

Ty Pak: Korean American literature as 'guilt payment'

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Ty Pak: Korean American Literature as “Guilt Payment”

I. 1. Ty Pak and the Silence of Asian American Studies

Ten years ago Korean Americans were commonly perceived as being well adapted to American culture, a model-minority. It wasn't until the “post-colonial turn” in ethnic studies¹ and the aggression directed at Korean immigrants during the “Los Angeles Riots” that research started focussing on a de-centred diasporic community, held together by collective memories of colonization, war, and post-war dictatorship.² Korean American literature, video productions and the visual arts have since challenged the idea of an essentially “ethnic” Korean American enclave³. The focus shifted

¹ I refer to new conceptions of culture which focus less on shared experiences of racism, stereotypisation and discrimination but on a “politics of representation” which places questions of power, hybridization and agency centre-stage. See Stuart Hall, “New Ethnicities”, *Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, eds. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (London and NY: Routledge, 1996) 441-444.

² See for example Elaine Kim, „Myth, Memory, and Desire: Homeland and History in Contemporary Korean American Writing and Visual Art”, *Holding Their Own: Perspectives on the Multi-Ethnic Literatures of the United States* (Tübingen: Stauffenburg Verlag, 2000) 80, and Min-Jun Kim, “Moments of Danger in the (Dis-) Continuous Relation of Korean Nationalism and Korean American Nationalism”, *Special Issue: New Formations, New Questions: Asian American Studies. Positions east asia critique* 5:2 (Fall 1997), guest eds. Elaine Kim and Lisa Lowe (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997) 358. Brenda Kwon Lee, “Beyond Keeamoku: Koreans, Nationalism, and Local Culture in Hawai'i.” Diss. U. of California, Los Angeles, 1997. *DAI A* 58/06 (1997): 2210.

³ I take my concept of “ethnicity” as a “process of inter-reference between two or more cultures” from Michael M.J. Fischer, “Ethnicity and the Post-Modern Arts of Memory”, *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, eds. James Clifford and G. Marcus (Berkeley: University of

away from notions of a dynamic “tradition”⁴ towards postcolonial identity constructions and the paradigm of cultural hybridity. According to Homi Bhabha, cultural hybridity complicates colonial representation and “reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other ‘denied’ knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority.”⁵ Like other postcolonial critics Bhabha aims at pointing out strategies that undermine the authority of the dominant culture.

Elements of postcolonial subversion can certainly be found in *Guilt Payment*, Ty Pak’s 1983 collection of short stories⁶ which I will discuss in this paper. However, *subversion* is not my focus. What Bhabha and some critics of Korean American literature have tended to ignore is the problem of trauma. In my view Korean American cultural productions⁷ point to a collective crisis which keeps the community from constructing a future-oriented ethnic identity.⁸ *Guilt Payment* is an early example of this pessimistic tendency. It gives the most radical account of what Pak’s writer-colleague Theresa Cha had called the Koreans’ legacy of “perpetual exile” just a year before, in 1982.⁹

1.2. Korean America: Enclave or Exclave?

Pak’s protagonists have lived in the United States for decades but they continue to be obsessed with what he describes as “the story of the race—the vagabondage that originated from Central Eurasian steppes, trekking and meandering across the mountains and deserts of two

California Press, 1986) 194-233.

⁴ I refer to “tradition” in the sense of Michael Fischer’s use of the term as a dynamic concept.

⁵ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994) 114.

⁶ (Honolulu: Bamboo Ridge Press and the Hawai’i Ethnic Resources Centre, 1983).

⁷ Examples of this are Yong-Soon Min’s works of art and videos such as *Sa-I-Gu* (1993 by Elaine Kim, Christine Choy and Dai Sil Kim-Gibson) or Wonsun Choy’s *Forgotten Yesterdays* (1994).

⁸ See Michael Fischer, “Ethnicity...” 196 and 201.

⁹ *Dictee* (New York: Tanam Press)

continents, the persecutions, discriminations, genocides that hounded them everywhere they went” (115). In this construction of a collective identity there is not even a homeland to return to. Like in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s *Dictée*, “Korea” is a cultural space that has always already been defined by enemy powers. It refers not so much to the national geography of the divided Korean nation but to a desired place of origin, a memory of something never had.

