A New Approach to No-Yong Park's Biographical Information

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With his East Asian background and American training at renowned universities such as the University of Northwestern, the University of Minnesota, and Harvard University, No-Yong Park, or Park No-yeong (朴魯英), became one of the most widely acclaimed Asian writers, scholars, and lecturers on Far Eastern affairs in the United States. He gained a reputation as being an "Oriental Mark Twain" or an "Asian William Jennings Bryan" for his keen sense of humor and rare gift of expression. With some reservations, Park belonged to what Elaine H. Kim calls "ambassadors of goodwill"—the writers who played an active role as a cultural bridge between the West on the one hand and the East on the other in the early part of the twentieth century.[1] Park wrote a number of outstanding books, some of which were highly recommended by literary critics and the Book-of-the-Month Club. Parts of his writings have been reproduced in Henry Steele Commager's *America in Perspective*, an anthology of the writings of such notables as Alexis de Tocqueville, James Bryce, Charles Dickens, and Dennis W. Brogan, among many others. In addition, Park was honored by the Freedoms Foundation, a non-profit or-

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1 Elaine H. Kim, 1982, *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context,* Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 58.

ganization in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, for his significant achievement in bringing about a better understanding and appreciation of the American way of life.

Surprisingly, while No-Yong Park's life and his writings have received considerable attention, as evidenced by highly favorable reviews, his achievement has rarely been given the recognition it merits in a full assessment of his career. Little if anything is known about No-Yong Park, in Korean academia, as well as in its American counterpart. Despite his remarkable achievement as a prolific writer, scholar of political science and international relations, and celebrated public lecturer, Park has remained largely unknown not only to the public at large but also to historians, both in his home country and in the United States. Almost everything concerning his personal life and his activities in both the Korean peninsula and the United States is shrouded in uncertainty and ambiguity. This is by and large accountable for Park himself, who was forced to change his life details in one way or other for political reasons. It explains in part why there was some obfuscation by Park and scholars regarding his origins and identity.

This uncertainty and ambiguity includes, among other things, his name, his date, and place of birth. Nothing is more ambiguous and profound, however, than his ethnic identity: was he originally of Korean or Chinese descent? Naturalized as a U.S. citizen in 1957, after American citizenship was legally expanded in 1953 to include Asian residents in the United States, Park's ethnic identity has remained open to dispute; the question of whether he was a Korean American or a Chinese American pervades any discussion about Park. Unfortunately, neither scholars nor critics have noticed or even discussed these discrepancies. Through a combination of archival materials, (e)mails, and interviews, I attempt to lift the veil that has obscured one of the most versatile writers, scholars, and public lecturers ever to emerge from the Korean peninsula during the dark era of Japanese colonialism. Descriptive in approach, this article aims to clarify the confusion and ambiguity surrounding Park, thus revealing who he really was. This could provide fodder for an interesting argument on Korean-Americans and identity construction in the Japanese colonial period.

Confusion over No-Yong Park's Names

Commonly claimed to be a mysterious man, No-Yong Park assumed many different names depending on the circumstances in which he found himself. Born into a poor peasant family in Namhae Island, South Kyŏngsang Province, located just off the southernmost tip of the Korean peninsula, Park's name was entered as Park Chŏngsŏn (朴廷善) in the family register that is still kept in his birth place. His father's name was Park Myŏngro, and his mother's name was Kim Mosim. Their first son, Park Hongsŏn was born in 1884 and died in 1961. No-Yong Park was the second son who was thirteen years junior to his elder brother. Park had two younger brothers, both of whom died young, and two younger sisters, Park Chŏngyun and Park Mogyun. The names clearly demonstrate that the male siblings used a generation name (*hangnyŏlcha* in Korean) of *sŏn* (善) while the female siblings used that of *yun* (允). Some of Park's relatives (mostly his nephews and nieces and their offspring) still live on Namhae and its vicinity, including Sach'ŏn, Chinju, Pusan, and P'ohang, as well as in Seoul.

