

Concluding Remarks: Provocative Issues at a Crossroads in Asian Diaspora Studies

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We are very grateful to all our presenters for their deep insights, and their personal, and often moving portrayals of the daily lives, struggles and achievements of diasporic peoples. They underline the need to deepen these studies, as they brought to us lessons on their struggle for survival, their fight against discrimination, and the claims for human rights that are surfacing in the homogenized post-capitalist global community.

We have learned not only about their struggles but also their triumphs in overcoming all obstacles to live a fulfilled and contented life. We have learned that nothing comes without a struggle, but that ultimately it is worth the effort, and that to find the light at the end of a dark tunnel you must pass through it.

The individual presentations were followed by an enthusiastic Q&A session, and due to the participants' specialist knowledge and experience in Diaspora studies, and the valuable opinions they expressed on a wide range of related topics, I have decided to include a brief report on these discussions. Some of the questions shed light on the original presentations, some were generated out of the discussion itself, and others elicited some practical advice for future diaspora research.

The questions sparked discussions on a wide variety of diaspora-related topics, and so for ease of reference and the benefit of our readers, I have summarized them and listed them by the principle topics.

1. Naming of Koryo Saram

One of the first questions was with regard to the term “Koryo Saram”. Tri Murniati asked whether the term referred to the Korean diaspora in different countries or just to those in the post-Soviet Union. I explained that Koryo Saram refers only to the Korea diaspora in the post-Soviet era and it is the name by which they identify themselves. In Koryo Saram studies there are several titles. For example, in English, they are known simply as ‘Koreans in the post-Soviet Union’, but in Japan, in Korea, and within Koryo Saram ‘s community there are many terms.

When I began my research, I found that the most important aspect of the name was that it was their own self-identification, because after the division of Korea, there were many political issues and then immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union they suffered from harsh political conditions and had to identify themselves either by a contemporary South Korean name, a North Korean name, or a Japanese name. But they were not South Korean, or South Korean and not the citizens of a colony, so to define their unique identity they named themselves as the *Koryo Saram*.

2. Language Acquisition

Helen Kim remarked on the Koryo Saram’s ability in reading and writing of the Russian and Kazakh languages. She was surprised that their proficiency in Russian was almost 99% but that in Kazakh it was much lower, at least in terms of writing. She was curious whether this was because Russian might be perceived as being more prestigious as a cultural language.

I explained that the Koryo Saram had already experienced being integrated into Russia during the Soviet period. Then immediately after the collapse of the USSR, the Kazakhstan government introduced the policy of Kazak centered integration of Kazakh language, culture, and

history. Immediately after the collapse of the Soviet union, Kazakh was not the major language in Kazakhstan, while, in Uzbekistan at the time, they did actually speak Uzbek. This meant that the over-forties in the Koryo Saram community couldn't speak Kazakh fluently, but the young generation had to, because the government introduced tests in Kazakh as a qualification for employment' so the young Koryo Saram in Kazakhstan had to learn it. That is why Koryo Saram teenagers and those in their twenties can already speak Kazakh.

3. Double-Belonging Identity Issues

I asked Ya-Han Chuang to clarify what she meant by double belonging. She explained that this phenomenon is particular to France, because French society is theoretically built on a model of assimilation where all citizens are taught there is no difference among people. However, in reality, as immigrants and their descendants grow up they are exposed to the a brutally multicultural environment, and find themselves constantly otherized at school, or by the media. Implicitly, in their social environment, Chinese descendants grow up with the idea that there is an authentic way of being French, but amongst their own people, there is also an authentic way of being Chinese.

This experience of socialization sandwiched between two cultures eventually pushes them to live with a hybrid identity. Ultimately, most of them live through a negotiation, beginning by saying that they are neither French nor Chinese and ending up by saying, they are both French and Chinese. In reality this does not result in a normative way of thinking but gives them a dual identity. Of course this only brushes over the problem, and the dilemma of, "Who am I?" will only be resolved when the revolutionary ideals of justice, equality, and brotherhood are actually adopted by humanity as whole.

What Ya-Han Chuang found interesting was that they succeeded in forming their own identity as a hybrid double belonging and this

symbolizes a kind of inner rebellion comparative to what we might imagine the struggle for the Republic was like.