My initial reluctance to use the proposed term “exclave” had to do with this presumed lack of a “real” homeland as a point of reference. Somewhat ironically, however, the factual existence of Korea as a divided nation allows for an interesting approach to this spatial concept of the exclave. As Elaine Kim has pointed out, the historical separation of families has gained the status of a central cultural memory shared by Koreans both within and outside the country of origin.¹⁰ We can thus safely assume that there must be a strong sense of connectedness between “homeland” and “exclave.” This sense of connectedness can certainly be found in the Korean American community in the United States whose artists often lament the division of the country. The transferral of South Korean nationalism is another example of this identification.¹¹

The homeland’s condescending attitude towards what many South Koreans perceived as an “Americanized” exclave¹² changed quite radically

¹⁰ “Geographical displacement and separation from family members” due to the division of the Korean peninsula “are the rule rather than the exception [...] touching even those born long after the armistice or living on distant continents” (Myth 79).

¹¹ As Min-Jun Kim has pointed out, many Korean Americans identify with South Korean nationalist ideology. It is, however, a romanticizing discourse which helps construct an ethnic Korean American identity. Min-Jun Kim argues in a similar way when she compares Korean nationalist identity constructions with romanticizing accounts of a Korean American „ethnic“ identity „that alludes to the discursive forms of an earlier Korean ‚nationalist‘ identity.“ Min-Jun Kim, 358. In my discussion of the „Los Angeles Riots“ I have shown how historical events in the „host country“ become meaningful when they are appropriated to a Korean discourse of national destiny. See my Ph.D. thesis *No Korean is Whole—Wherever He or She May Be: Erfindungen von Korean America seit 1965* (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 2002). Another instance which shows the sense of connectedness was when Korean Americans supported a South Korean worker’s protest against a transnational American firm in 1990. See Ramsay Liem and Jinsoo Kim, “The Pico Workers’ Struggle: Korean Americans and the Lessons of Solidarity, *Amerasia Journal* 18:1 (1992): 49-68.

¹² For an example see Elaine Kim’s autobiographical account in *Writing Self Writing Nation* (Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 1994), Theresa Cha’s description of the hostile reactions of some South Koreans when a Korean American comes to visit (*Dictée* 56-57). In the 1950s the Korean American director Peter Hyun became a celebrity in post-war Korea while in America he had

when people in Seoul or Pusan witnessed the looting of Korean American stores during the “Los Angeles Riots” via television. The growing awareness of the Korean American situation is mirrored by the interest South Korea’s cultural institutions take in the art and literature of the exclave. Korean American Literature has been translated into Korean within a very short time. According to Ki-han Lee from Myonji-University in Seoul, Korean American authors are often seen as “heroes or even patriots, advancing Korea’s image and prestige in the United States.”¹³ This has not been true for the three books¹⁴ published by Ty Pak. His work does not attract the South Korean publishing business, probably because stories about male guilt abound in that country.¹⁵ An additional reason may be that his books do not offer a positive image of the exclave. Of course, the author’s decision to write in English must be interpreted as a move *away* from both the exclave and the “enclave” towards the American mainstream.¹⁶ When in 1996 I interviewed a Korean American bookseller in Los Angeles, she had never even heard of any of the Korean American books which I mentioned, all of them written in English. At least at that time and place Korean American bookstores presented themselves as “linguistic and literary exclaves.”¹⁷ The store was literally *marked* by difference. The shelves were overflowing with books and journals covered with the Korean writing system known as *hangul*.¹⁸

suffered severe exclusion as an artist. See his autobiography *In the New World: The Making of a Korean American* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1995).

¹³ http://kn.koreaherald.co.kr/SITE/data/html_dir2002/05/18/200205180027.asp

¹⁴ The second collection of short stories, *Moonbay* and Pak’s first novel, *Cry Korea Cry* were both published by The Woodhouse Press, New York, in 1999.

¹⁵ I thank Professor Kun Jong Lee from Korea University for pointing this out.