At the age of about thirteen when he left his home on the island, Park, in a highly symbolic gesture, changed his birth name Chŏngsŏn to Park No-Yong. He ran away from home for two main reasons. Firstly, his parents, short of hands on the farms, forced him to marry at an early age, a custom that prevailed in the early 20th century, particularly in rural districts. He left Namhae Island by a ferry boat in the dead of night just before the wedding was scheduled to occur. Second, Park, eager to learn, was loath to eke out a miserable existence as his father and forefathers had done on the island. Almost a vagrant beggar, he begged for food and lodging in Pusan's streets until he chanced to meet a kind old woman. Aware that his sole ambition was to become a scholar, she introduced him to the members of the T'ongdo Temple, a famous Buddhist monastery founded in the mid-7th century during the kingdom of Silla. Located in Yangsan, South Kyŏngsang Province, the temple is approximately 25 kilometers from Pusan. It should be noted in passing that in the 1910s and 1920s several Buddhist temples ran modern proprietary schools for

children who were intelligent but too poor to go to public schools then operated by the Japanese colonial government in Korea. It was fortunate that in T'ongdo Temple Park met Reverend Kuha (九河), the head monk of the temple renowned for his philanthropy and patriotism. Greatly impressed by the young boy's eagerness to learn, Reverend Kuha accepted him as one of his disciples and taught him Chinese classics as well as Buddhist scriptures. It was quickly surmised that due to his excellent intelligence as well as his strong motivation, Park could read and write Chinese classics in a comparatively short period of time. Park seemed to be well versed in Chinese classics because he often cited from the writings of Kongzi (Confucius) and Laozi (Lao Tzu). More importantly, he converted to Buddhism and became a monk. As an apprentice monk, Park was given a Dharma name of Min-o (珉悟), meaning awakening to truth as precious as a gem. At the same time, Park completed a primary course of study at Myŏngsin, a modern proprietary school established by T'ongdo Temple.[2]

One might guess that No-Yong Park stayed in T'ongdo Temple for five years or so. Given that he had left home in Namhae Island at thirteen, he spent most of his teens in the temple from 1911 to 1915. Still avid to expand his knowledge in a bigger city, Park requested that the head priest should send him to Kyŏngsŏng (Seoul) to pursue a more modern advanced education. Fully aware of Park's rare intelligence and keen desire for learning, the priest wrote to Kim Sŏngsu (金性洙), the new owner of private secondary school, Joong-Ang School, to inquire about the possibility of him sponsoring Park. In compliance with the priest's recommendation, Kim decided to sponsor and host Park, who eventually left the temple for Kyŏngsŏng.[3]

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[2] The first modern proprietary school, founded in 1906 by Wonhŭngsa Temple in Seoul, was Myŏngjin School, the predecessor of Hyŏhwa College and later Dongguk University. It would not be an exaggeration to argue that Buddhist temples in Korea played a pivotal role in modern education at the turn of the century, particularly in the colonial period.

[3] A landlord, journalist, and industrialist among others, Kim Sŏngsu is better known for his doctrine of the establishment of Korea on the basis of education. For further details on Kim and his great contribution to modern education in Korea, see Carter J. Eckert, 1991, Offspring of Empire:

The records at Joong-Ang School show that the name of No-yong Park was entered when he enrolled in the school with the class of 1914. During his school days, Park used two names interchangeably: Park No-yeong and Park Min-o. Officially, he used the newly adopted name, Park No-yong, for school activities. On the other hand, he used his Dharma name, Min-o, unofficially when he took part in political activities. Park took up his lodgings at Kim Sŏngsu's house for five years until he left school in 1919, with no diploma for reasons to be discussed in detail later. Park was especially close to Kim as Kim sponsored and hosted him throughout his time at Joong-Ang. Just as Guha envisioned a devout monk for Park, so did Kim a great intellectual for him. As Park's wife, Lanhei Kim Park (金蘭兮, née Kim Sun-bu), points out in her autobiography entitled *Facing Four Ways*, Kim Sŏngsu was "a very important guiding force for [her] late husband throughout his first formal education at Chung-Ang [Joong-Ang] High School."[4] In *The Ninety-Years' History of Joong-Ang*, Park is listed as being in the 1919 graduating class. Park's classmates include Chang Kiuk (張基郁), Yim Pongsun (任鳳淳), Yi Tongje (李東濟), all of whom participated in the March First Movement. The famed linguist Yi Hŭisŭng (李熙昇) was Park's one year senior while the noted playwright and director Park Sŭnghŭi (朴勝喜) was his one year junior.

Kim Sŏngsu was in fact a guiding force not merely for No-Yong Park's advanced knowledge but for his patriotism as well. In early 1919, Joong-Ang School turned out to be the cradle of the Korean independence movement. Inspired by the Fourteen Points outlining the right of national self-determination proclaimed by President Woodrow Wilson, Korean intellectuals and activists called for independence from Imperial Japan. The March First Movement, also commonly known as the Sam-il Movement, was one of the most significant protest movements. Kim

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The Koch'ang Kims and the Colonial Origins of Korean Capitalism, 1876-1945, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 148-150.