4. Third Space for Diaspora Living in Two Worlds

When talking about the Asian diaspora in France Ya-Han Chuang had mentioned that most of them feel neither here nor there, as if they are living in two worlds. Tri Murniati brought up the question of a third space. For example, Indian domestic workers in Hong Kong have a regular gathering in a place called Victoria Park. This has become a kind of third place where they can bridge between the two worlds of Indonesia and Hong Kong. She asked Ya-Han Chuang whether the Asian diaspora in France have created or built such a space.

She replied that she thought that third spaces, as public spaces for diaspora to gather, have always existed for migrants, especially for those who live in Paris, since there are at least two little China towns where they can find very home-like clothing and sweets, and the Asian diaspora youth have grown up in this environment.

She pointed out that what has changed is that there has been a reevaluation of these spaces due to a new cultural activism. Chinese cuisine in France, or Asian cuisine in France, is often associated with inferior quality cuisine, especially if it is Chinese. In their new cultural activism the youth have reevaluated all this cuisine with illustrations portraying Chinese food as high quality cuisine.

However young people who are brought up in an entrepreneur's family, or children of Asian origin adopted by white French parents, grow up in a much more isolated environment and it is already difficult and complicated for them to assume their own identity as being Asian in France. For them, the Internet has become their primary place to meet up to exchange their experiences in a much more anonymous way. Then after this first encounter, they begin to nurture an identity, and nowadays we are starting to see them also gathering in some diasporic spaces. Ya-Han Chuang gave the example that her first meeting with these young

Asians was quite naturally in a well-respected Chinese restaurant, and actually for many of them, it was probably their first discovery of good Asian cuisine in Paris as well.

I asked Tri Murniati about the function of Victoria Park as a third space for Indonesian domestic workers to gather. I wondered if, in addition to the function as a space for Indonesian nationals it also acted as a space that accommodated the mixing of the two countries' cultures like Chinatown in Korea, or Korea Town in LA, which also have some important commercial or economic functions. Chinatown in Korea became the workplace of Chinese people living in Korea, thus providing economic benefits for their lives as well, and their network is formed based on that function. So I asked if there is any particular commercial or economic function in Victoria Park in Hong Kong?

Tri Murniati explained that migrant workers or the Indonesian domestic workers are not allowed to do any business outside their employment. However, according to the written sources, some of them do something like opening a food stall in Victoria Park selling Indonesian cuisine, so, this has helped the domestic workers to have a taste of home. This has the added benefit of providing the Indonesian domestic workers with additional income, not from their employment, but from this illegal business.

However, it is different from, say, a Chinatown, where the Chinese diaspora can legally make a living, while this is not the case for Indonesian domestic workers. In fact Victoria Park emerged as a space where they can socialize with their peers, other domestic workers, but not necessarily while freely enjoying economic activities.

5. Activists' Strategies against Anti-Asian Racism

Helen Kim pointed out that the Anti-Asian racism that Ya-Han Chuang described in Paris is also happening in other places, namely, the US and the UK, and a lot of the recent claims in the US accuse activist organizations who highlight anti-Asian racism of trying to silence or

divert attention away from anti-black racism. She asked her about the political landscape around making these claims in France, and whether she felt there was a greater sense of solidarity amongst racialized groups and political organizations across the board.

Ya-Han Chuang replied that there is a huge debate around this subject in France. The situation in France is not as serious but it is similar to the US in the sense that interracial hostility also exists, especially aggression in the form of delinquency coming from black or North African young teenagers who are in the beginning of their careers as a gangsters. When there were demonstrations there was a debate inside the Asian and Chinese circles as to whether to highlight this aggression as the consequence of interracial hostility or not? It is also true that some among the first generation Chinese entrepreneurs do have racial prejudice against Northern African or black minority teenagers. They do this without necessarily contextualizing them in the bigger sociological framework as young delinquents or apprentice criminals, so this hostility goes on, and this divergence still exists even among the Asian activists.

She explained that regarding the question about solidarity with other racial minorities concretely, there are different ways to frame the question. One group claims they are the victims of racism, and they want harsher reform, to punish teenagers who commit such a crime. In other words an ethno-centric way to frame the problem from the perspective of being criminally attacked. Meanwhile, another group tends to describe such a problem as a consequence of the systemic racism. This view is less visible today among activists, but it's growing under COVID-19.

