives to make himself assimilated into the dominant white culture in order to survive in America. He speaks English and always shows how well his son is assimilated. He is forever catering to the taste of his white customers. In brief, he struggles to set up an image of model minority, showing his best side to others. Moreover, he even makes himself and his family as innocent beings to the neighborhood as possible. By doing so, people will not pay much attention to them owing to their different racial identity; therefore, they can elude unnecessary trouble, which can be sensed from the following passage:

[H]e mostly operated as if the town were just barely tolerating our presence. . . . [W]e had to be that careful of what people thought of us, as if we ought to mince delicately about in painted feet through our immaculate neighborhood, as if everything with us were always all right, in our great sham of propriety, [and] as if nothing could touch us or wreak anger or sadness upon us. (*Native Speaker* 52)

For Henry's father, it is only through the model minority discourse that they can likely avoid alienation and antagonism from others. Similarly, Doc Hata in *A Gesture Life*, can be regarded as a representative of the first-generation immigrants in the US. He also endeavors to make himself perfect in all aspects, for he is firmly convinced that this is the best way to melt into an unfamiliar society. In this regard, Vilna Bashi and Antonio McDaniel have pointed out that through the ideology of model minority, "[t]he immigrant group is assumed to have the potential to be like the native-born or majority group" (668). Therefore, both Henry's father and Hata—the first-generation immigrants in the two novels—hope to be accepted as members of the majority group more easily via the ideology. However, they neglect the fact that the model minority discourse actually implies racial stratification and cannot help them truly integrate into the white society. According to Sāmi Ludwig, in present-day America, "notions of ethnicity and ethnic identity are still mainly based on a person's origins as they manifest themselves in physical features and the kind of culture usually associated with these looks" (221). That is, racial characteristics are crucial factors for immigrants and their descendants to be accepted as members of the white society. As a result, non-Caucasian people with visible difference are very likely to encounter prejudices based on different cultural and genetic backgrounds. Even so, immigration has ironically enacted "an important and essential role in racial identification. . . [and] the development of the

U.S. racial system” (Bashi and McDaniel 671-72). Meanwhile, Bashi and McDaniel definitely indicate that “‘Asian’ immigrants are assigned to [one of the] races within the European model of racial hierarchy” (672).¹⁹ In order to resist the racial stratification, Asian immigrants are “forced to assimilate as members of different racial groups” (Bashi and McDaniel 672). For Asian Americans, assimilation appears to be the most viable solution to integrate into the white culture. Nevertheless, Chang-rae Lee does not think so. In the two novels, he reflects the negative side of the model minority discourse. Henry’s father struggles to be well-assimilated, but is still disdained by the whites, and has been called an “Oriental Jew” (*Native Speaker* 53). Likewise, Hata is always friendly to others, constantly giving them a hand. For instance, he still goes back to Sunny Medical Supply and gives help even though it is purchased and run by a young couple, Mr. and Mrs. Hickey. To his astonishment, however, his kindness results in Mr. Hickey’s anger. He thinks that Hata wants something from them. Above all, he even views Hata’s generosity as a feigned gesture to gain popularity. With the examples of Henry’s father and Hata, Lee implicitly reveals that assimilation still cannot make Asian immigrants truly integrated into the white culture, which is always the view of Henry and Sunny, who are the second generations of Asian immigrants.

4.2 The Introspection of the Aliens and Their Descendants

Through Henry and Sunny, Chang-rae Lee suggests that assimilation is not the only exit for people of different origins in the US. In *Native Speaker*, Henry knows too well with regard to the situation of his father as a well-behaved assimilationist and a Korean alien. Henry is aware that people will not ignore their racial features just

¹⁹ Based on Bashi and McDaniel’s argument, Black and Hispanic immigrants are also included within the racial hierarchy. Nevertheless, because the thesis focuses on Korean Americans, I put more emphasis on Asian immigrants exclusively.