4 Lanhei Kim Park, 1984, Facing Four Ways: *The Autobiography of Lanhei Kim Park (Mrs. No-Yong Park)*, ed. Chinn Callan, Oceanside, CA: Orchid Park Press, 293.

Sŏngsu, together with the leading teachers of Joong-Ang, Song Chinu (宋鎭禹) and Hyŏn Sangyun (玄相允), worked out behind closed doors the resistance movement. Under the guidance of these teachers, No-Yong Park, under the Dharma name of Min-o, became deeply involved in organizing students at Joong-Ang School for participation in the March First Movement in 1919. Joong-Ang students took a leading role in staging rallies first in the Pagoda Park and then on the streets of Seoul. According to *The Eighty-Years' History of Joong-Ang*, the school was even planning to hold the 1919 class graduation ceremony at the Pagoda Park on March 1—but, unfortunately, to no avail.[5]

At the same time, under the guidance of the distinguished Buddhist poet and activist Han Yongun (韓龍雲), Park Min-o, together with Buddhist School students, notably Paek Sŏnguk (白性郁) and Kim Pŏmlin (金法麟), also took part in Buddhist efforts to support the Korean independence movement and the Provisional Government in Shanghai. In addition, Park joined the underground organization Hyŏksindan (Society of Innovation), led by Kim Sangok (金相玉), a revolutionary who later attempted to blow-up Chongno Police Station in 1923, and published its underground publication *Hyŏksin'gongbo* (Bulletin of the Society of Innovation).[6] Park Min-o (not Park No-yong) was designated as a political criminal on "Chōsen dokuritsu undosha no kenkyo" [Arrests of Korean Independence Activists], a document the Commissioner General of the Government-General of Korea sent in secret to the Japanese Government on May 12, 1921.[7] As is the case with most important independence activists, No-Yong Park passed himself off under the assumed name Park Min-o (朴玟悟). This explains in part why the Japanese colonial police had difficulty in locating and arresting him. Furthermore, Park Min-o

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5 Joong-Ang Alumni Association, ed., 1993, *The Eighty-Years' History of Joong-Ang*, Seoul: Joong-Ang Alumni Association, 47-56.

6 Wook-Dong Kim, 2019, *Global Perspectives on Korean Literature*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 158-160.

7 "Chōsen dokuritsu undosha no kenkyo" 朝鮮獨立運動者 檢擧 [Arrests of Korean Independence Activists] 1921. https://db.history.go.kr/modern/level.do. Accessed May 10, 2024.

was often mistaken for Park Chi-o (朴致悟), presumably due to a typographical error, which was common in those days. Undoubtedly, Park played a very active part in the Buddhists' anti-Japanese movement, particularly young Buddhist monks' independence activities, both in Korea and in China.

Ferreted out due to these political activities by the Japanese colonial authorities, No-Yong Park soon fled Korea in September 1919, sailing first to China and then on to the United States via France. After staying in major Chinese cities such as Tianjin, Nanjing, and Shanghai, Park went first to war-ravaged France and then arrived in New York in July 1920. He initially intended to study not in the United States, but in France, as Kim Pŏmlin did, but soon decided to leave for "the land of the free and the home of the brave," as described in the national anthem of the United States, "The Star-Spangled Banner." Regarding this change of mind, Park stated that he found Western civilization had more to offer an Eastern man like him to improve his culture, and added, "As I sank into despair, some friends of mine consoled me by telling me that the center of the Western civilization had shifted from Europe to America during the World War."[8]

Just prior to his departure for the United States, No-Yong Park changed his name again. The Pickler Memorial Library of Truman State University, formerly North East Missouri College (Northeast Missouri State Teachers College) at Kirksville, Missouri, where Park regularly gave lectures from 1940 through 1974, has an archive of Park's documents and papers. No-Yong Park's papers at the Special Collections Department include the passport he used when he went to the United States: "Passport No. 176 issued to Po Fong by Consulat Général de la République de Chine à Paris (Consulate General of the Republic of China in Paris), July 5, 1920." Park had his passport visaed by the U.S. Vice-Consul at Paris, on condition that the visa holder must depart on July 10,

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[8] No-Yong Park, 1948, *Chinaman's* Chance, 3rd rev. ed., Boston: Edward K. Meador, 16. The first edition of the book was published in 1940, followed by the second edition in 1943.