¹⁶ Lawrence Venuti. “Introduction”. *Rethinking Translation: Discourse, Subjectivity, Ideology*. London and NY: Routledge, 1992, 5.

¹⁷ I thank Armin Paul Frank for the terminology.

¹⁸ For a discussion of „oriental stores“ see Enrique Bonus. “Marking and Marketing ‘Difference’: Filipino Oriental Stores in Southern California”. *Positions...*, eds Elaine Kim and Lisa Lowe, 643-696. It would be worth investigating whether these bookstores are by now selling Korean translations of Korean American texts. In 1996 there were still only a few translations available.

We should be wary, however, toward reducing the community to an extension of the “homeland” connected via satellite, Korean language newspapers, and a network of personal and business relations. Trying to help, the bookseller handed me a Korean American success story written by a politician in the Midwest—in Korean, of course. This linguistic exclave may not have a high command of English, but it clearly shows an interest in the American myth that brought many of its members to the US in the first place. In addition to *this* variety of Korean American literature (which is written in *hangul*), the community also has access to translations of American literature into Korean.

1.3. Torn between Cultures: Ty Pak

This immigrant community is certainly not the readership Pak had in mind when he wrote his overall pessimistic stories of failed assimilation. However, he is widely known in academic circles, especially among Asian American scholars. But while he is “known,” he has not been receiving much critical attention.¹⁹ I believe this is due to *Guilt Payment*’s “failure” to assimilate to dominant academic discourses. Unlike Cha, who used to be dismissed as an “elite” author in the 1980s and who now is among the most celebrated Asian American writers, Pak’s work is not primarily concerned with hybrid identity constructions, successful postcolonial strategies of subversion, or other preferred topics in contemporary debates.

In what follows, I will discuss Pak’s “failure” as a meaningful phenomenon. My argument is that Pak’s reaching out to the general American public is a highly ambivalent move. He deliberately chooses to write in the language of the superpower whose name is connected to the bloody war of 1950-1953, the division of the country, and a succession of authoritarian regimes in the “democratic” South. While the stories are written in the language of the liberator/colonizer, they also keep up an extraordinarily strong connection to the Korean cultural tradition. As I understand the title of the book, it could be seen, at least on one level, as a tribute to Korea, an emigrant’s “Guilt Payment.”

¹⁹ See Seiwoong Oh on Ty Pak in a forthcoming reference book on Asian American short stories.

Furthermore, the book mirrors an opinion which is rather widespread in immigrant enclaves: While Pak pragmatically supports translation as a means of survival, he has strong doubts about its ability to communicate across *cultural* borders. "Possession Sickness," one of the best stories in the collection, helps to illustrate this: It centres on George Kahn, a Korean American who even changed his name to an American one. Years ago he had abandoned his wife in order to start a new life. When he finds his daughter watching an interview with a Korean shaman on American television, he recognizes his wife Moonhee. In the middle of her interview with "Western specialists," she "departs from the agreed-upon text" and directly addresses her ex-husband in front of the TV, calling him a "son of a bitch" in Korean. Ironically, the narrator translates her "strong Cholla vernacular" into an entirely different and somehow ill-fitting *American* vernacular ("son of a bitch"), thus emphasizing the impossibility of finding a cultural equivalent to her verbal attack (27). Consistent with this scepticism Pak refuses to serve as a "cultural translator" in a very substantial way which effects not only the structure of the stories but their overall narrative pattern as well.

Without a doubt Pak and his protagonists have a lot in common. Their histories of immigration are products of international power relations and post-colonialism. Ty Pak was born during the Japanese occupation of Korea in 1938, he lost his father during the Korean War, and came to the United States in 1965 to eventually settle down in Hawaii. Like many Korean Americans, including the second generation, Pak never severed his ties with his native country. In the 1990s he even returned and attempted to establish a business in South Korea. He now lives in the United States again.²⁰ The transferral of Korean cultural codes to the American context is a direct symptom of this concept of migration.