because of their desire for assimilation. He hopes to be truly accepted as a member of the white society via his American-born identity, along with perfect linguistic accuracy and pronunciation. However, he still worries that he will be rejected owing to his Korean traits. Besides, in *A Gesture Life*, Sunny also sees clearly that people do not really accepted her adoptive father despite being well-assimilated. Both Henry and Sunny realize that for the whites, Asians are forever Asian. They are never American enough even though they are thoroughly assimilated and have been rooted in the US. In this regard, Anne Firor Scott expounds that this is because “people see most easily things they are prepared to see and overlook those they do not expect to encounter” (7). In other words, this is all about race. The Caucasian Americans seem unable to fully accept or treat people with different colors very equally. Hence, they electively neglect the needs and hopes from Asian immigrants and Asian Americans, such as the acceptance as a member of the white society. By means of Henry, Chang-rae Lee depicts the dilemma that the descendants of the immigrants encounter. Furthermore, through Hata, Lee also delineates the struggle of the first-generation immigrants, and how eagerly they hope to integrate into the white society by the model minority discourse. Via the stories and *Bildungs* of Henry and Hata, Lee implies that both the first and the second generations should not forget their ethnicity in order to be viewed as Americans authentically.

In addition, through their *Bildungs*, Lee also comes up with his idea that Korean or Asian Americans should live without worrying about identification. As indicated by Samuel Lee, “being a Korean American does not mean that one must follow the Korean or American ways of life all the time nor that one be committed in that one culture exclusively” (294). In fact, they do not need to be troubled with the identity problem, for they are supposed to view themselves as “new residents with new identity” in America. As Ludwig argues,

We are not simply what our body is. Nor are we only what the patterns of our parents' culture want us to be. We are more than that, and our daily negotiations therefore happen in terms of rules that can go beyond these two main traditional aspects of 'ethnicity.' (223)

Both race and ethnicity are just conventional signifiers of our body and culture. People should not be defined by race or ethnicity. For Korean Americans, they are not only Koreans but also Americans indeed. They do not need to emphasize the fact that they are Americans, and it is unnecessary for them to abandon their Korean ethnicity. In this regard, Samuel Lee utilizes the orthogonal identity model to explain and to express that "identification with any culture is independent of identification with other culture" (294-95). The following figure shows the outline of the model.

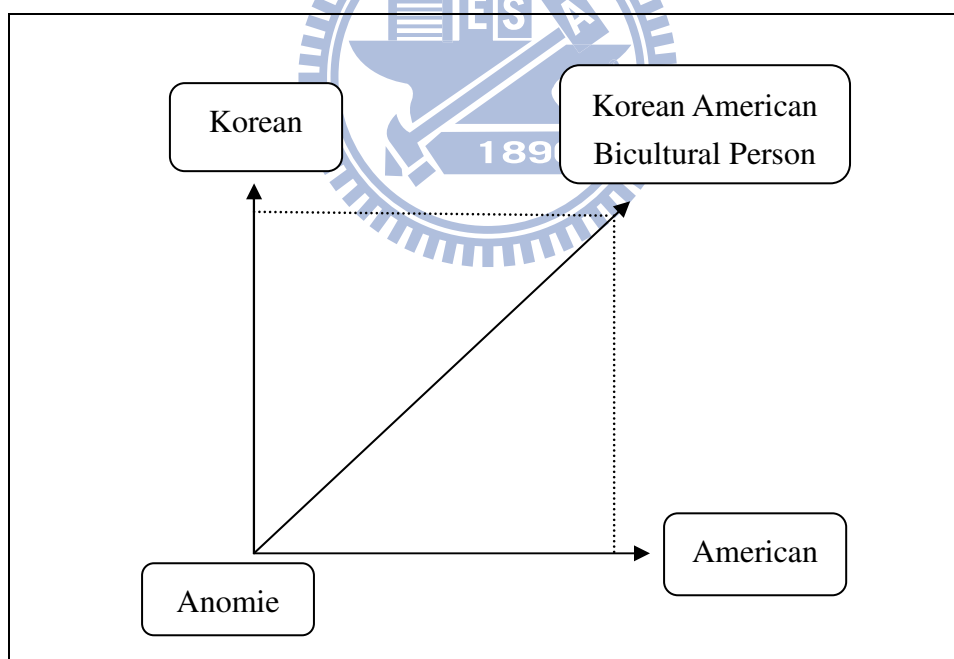


Fig. 1. Orthogonal model of Korean American cultural identification²⁰

In the model, two cultural identification dimensions are right angles to each other.