1920 through July 25, 1920. Under the visa stamp was another stamp: "Commissariat Spécial Havre le 9 Juil 1920 Vu au Passage (Special Commission Havre July 9 1920 Viewed at Passage)."[9] Rather surprisingly, the name entered on the passport was neither Park Chŏngsŏn nor No-Yong Park nor Park Min-o, but Po Fong, which is inarguably a Chinese name. Bao or Pao, as used by No-Yong Park in the United States, is the pinyin Romanization of two common Chinese surnames, either 鮑 (pinyin: Bào) or 包 (pinyin: Bāo), preferably the former. Po Fong might be a Romanization of 鮑方 or 蒲芳 . Park and Pao may be thought of as being in some way analogous to each other at least phonetically, albeit not semantically.

Park's passport does not indicate the type, but it appears that he obtained a student passport in France when he left for the United States in 1920. All things considered, it is more than likely that Park somehow had his passport forged, using a spurious Chinese name. It was almost impossible for Park, wanted as a person on the blacklist by the Japanese colonial police, to have a Chinese passport issued in France. Nevertheless, the passport, forged or not, once saved his life when he was attacked by the owner of a Chinese restaurant in Canada who considered him to be Japanese and attempted to kill him. Park just managed to survive this crisis by showing him the "passport fully sealed and certified by the Republic of China."[10]

It remains an open question as to how Park could obtain a U.S. visa because immigration from Asia in general and China in particular to the United States had been heavily restricted since the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882. However, as Madeline Y. Hsu cogently claims, students were often exempt from restrictions on the grounds of their potential value—their tremendous potential to contribute to the United Sates as highly trained, skilled workers. Often considered "Anglo-Saxons of the Orient," the Chinese were often accepted rather favor-

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[9] Before his death Park made a will bequeathing all his documents to the Pickler Memorial Library. http://library.truman.edu/manuscripts/P4-Park_Papers.asp

[10] For this episode, see Park, *Chinaman's Chance,* 46.

ably. The American policy makers believed that the United States might need people of knowledge and technical skills for economic purposes. American missionaries, on the other hand, found in Chinese students the great potential to adopt Christianity and become missionaries to China.[11]

Even so, it is unclear how Park was able to obtain a U.S. visa. Presumably, he was not in position to apply for the student visa although, as he affirmed to an old woman in Pusan in his early teens, his sole ambition was to become a great scholar. Park did not enroll in Alma White College (now Pillar College), an academic institution affiliated with the Pillar of Fire Church, until several months after his arrival in the United States. He knew nothing about this college until a young woman handed him a flyer *The Pillar of Fire* in New York City. It was in the fall of 1922 that Park finally enrolled in Evansville College in Evansville, Indiana. It can be safely inferred that the U.S. consul at Le Havre was generous enough to issue a visa to an apparently promising Chinese student. Besides, Park might have persuaded him with his usual exaggerated statement regarding his academic credentials.

Upon arrival in the United States, No-Yong Park used the Chinese name Po Fong (and its variants Pao Fong and Bao Narong as well), along with No-Yong Park. In *An Oriental View of American Civilization*, the author's name is rather dubiously entered as "No-Yong Park (Pao)." In a document (No. 20697) filed at the U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services in Chicago, his name was even more abnormally listed as "No Young Park, Po Fong." On formal occasions, he used "No Yong Park," "No-Yong Park," or "No-Young Park" as in the forms which he filled out when he applied to the University of Minnesota and Harvard University for admission, and to the Immigration Office for the extension of his visa. On unofficial occasions, however, Park used a Chinese name "Bao Narong." In connection with his Chinese name, Park recalls a very amusing episode in *Chinaman's Chance*:

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[11] Madeline Y. Hsu, 2015, *The Good Immigrants: How the Yellow Peril Became the Model Minority* ,Princeton: Princeton University Press, 23-54

> The chairman at one dinner-party did not know how to pronounce my Chinese name, "Pao." I told him it is pronounced "Bow," as in "Bow-wow" without the "wow." But when he came to introduce me, he was so nervous that he forgot all about "Bow" and introduced me as "Dr. Wow."[12]

Obviously, this is a rather exaggerated statement designed to please the audience, and yet there seems to be some truth in it. Many native speakers of English often do find it hard to pronounce Chinese names. This episode clearly indicates that Park used to introduce himself to the audience as Bao Narong, not No-Yong Park.