The following discussion is concerned with translation as a multi-layered process of cultural textualization. Although commonly labelled an "author," Ty Pak is also a translator: In *Guilt Payment* he translates a Korean cultural discourse into the American cultural context. Or is it the other way around? Pak relates two stories simultaneously yet separately, thereby ignoring the traditional hierarchy between the "original" and the "translation".

²⁰ I thank Seiwoong Oh and Myung Ja Kim for the biographical information.

There are of course limits to my “translation” of *Guilt Payment*. I am myself a “Western specialist” with limited access to the dynamic concept of Korean culture. I do not even speak Korean. The “canon” of Korean literary tradition is scarcely available in English. The same is true for academic discussions about Korean literature. Translations from Korean are still fewer than those from Japanese or Chinese.²¹ Although more recent Korean fiction often deals with the peninsula’s post-colonial experience and its connectedness to American foreign policy, few authors have found major publishers in the English-speaking world.²² Of course, I don’t want to uncritically celebrate translations as I am aware of the element of domestication implicit in “fluent” translations.²³ But I am equally sceptical of Esther Ghymn’s proclamation that “a study of ethnic literature is best done by someone with a background in that culture”.²⁴ What we need is an open-minded, self-reflective, interdisciplinary, and intercultural collaboration. We live in an age where the ideas of “home” and “abroad,” “self” and “other” seem less clearly opposed. “On six continents” says James Clifford “foreign populations have come to stay—mixing in but often in partial, specific fashions.”²⁵ I think we should at least try to exchange ideas about this “new diversity.” We are all a part of it. This paper is a contribution to this kind of exchange.

First I will outline some general implications of Pak’s strategy. Second, I will introduce the Korean background of *Guilt Payment*. In my concluding remarks, I will make a preliminary assessment of Pak’s strategy.

²¹ The only data I could find about this were in *Publisher’s Weekly*, July 5, 1990: C.B. Grannis. “Balancing the Books”, pp. 21-23.

²² See Bruce Fulton’s list in “Selected Readings in Modern Korean Fiction in English Translation”, 1-9

²³ Koskinen, 132

²⁴ Esther Mikyung Ghymn, *The Shapes and Styles of Asian American Prose Fiction* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992) 9.

²⁵ *The Predicament of Culture*. (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1988) 13

II. 1. Ty Pak's *Guilt Payment*: General implications

Guilt Payment is concerned with questions about cultural identity in the face of trauma. As I will demonstrate in the rest of my remarks, trauma not only prevents successful identity formation but also the construction of a meaningful text.

Guilt Payment includes thirteen short stories set in various countries, including America, Korea, Vietnam, and Saudi Arabia. Together these spacial configurations form what Mary Louise Pratt has called a “contact zone,” spaces where cultures meet “in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power.”²⁶ Most of the protagonists are male immigrants who left Korea at a time of personal or political crisis.

In order to tell us more about their past, Pak uses the patterns of *trauma* and the “return of the repressed”²⁷ as a narrative structure: In the first part of each story we are introduced to a model minority Korean American who leads a very ordinary “American” life. In the story, “Possession Sickness,” for example, the Korean American protagonist is pestered by his daughter to let her go to Italy, where she pretends she wants to study music. Triggered by this conversation (in many other stories a surprise encounter serves the same purpose) the protagonist is overcome by memories he has denied successfully until that point. Through flashback the story then relates an individualized account of the protagonist’s past. The “Korea” of the 1950s emerges as an earlier version of a more familiar “Vietnam.” In other words, Pak appropriates a pattern known from the 1970s TV series *M*A*S*H*. But while in *M*A*S*H* “Korea” had become the fictional Ersatz-setting for the war in Southeast Asia, *Guilt Payment* re-focuses the reader’s attention to the devastating reality of the Korean War itself.²⁸

As Than Nguyen Viet has pointed out in *Race and Resistance*, “Vietnam” has introduced a new Asian stereotype to American society: the

²⁶ “I use this term to refer to social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today.” Mary Louise Pratt. “Arts of the Contact Zone”. <http://web.new.ufl.edu/~stripp/2504pratt.html>. April 30, 2003.

²⁷ Psychologically the two concepts are linked but not similar. Pak uses them interchangeably.