The origin of two axes is anomie, a hypothetical point where one does not have any

²⁰ The model is created by E. R. Oetting and F. Beauvais. For more information, please refer to Oetting and Beauvais's article—"Orthogonal Cultural Identification Theory: The Cultural Identification of Minority Adolescents."

identification with any culture, similar to the alienated or marginalized state. Based on Samuel Lee's explication,

The orthogonal identification model indicates that any pattern and any combination of cultural identification can exist. There can be persons with high bicultural identification, monocultural identification, high identification with one culture and medium identification with another, or even low identification with both cultures. (295)

While facing another culture conflicting with his ethnic background like the cases in Henry and Hata, one does not have to make an alternative decision from them. It is very likely to own them at the same time. In other words, even though Korean Americans are well-assimilated into the white culture, they still can hold their Korean identity as bicultural people if they want to. In this regard, Heike Berner also brings out his similar viewpoint in his dissertation:

“Asian” in “Asian American” is meant as a modification of “American,” demonstrating that it is possible to be American and non-white at the same time, and that one can be part of American culture without losing the notion of one's ethnic background, and certainly without becoming schizophrenic. (21)

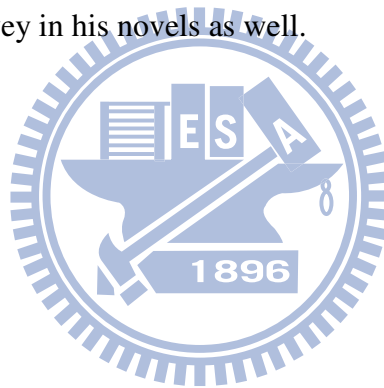
Both Berner and Samuel Lee consider that biculturalism is normal and should be thought of as a trend for Korean or Asian Americans. However, just like what Mark Jerng stresses, “‘Knowing’ what it means to be Korean American seems to be far more about desire than it does any concrete understanding” (50). “Korean American” should be more than its literal meaning or biculturalism. It is not merely concerning Korean and American. Instead, it should be realized as a new category, a new identity, just as the flag Hata waves at the end of *A Gesture Life*. Through deploying his novels as the *Bildungsromans*, Chang-rae Lee successfully conveys

his thinking about what a contemporary Korean American should be. For him, Korean Americans do not need to be identified or seek identification with the help of the model minority discourse, nor do they need to face the dilemma of national and ethnic identity. Instead, it is just because of their special identity that they are unique. They should, as a result, be themselves and see themselves as “new residents with new identity” in America. In the following section, I will share my view from my *Bildung* after reading the two novels.

4.3 To Be “A Part” or “Apart,” That Is the Question

I believe under the binary situations of integration and alienation, “A Part” or “Apart,” indeed, is nothing but a matter of choice. Actually, the two novels remind me of one of my best friends, who is a Taiwanese-born Japanese. He does not tell me that he is a Japanese until I see his identification card. He thinks he does not have to reveal his dual nationality due to his perfect assimilation and integration into the Taiwanese culture. Nevertheless, he is also afraid that more or less the classmates might treat him differently because of his Japanese identity, which would make him uncomfortable. As a result, he chooses to conceal the truth. After knowing this, in fact, I often play a trick on him over his Japanese identity, which enrages him. Thinking back, I consider this is the experience that helps resonate me with Henry and Hata when reading *Native Speaker* and *A Gesture Life*. All of them just want to be treated as local people only and can live well without racism. After reading the novels, I realize I do something wrong to my friend. This is because the moment I pay attention to his identity, discrimination kicks in actually even though I am innocent, which now I consider is what my friend cares about. Accordingly, I am convinced that the novels not only inspire Korean Americans to be what they are, but also convey the message that people should change their thinking toward

new residents. Aside from this, for Asian Americans or people with dual or many identities, it is very important to have deep conviction that they are special. To be “A Part” or “Apart,” that is the question. Here, we should try to imagine that “A” metaphorizes the Asian Americans, while “Part” symbolizes mainstream white culture. When the Asian Americans have a tendency to approach the white society through assimilation, the result of “Apart” probably suggests distance and separation. On the other hand, if they can keep their selfhood and racial uniqueness, the outcome of “A Part” insinuates a real integration instead of division on the surface of the phrase. Namely, for the Asian Americans, “A Part” and “Apart” are just different ways of thinking about the same issue, which I think is what Chang-rae Lee tries to convey in his novels as well.



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