It deserves mention that No-Yong Park sometimes used his name in Chinese characters. During his school days at Joong-Ang School, his name in Chinese characters was written as "朴魯英." *The Ninety-Years' History of Joong-Ang School*, published in 1993 by the Joong-Ang Alumni Association, listed Park's name in the same Chinese characters. In the United States, however, Park wrote his name in Chinese characters as "鮑訥榮," pronounced as "Bào nè róng" in Chinese. On the front flyleaves of the copies of the third revised edition of *Chinaman's Chance* and the first edition of *An Oriental View of American Civilization*, both of which are in my possession, his Chinese name is inscribed as "鮑訥榮" in his own handwriting. On the China Center homepage at the University of Minnesota, his name is entered as "No-Yong Park 鲍纳荣" in simplified Chinese characters.[13]

Confusion over Park's Birth Date and Place

In addition to the various names No-Yong Park used in Korea, France, and the United States, there is much confusion surrounding his date and place of birth. The China Center homepage at the University of Minneso-

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12 Park, *Chinaman's Chance*, 105.

13 https://chinacenter.umn.edu/umn-china/history/alumni/distinguished-alumni/park-no-yong

ta, where Park received a Bachelor of Arts in 1927, lists Park's date of birth as 1899. Park also wrote "October 8th, 1899" on the section of date and place of birth in the application form that he filled out in 1927 when he applied to Harvard University for admission to the graduate program.[14] His date of birth seems to be of no dispute because he signed the document in his own handwriting. However, according to both Park's California driver's license and his FBI Fingerprint and Criminal Record Report from the Missouri State Highway Patrol, his birth date is listed as August 8, 1899.[15] Despite discrepancies in his birth date and month, his birth year is exactly the same.

However, it is not as simple as it appears. The official register of the Park family at Namhae County shows that Park was not born in 1899, but in 1897 (the year of the rooster in the sexagenarian cycle [丁酉年]), one of the most significant years in modern Korean history when King Kojong (r.1863-1907) declared the Korean Empire, marking the end of the Chosŏn dynasty period. This was attested by Lanhei Kim Park, who, in *Facing Four Ways*, listed her husband's birth date as 1897 in the genealogical chart of the Park's family.[16] Moreover, "Arrests of Korean Independence Activists," a confidential document mentioned above, lists twelve Korean independence activists from Kyŏngsang Province, among whom is "T'ongdo Temple Monk Park Min-o (location unknown), 26 years old." In 1921, Park was approximately 23 years old—closer to the estimation the Japanese colonial authorities had made. Driven by a sense of urgency to hide his identity, Park had good reason to change both his birth year age as well as his name. The Japanese colonial police kept a close eye on Korean students studying in the United States and other foreign countries. In *Long Time No See*, a collection of the lectures he gave

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14 Student folder for No Young Park, UAZV 161.201.11 Box 56, Harvard University Archives. Quoted in "Korean Alumni Biographies Project." https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/koreanalumnibiographiesproject/people/no-yong-park-%EB%B0%95%EB%85%B8%EC%98%81

15 No-Yong Park Papers, Ms Collection P4, Special Collections University Archives, Truman State University. http://library.truman.edu/manuscripts/P4-Park_Papers.asp

16 Lanhei Kim Park, *Facing Four Ways*, xvi.

at Northeast Missouri State Teachers College at Kirksville, as well as in *Chinaman's Chance*, Park makes it clear that he was only thirteen years old when he ran away from home.[17] He had stayed in T'ongdo Temple for four years or so and then spent five years in Joong-Ang School, making his age twenty-three when he departed for the United States. All things considered, Park was born in 1897, not in 1899, as commonly known so far.

No-Yong Park also made Americans believe that he grew up in Manchuria, not on Namhae Island in Korea, as stated above. He begins *Chinaman's Chance* with the unpleasant memory of his childhood in a little farming village in the northeastern corner of Manchuria:

> My parents, especially, were stirred by what was happening because they were *originally Koreans* who, during the early stage of [the] Japanese invasion into Continental Asia, had been forced to pack up their meagre belongings and lead *their tender sons* and daughters barefooted and bare-headed into primitive and undeveloped Manchuria in search of a new home and a new haven from the menace of modernized Japan.[18] [Emphasis added]

What is striking to observe in the passage quoted above is how fully Park attempts to hide his identity. The passage begs the question as to whether Park was born on the Korean peninsula or in Manchuria, a region in Northeast Asia encompassing the entirety of present-day Northeast China and historically parts of the modern-day Russian Far East, often referred to as Outer Manchuria. Was Park included among those he calls "their tender sons" or not? As for his siblings, it should be remembered that Park had one elder brother (thirteen years his senior) and two younger brothers (both of whom died young) as well as two younger sisters. In one way or another the passage leads the reader to think that Park was

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[17] No-Yong Park, 1967, No Time No See: Lectures , New York: Exposition Press, 102.