²⁸ For an in-depth analysis see chapter I.2 in the second part of my dissertation.

victim.²⁹ In comparing Vietnamese and Filipino literatures, he argues that “the discourse of victimization and the status of the Vietnam War in the American imagination allow Vietnamese voices to attain a certain limited stature in American discourse” making them much more “visible” than other Asian minorities. By introducing the Korean as victim, Pak shifts the readers attention from an imaginary “Vietnam” to an equally devastated Korea, a place where “many were simply shot on the streets and left there to be trampled. Whole families, including the very young and old, were executed” (12).

Like all the other stories “Guilt Payment” ends by returning to the original time setting, where the father finally agrees to send his daughter to Italy. The reader’s initial impression of an “assimilated” immigrant seems superficial after he/she has learned about the psychological motivation of the father’s consent. He turns out *not* to be the liberal, “Americanized” model-minority father but a guilt-ridden, traumatized immigrant who feels an urgent need to atone for abandoning his daughter’s mother during the war.

In order to bring across the suffering of Koreans during the War Pak uses a narrative pattern derived from what we have come to know as “the return of the repressed” and “trauma.” The protagonist suffers from memories of the past, which are triggered by everyday encounters. He then—in flashback—lives through the past experience. When he “returns” to his present life, he has difficulties orienting himself.³⁰ Closely linked to “the return of the repressed,” “trauma” is a Western psychoanalytic concept that includes the inability of body and mind to forget or overcome past experiences. As a historical phenomenon, “trauma” was re-defined by American psychiatrists after the Vietnam War.³¹ Especially in

²⁹ (Oxford UP, 2002) 27-28

³⁰ In Pak’s story “The Grateful Korean” e.g., the protagonist’s surprise encounter with a “tall woman” with “blonde hair”, a “high nose” and other attributes of American beauty triggers the feelings of guilt linked to memories of the past. He mistakes the woman for his former wife, “the avenging Fury herself” (195). He abandoned Moonhee in the aftermath of the Korean war, the memory of which “still returned with the vividness of a nightmare” (189).

³¹ What we know as “trauma” today was called “homesickness” after the American Civil War, in the First World War Germans would speak of “Granatenschock”, after the Second World War it became known as “Gefechterserschöpfung”. See Ronald J. Comer, *Klinische Psychologie* (Heidelberg: Spektrum Akademischer Verlag, 1995) 232-237.

the pluralist society of the US, the concept has gained the status of a very powerful cultural narrative. In the feminist discourse on rape and also in connection with African American, Native American, or Jewish American identities, “trauma” has become an important marker of individual and historical *difference*. By inscribing Korean Americans into this cultural discourse and narrative pattern, *Guilt Payment* produces acceptable meanings for the cultural community of “American” readers.³² In other words, Pak seems to *accept* the dominance of American cultural codes.³³

The fact that like the English language itself the discourse of trauma has become part of post-colonial South Korea adds to, rather than weakens this point. But, as I previously suggested, the narrator is also a translator, a code-switcher. While he skilfully adapts to the language of assimilation, he erodes what may be called the American cultural hegemony. Pak establishes a very powerful cultural subtext. This subtext proposes a distinctly “Korean” approach to what we call “trauma.” As Christina Schäffer and Beverly Adab have pointed out, “[c]ultures not only express *ideas* differently, they shape *concepts* and *texts* differently.”³⁴ Further complicating the matter, Pak employs a cultural doubling with a twist because he does not openly *thematize* his strategy.³⁵

II.2. Double Telling

For the Western reader it is not easy to identify this subtext. How *did* I experience a sense of “cultural difference” in *Guilt Payment*? I found what

³² See Renate Resch. “Ein kohärentes Translat – was ist das? Die Kulturspezifität der Texterwartungen” and Michaela Wolf, „Translation as a Process of Power: Aspects of Cultural Anthropology in Translation“. *Translation as Intercultural Communication* (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1995) 271-281 and 123-133.

³³ About questions of power in language use see Venuti “Introduction”, *Rethinking Translation* 5. I would like to add that not all of the stories relate directly to the war. They do, however, relate *memory* as a “traumatic” one, preventing the individual’s participation in American society.