Since COVID-19, activists have succeeded in changing the discourse on racism against Asians by showing the extent to which a common ideology remains deeply embedded in the French perception of their society, instead of it just being about a neighborhood problem of criminal hostility among residents of different ethnic origin. Further, in a larger way, in terms of the convergence and solidarity, there are more initiatives being done by other minority groups toward the Asians. For example, when in 2017, a Chinese man was shot in his apartment,

youngsters of all minorities demonstrated loudly against the police violence, so victims of similar violence who were of African origin and whose movement has been going for longer actually showed their support to this Chinese victim's Asian family.

However from a solidarity perspective the case of Asian youngsters going to the Black Lives Matter protests is much less visible and it's not yet becoming a consensus among the Asian activists in France.

So there has been some debate, and we can see among Asians a clear distinction between those who want solidarity, who want to work with the other minorities, and those who try to have a more ethnocentric way, who paradoxically tend to finally conserve the status of the model minority, even inside the political landscape. This situation is influenced by external economic and political conditions but there is certainly hope for the success of these activists efforts in to achieve solidarity. This is related to the conclusion to Section 3, and further highlights the point that differences of race, creed and color can only be resolved when the revolutionary ideals of justice, equality, and brotherhood are adopted by humanity as whole.

6. What Next after Gaining Political Agency?

Helen Kim recalled Tri Murniati's account of a narrative by an Indonesian domestic worker who, in resisting the unreasonable demands of her employer, had found a moment of political agency. She wanted to hear more about what happened after that. In this particular account the woman had contemplated going back to Indonesia and Helen Kim wondered whether she had come across other examples of these moments of political agency or subjectivity, and how much power or agency it actually give these women?

Tri Murniati replied that most of the time, these women do take lessons from their experience and in the case the protagonist in the narrative, she was able to execute acts to solve the conflict. Taking examples from the narratives, other protagonists began to engage in

micro-activism. They wanted to help their peers, fellow Indonesian domestic workers who were enduring similar problems. Their political moments empowered them to be more active in terms of becoming involved in advocacy, helping domestic workers and other workers who have similar problems. In this way are they participating in a wider space, migrant activism.

She encountered this firsthand when doing fieldwork in Singapore, where she met a migrant worker who was also actively participating in advocacy. She had a help desk and she spent her Sundays, which is the off day for the migrant workers in Singapore, helping other domestic workers who had problems.

She concluded that after they have experienced a political moment of this kind, and they have their political agency they not only empower themselves by having the confidence to disempower the colonial relation between themselves and their employer, but they also extend it to help other domestic workers. They have more agency to help not only themselves, but also others. They see others experiencing something they have also experienced and feel strongly that they would like to help them. From building the agency for themselves, they also become an agent in a wider space. I found this to be an inspiration in the diasporic people's struggle for equality and justice.

7. Mothering from Afar

When Tri Murniati tried to unravel the practice of mothering from afar in the case of Indonesian domestic workers, she studied the literature which examined similar issues but in different contexts, such as the context of Mexican migrants in the US. She mentioned Helen Kim's story about the Korean husband who followed his wife to Germany, and asked her if some of the guests workers' and nurses' husbands did not follow them, so that they had to do mothering from afar. Then she asked Helen if mothering from afar practices exist in her research context.

Helen answered that she has been interested in transnational mothering and mothering from afar, and had learned a lot by studying some excellent work that was done in the Philippines, by Jason, Cabanis and Suriano and recommended that other Diaspora researchers read their works and incorporate this very human aspect of migration into their diaspora studies.

8. Support from Host Country vs. Original Country

Prof. Lee Byong Jo of the Far East Department of the Al-Farabi Kazakh National University in Kazakhstan mentioned that after the Korean War, in the 1960s, the Korean government got a loan from Germany, and with the help of the Korean miners and nurses in Germany, was able to rebuild the Korean economy.

He asked Helen Kim if there is still a Korean miner and nurse community in Germany today and whether the German government giving them any support?

Helen answered that there are many associations, migrant associations, diasporic associations, specifically for miners and nurses in Germany. In fact, for the first leg of her project, she did a lot of interviews with these guest workers who settled in Germany, and part of her time there was spent visiting these associations. Every year, they travel from all the different towns and regions of Germany and meet in the former industrial region of Germany, spend a day together, eat, talk and reminisce on their past experiences and present circumstances. Helen informed us that there are numerous associations both informal and formal that have been created and sustained in Germany.