[18] Park, *Chinaman's Chance*, 11.

born in colonial Korea, not in Manchuria. Reminiscing about his first arrival in the Unites States, Park also states, "Having grown up under the shadows of [the] Japanese secret police and Manchurian bandits, I did not know what peace and freedom meant."[19] To say that he suffered Japanese colonial authorities is quite right, but to say he suffered from Manchurian bandits sounds preposterous.

No-Yong Park made it quite plain that he was born and raised in Manchuria here and there. No better illustration of this can be found than in *An Oriental View of American Civilization*. In the introduction to the book, Park states, "As America is undertaking the task of reconstructing her culture, *I, a Chinese recipient* of American kindness and hospitality, pause as a friendly critic and offer some frank criticisms from the Oriental point of view with the hope that they may be of some use to the building of a civilization that will last and perpetuate itself"[20] (emphases added). The front flap jacket of *Long Time No See* reads: "Born and reared in Manchuria, and educated in Asia, Europe and America, No-Yong Park has taught at some of our leading universities and colleges, and has written a number of outstanding books." One of the publicity flyers for his lectures, drawn up by Harry Byrd Kline Celebrity Service in Dallas, Texas, reads similarly: "Born and reared in Manchuria, but now an American citizen, he holds a bachelor of arts degree from the University of Minnesota and M. A. and Ph. D. from Harvard."

It has by now become evident that No-Yong Park was not only born in Namhae Island, but also spent his most formative years on the Island and in its vicinity. More specifically, his birthplace is Ka'in-ri, Changsŏn-myŏn, Namhae-gun in South Kyŏngsang Province. Namhae Island consists of two main islands: Big Namhae Island and Little Namhae Island. Located on Little Island, Ka'in-ri was a tiny farming and fishing village. In *Chinaman's Chance*, Park wrote that his parents, who somehow found out that their son was in a Buddhist monastery, promised

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[19] No-Yong Park, 1951, *A Squint-Eye View of America*, Boston: Meador Press, 27.

[20] No-Yong Park (Pao),1934, *An Oriental View of American Civilization*, Boston: Hale, Cushman & Flint, 9.

to send him to a modern school anywhere in order to prevent him from becoming a monk. Park says, "So I left the peaceful monastery encircled by silent mountains, and went to Nanking, Peking, Seoul, and Tokyo in search of the modern education which seemed so dear to my heart."[21] This statement is obviously overstated—so much so that it sounds absurd. Illiterate and poverty-stricken, his parents could not afford to provide him with a modern education, let alone a village school. As to Manchuria, they had never left their homeland Little Namhae Island to migrate to "primitive and undeveloped Manchuria in search of a new home and a new haven from the menace of modernized Japan." They were in fact too uneducated to be threatened by the menace of Japan's imperialism.

Park's Ethnic Identity

The matters regarding No-Yong Park's different birth dates and places, as well as his diverse names, inevitably lead to the more significant controversy of his ethnic identity. The question of whether he is a Korean American or a Chinese American has, as expected, been a contentious subject among scholars and critics. In a short introductory note to "Cultural Strains" by No-Yong Park, Oscar Handlin and Lilian Handlin, noted for their research on immigration and other social topics in American history, claim, "Born in 1899 in Manchuria to a family that had fled from Korea upon the Japanese invasion, Park became impatient with traditional Chinese society and, influenced by Methodist teachers, came to the United States."[22] What the Handlins say about Park is based to great extent on the biographical information the author gives in *Chinaman's Chance*. Without the slightest awareness that the author might give a false account of his life story, the renowned historians took what Park

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[21] Park, *Chinaman's Chance*, 15.

[22] Oscar Handlin and Lillian Handlin, eds., 1997, *From the Outer World: Perspectives on People and Places, Manners and Customs in the United States, as Reported by Travelers from Asia, Africa, Australia, and Latin America*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 151.

wrote at face value.