³⁴ Christina Schäffer and Beverly Adab. “Translation as intercultural communication – Contact as Conflict”, *Translation as Intercultural Translation*, 327. Emphasis mine.

³⁵ In this he differs from his writer colleague Theresa Cha. Her *Dictée* is a highly subversive post-colonial exercise which constantly attunes its readers to implicit cultural differences, reminding him/her of “narrative shifts” (145) and “second shroudings” (145).

Schäffer and Adab have called “features that somehow seem ‘out of place/strange, unusual’” for the American “receiving culture.”³⁶ However “fluent”³⁷ each short story seemed to be, there still was a sense of irritation disrupting the narratives. The apparent ritualistic narrative pattern disturbed me as much as the obsessive preoccupation with a similar set of characters. *All* of the stories focus on a male protagonist who, like the narrator in “Nostalgia,” feels “like a man on vacation away from home,” “a prince travelling incognito” (85). Although “the new country had opened her arms wide to receive” them (“The Grateful Korean, 188), they remain in a state of mental exile for decades. Their life in America is devoid of meaning until the Korean woman whom they once left behind intrudes into their existence. Could this gendered pattern be a specifically “Korean” version of survivor guilt?

According to Sheila Miyoshi Jager “[t]he figure of the anguished, lonely female, unduly separated from family and friends” shows an “ubiquitous presence in Korea.”³⁸ The concept exists at least since the Koryo dynasty (19th century). It is a popular discourse rather than an “original story.” Rooted in an oral tradition, which is still popular today, it was spread over the country by travelling singers and storytellers. The “Story of *Ch’unhyang*” is the most popular of these stories. While her lover leaves her behind in order to accomplish a career, *Ch’unhyang* resists the approaches of an evil governor. While she is tortured, she practices *jeoljo* (absolute chastity for women), a concept based on Confucian beliefs. During her torture she quotes basic concepts from Confucian thought, accusing the evil governor of offending against the principles of responsibility. In the course of Korean literature the story around “Korea’s most cherished heroine” has become something of a genre.

In the 20th century the emphasis shifted from Confucianism toward the symbol of *woman as nation*. As Jager points out, the ontological concept of “woman” entered Korea around the turn of the 19th century,

³⁶ “Translation as intercultural communication – Contact as Conflict” 325.

³⁷ About “fluency” as a central feature of a “good” translation see Venuti, “Introduction”, *Rethinking...*, 5.

³⁸ “Women, Resistance, and the Divided Nation: The Romantic Rhetoric of Korean Reunification”. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 55.1 (February 1996): 4.

when American missionaries began to settle in Korea. The figure of the oppressed female came to symbolize Korean class conflict and colonization.³⁹ This ideological re-framing also resulted in a body of pro-feminist writing. In Kwang-Su Yi's⁴⁰ classical modernist novel *Mujông* (1917), the female hero refuses to suffer while his male protagonist "consoles himself in the way of many male protagonists of Korean fiction, in the 'dream-world' of irrationality: his future life in America."⁴¹ Does that sound familiar?

In Pak's stories the "master narrative" *Ch'unhyang* continues to shape the immigrants' thinking about history in terms that are strictly gendered. Akin to Yi's pro-feminist stance, Pak's "deserted women" have emancipated themselves after they were left behind.⁴² Using the means of modern transport and communication they ignore geographical borders and enter the United States.⁴³ They are looking for their husbands, whom they want to call to account. Since their guilt-ridden husbands are already waiting, they all succeed. As one of Pak's *Ch'unhyangs*, another woman named Moonhee remarks that her husband still keeps some "primitive fetishism" about Korea. He never changed his name "to an Anglo-sounding one like Richard Taylor" (105). When Moonhee claims to "forgive" her husband's unfaithfulness, the story resonates with a mocking commentary on the *Ch'unhyang* legacy.

All of the encounters in *Guilt Payment* are characterized by the theme of affliction. The German word "Heimsuchung" is even more apt. It contains both a sense of hauntedness and the idea of a "familiar"

³⁹ Jager, "Women and the Promise of Modernity: Signs of Love for the Nation in Korea", *New Literary History* 29:1 (Winter 1998): 124

⁴⁰ Sometimes also spelled „Lee“.