She mentioned that regarding the German government, there has been a lot more research within the last couple of years by South Korean scholars who have had access to the Ministry of Labor which has released documents concerned with this agreement between South Korea and western Germany at the time, so there's been a lot more research around this particular guest worker wave.

She stated that these guest workers receive no formal support from the German government. However, the South Korean government has proposed formal support to the guest workers in terms of offering pensions, which has yet to materialize. However, promises have been made by the South Korean government to offer support to these guest workers and we hope that they will be fulfilled.

9. New Approaches to Diaspora Studies

While enjoying this collaboration with my fellow Asian diaspora researchers I wanted to learn as much as I could from them, so I brought up the topic of research methodology. Diaspora researchers are trying to make a logical research framework for many cases, through conducting interviews and narratives. Helen Kim sought to establish a specific research framework from some cases of the Koreans who migrated to become German guest worker nurses, and Tri Murniati tried to generalize the study of some Indonesian domestic workers cases through narratives.

Therefore, I asked all the presenters two questions. 1) What is the most important thing for you in the process of generalizing several cases? And 2) What was the most difficult thing for you in making those processes.

I explained that in my case, in order to create a logical framework, first, I try to find commonalities and differences between the cases that I have gained material from during my field work. Then I try to sort them out and align them with my research framework. However, I have found this very difficult, and in most cases, I had no choice but to tailor my research to the existing researches' framework, rather than presenting a new framework. Then I asked the others to explain how they dealt with this issue.

Tri Murniati said that in her research she focuses on the narratives written by women who work as domestic workers and so she explores the migratory experiences particularly from the perspective of border studies, which is not so difficult because there is a lot of literature which

is similar to her research focus. However, as existing research is not looking at these issues from the perspective of border studies this is the significance of her research about the Indonesian domestic workers.

However, when she discusses their migratory experiences, she found that this is a common theme explored by other scholars, especially when they talk about migrant literature.

Helen Kim suggested that there are two research questions that frame her research which revolve around the usefulness of conceptualizations of diaspora. One research question could be for example, “How could diaspora studies more recent conceptualizations be useful in thinking about, and trying to reveal the lived experiences of these guest workers, as they have migrated from place to place?” In addition, the lived experiences themselves really tell us something new, and perhaps could stretch or offer different conceptualizations of diaspora. This comes from thinking of methodologies, and she is trying to explore the use of certain methods. She is an ethnographer, but in this project she has been trying to engage more with oral history interviews, and she has found that these oral history interviews introduced something entirely new. Some of the stories cannot be told, just through just speaking, and yet they are an integral part of the diasporic experiences, stories, these secrets that can’t be told, which Susan Boyan describes in her work on diaspora and intimacy.

Helen Kim stressed the importance of studying the more recent literature around post-colonial formations, namely, Susan Boyan’s work on Diasporic intimacy, Hazel Carby’s ‘Imperial Intimacies’, and also Lisa Lowe’s ‘Intimacies of Four Continents. These are groundbreaking works that offer a different historical narrative. She summarized by saying that in her recent work she has been linking diaspora and work on intimacy, as the people, their cultures and identities and the connections that we cultivate are also our diasporic resources.

I hope that you have found my fellow presenter’s comments and suggestions useful, and in conclusion, I would like to encourage the readers of this small report on Asian diaspora studies to continue to

pursue their studies for the success of their careers, and most importantly, for the benefits and lessons their reports can bring in establish equality, justice and human rights for all humankind.

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Presentation 4. “Preserving the Life and Culture of the Korean Diaspora among the Majority: Ethnic Minority Rights in Kazakhstan in the Post-Soviet Era”

Dr. Lee received a PhD in Area Studies, from Kyoto University in 2019. She is a foreign postdoctoral fellow of the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science and is presently engaged in Korean Diaspora research at the Asia-Japan Research Institute, Ritsumeikan University, Japan.

Dr. Lee specializes in research on the Korean Diaspora (*Koryo Saram*) in Contemporary Kazakhstan. Her dissertation “Social Transformation of the Korean Diaspora (Koryo Saram) in Contemporary



Kazakhstan” explored the acculturation of Koryo Saram in the post-Soviet Union as a minority in Kazakhstan and a part of the Korean Diaspora. Her current study analyzes the social integration and transformation of the Koryo Saram, the Korean Diaspora in Kazakhstan from the Perestroika period, just before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, to today’s Kazakhstan, after its independence.