Sau-Ling Cynthia Wong argues that No-Yong Park is a Chinese American autobiographer. In her brief discussion of Chinese American autobiographies, Wong classifies Park's *Chinaman's Chance* as belonging to "another group of works that do devote more space to life in America than in China," considering it a "Chinese-American autobiography."[23] In Wong's view, Park's book is not different in any meaningful way from Huie Kin's *Reminiscences of an Early Chinese Minister* and Anna Chennault's *The Education of Anna*. Kin's book is a memoir of his career as the first Chinese Christian minister in New York and one of the prominent leaders of the local Chinese community. Chennault's book is an intimate story of her life with her husband, General Claire L. Chennault, commander of the American Volunteer Group later known as the "Flying Tigers." Wong asserts that, despite Park's Korean descent, he was raised in Manchuria as a Chinese and later wrote of Chinese matters as a Chinese.

More recently, Xiao-huang Yin, Professor of American Studies at Occidental College, who was educated in Nanjing University in China and then received his M. A. and Ph. D. from Harvard University, also repeats the same mistake the Handlins and Sau-Ling Cynthia Wong make. Yin claims that "Park is sometimes thought to be Korean, perhaps because of the unconventional way he spelled his Chinese surname."[24] Yin further claims that Park was one of the "most cultivated Chinese" who attempted to shy away from sensitive issues like race politics. That is why Yin lists Park's name both as "No-Yong Park" and as "Bao Narong" at the same time. Yin further argues that "[w]hat really differentiated Wu [Ting-fang] from other cultivated Chinese such as Park No-yong, howev-

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[23] Sau-Ling Cynthia Wong, 1991, "Immigrant Autobiography: Some Questions of Definition and Approach," in *American Autobiography: Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. Paul John Eakin, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 154, 163.

[24] Xiao-huang Yin, 2000, *Chinese American Literature Since the 1850s*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 81, footnote 35. Yin transcribed Park's full name as "鮑納榮," not "鮑訥榮."

er, was that he spoke openly and clearly against racism."[25] Wu Ting-fang (伍廷芳) was a Chinese diplomat, lawyer, politician, and writer who served as Minister of Foreign Affairs and briefly as Acting Premier during the early years of the Republic of China. Like No-Yong Park, Wu earlier wrote books on American culture and civilization such as *America and the Americans: From a Chinese Point of View* (1914) and *America: Through the Spectacles of an Oriental Diplomat* (1914), both of which were fairly well accepted by American readers. A specialist in Chinese American transnationalism, Yin contributed in a significant way to the spread of Park's prominence as a Chinese American immigrant writer, scholar, and lecturer.

In addition, the China Center at the University of Minnesota proudly lists Park as one of the distinguished alumni from China: "Park No-Yong, who was born in 1899 in Liaoning, received a bachelor of arts from the University of Minnesota in 1927. Park won the John S. Pillsbury Prize at the University in 1926. After graduating from the University, he enrolled at Harvard University and received a master of arts in 1930 and a doctorate in political science and international relations in 1932."[26] The writer of this entry unusually specifies Park's birthplace as Liaoning, a northeastern Chinese province located between China proper and Manchuria, bordering North Korea and the Yellow Sea. It is also worthy of notice that his name is given with the family name first, followed by the given name (Park No-Yong), as used in East Asian countries such as Korea, China, and Japan—not the other way around (No-Yong Park) as in the United States and elsewhere.

Even Korean American scholar John Jae-Nam Han also classifies Park as a Chinese author. Like some Chinese American scholars, he

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[25] Yin, *Chinese American Literature Since the 1850s*, 67. No-Yong Park must have known Wu Ting-fang because in *Chinaman's Chance* he introduced an episode in which Wu made a comment on high society ladies and gentlemen dancing in a ballroom. Wu asked his American hostess why she did not hire the African Americans to do the dancing instead of making the guests do such a hard labor. For this episode, see Chinaman's Chance, 93; *A Squint-Eye View of America*, 104.