⁴¹ Jager, 1998, 128.

⁴² While Pak's male figures undoubtedly conform to Western stereotypes of Asian men, the women are no longer "the Oriental wife men dream of: understanding, forever yielding, obedient, self-effacing, and yet a rock of strength and wisdom" (Jager 91).

⁴³ As Seiwoong Oh has pointed out to me there also exists a whole tradition of ghost stories about abandoned women who come back to haunt the men. These stories are very popular and have been interpreted as cautionary tales about why men should not abandon their women. This genre cannot be separated from the *Ch'unhyang* tradition.

cultural origin. "A Second Chance" is one of the few stories with a happy ending, with the male protagonist regaining his sexual potency. But Pak gives prominence to the point that most of his protagonists *fail* in solving their problem with the past. In his story "Possession Sickness" the protagonist is not able to accept the "second chance" a life in America offers him. Overwhelmed by sudden guilt and superstition, he returns to Korea, dragging his "Americanized" daughter along with him.

III. Concluding Remarks

Drawing on the narrative patterns of "trauma," the "return of the repressed," and on the concept of "survivor's guilt," Pak adopts a style for which there is a model in the target culture. Like his use of English, this is clearly a signal of assimilation. By using these familiar discourses he is able to convey to Americans the Korean experience of what has been called "the forgotten war." At the same time he employs a distinctively Korean cultural narrative and introduces it to the American context. This strong connection to the "homeland" shows that not only the protagonists, but the author himself embraces an exclave identity.

As the title to the collection indicates, *Guilt Payment* is a tribute to Korea. At the same time many of the stories are full of praise for "the new country" that "had opened her arms wide to receive him" (187). Pak not only picks out the potential dilemmas of immigrant identities as a central theme, but *Guilt Payment* actually *mirrors* these difficulties on the textual level itself.

By emphasizing the *cultural* aspect of trauma and memory, *Guilt Payment* highlights differences which on another level it attempts to bridge. While these stories actively support the belief in the human capacity to share grief, they remain pessimistic when it comes to intercultural mimesis. Ty Pak does not take the stance of a "radical" narrator/translator who refuses to "share his culture with an all-absorbing America"⁴⁴ in an act of "faithfulness" to his mother tongue. After all, he uses the English language without ever discussing its role in the postcolonial Korean scenario.

⁴⁴ James Clifford, *The Predicament...*, 217.

Pak is a difficult case when one tries to categorize him in the context of “Korean American literature.” He uses the language of the dominant culture to cross the border between the exclave and the more general American public. Unlike other Korean American literature, *Guilt Payment* largely resists the label of an “ethnic” or “hybrid” text. By using a narrative derived from the home country, the collection constructs a fictional exclave/enclave based on a *continuation* of Korean literary history. Somewhat paradoxically, however, *Guilt Payment* turns its back to “Korea.” Pak’s criticism of immigrant nostalgia echoes through the book. The use of the English language, thus, marks the *will* to break with the past. But since this break is never realized on the story level itself, the English language remains a very isolated yet powerful gesture of assimilation. Pak’s protagonists themselves rarely succeed in integrating/translating “Korea” into their American lives. Some leave the United States and find themselves out of place in modern Seoul, some remain alienated from both the community and the larger society, some commit suicide.

Pak clearly supports the idea of a collective cultural memory, but he approaches the concept of a Korean-American identity by breaking it up into radically different fictional “case histories.” While every one of these individuals suffers from a strong “cultural trauma,” Pak refuses to offer any *collective* solutions to help them define a meaningful cultural identity in the complex field of an enclave/exclave immigrant situation. I am usually very careful with biographical analogies. Minority authors are easily dismissed on this basis as writers of autobiographical non-fiction. In the case of Ty Pak, however, I’ll make an exception: His stories resonate almost desperately with the search for a “home.” In the end, *Guilt Payment* itself is presented as a fictional site for the author’s own shifting identities, shifting between “assimilation” and “exile,” between the “ethnic” and “diasporic subject.”

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