[26] https://chinacenter.umn.edu/umn-china/history/alumni/distinguished-alumni/park-no-yong

claims that Park was born and grew up in Manchuria. Han further maintains, "The title of the book itself debases Park and his ethnic background."[27] The implication of this sentence would be quite obvious: Park humbled himself in calling his autobiography "Chinaman's Chance," since he had a Chinese ethnic background. As he admits in his introduction to the second edition, Park uses the phrase, "Chinaman's Chance," in the proverbial sense. Han also argues by way of parenthesis that "Park met Lanhei, a *Chinese* art student at the University of California at Los Angeles"[28] (emphasis added). However, this is not true either. Born in 1902 and raised in Pyongyang, Lanhei was as much Korean as Park was. In 1914, Lanhei, together with her sister Milwhachu (Nancy), left Pyongyang for Qiqihar in Manchuria where her father had established a business. After attending Myŏngsin Girls' School in Longjing, she entered Ewha Girls' School and then Ewha College in Seoul. It should be remembered that Park, at one point in his autobiography, writes, "I must marry one of my own kind with whom I can feel at home even in the 'Inferno.'"[29] A couple of years after Park had met Lanhei in Los Angeles, he proposed to her and they got married in New York City in 1935.

On the other hand, John J. Han seeks a compromise to solve this matter. He has found a middle ground between Park as a Korean American and Park as a Chinese American, hence a "Korean/Chinese American."[30] In an article on No-Yong Park, Han also claims that "one of the earliest American writers of Korean Chinese ancestry, No-Yong Park was born and raised in Manchuria."[31] Han further maintains that "[a]s a

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[27] John J. Han, 2001, "No-Yong Park," in *Asian American Autobiographers*: *A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook*, ed. Guiyou Huang, Westport. CT: Greenwood Press, 307-308.

[28] Han, "No-Yong Park," 306-307.

[29] Park, *Chinaman's Chance*, 125.

[30] John J. Han, Fall, 2004, "The Impact of the Bible on Asian American Writing: The Cases of Richard E. Kim, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, and Li-Young Lee," *Intégrité* 3: 2: 53-62; John J. Han, "No-Yong Park," 309.

[31] Han, "No-Yong Park," 305

young boy, Park attended a backwoods and all-male school in Manchuria, learning ancient Chinese classics, Chinese poetry writing, and calligraphy."[32] What Han proposes, despite his best intentions, seems to be inadequate for no other reason than such phrases as "Korean Chinese ancestry" and "Korean/Chinese American" may be misconstrued as "half Chinese and Korean American." Those Americans, one of whose parents is of Korean descent and the other of whose parents is of Chinese descent, can be called as such. The case of No-Yong Park, as discussed above, is quite different because his father Park Myŏngro and his mother Kim Mo-sim were Koreans to the core.

To say the least, Park is largely responsible for this misunderstanding because he often disguises himself as Chinese since his earliest books. In Chapter 10 of *Chinaman's Chance*, for instance, he writes, "I had come to America to study Western culture so that I could go back to China to help 'civilize the benighted people.'"[33] At one point in the autobiography, he calls himself, with some self-congratulation, "a heathen Chinese." In the wake of Imperial Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor, approximately 110,000 Japanese Americans and Japanese who lived along the Pacific coast of the United States were relocated to camps called "War Relocation Camps." Threatened by what might be termed the "Japanese peril," Park attached on the lapel of his jacket a small placard saying, "I am Chinese!"

Based on varied materials, however, I have claimed that, despite his self-proclaimed Chinese origins, Park was undoubtedly of Korean descent and later earned recognition as a Korean American writer *per se*.[34]

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[32] Han, "No-Yong Park," 305.

[33] Park, *Chinaman's Chance*, 70.

[34] For my articles and book chapters, see Kim Uk-dong (Wook-Dong Kim), "Park no-yeong ŭi chunggukin ŭi kihoe: imin chasŏjŏn ŭi kanŭngsŏng kwa han'gye [Park No-Yong's Chinaman's Chance: Possibilities and Limits of Immigrant Autobiography], Oegukmunhak Yoŏn'gu 32 (2008): 31-49; Kim Uk-dong (Wook-Dong Kim), "Park No-yeong: Munhwajŏk tonghwa esŏ t'aldonghwa ro [No-Yong Park: From Cultural Assimilation to Its Dissimilation], in Hangukgye miguk imin chasŏjŏn chakga [Korean American Immigrant Autobiographers]. Seoul: Somyŏng Ch'ulp'an, 2012), 59-103; Kim, "No-Yong Park's Chinaman's Chance: A Fictionalized Autobiog-

Park spent most of his youth squarely on the Korean peninsula, rather than in Manchuria in particular and China in general. He lived in Namhae Island, Yangsan, and Seoul before he was forced to leave his mother country for the United States via China and France in 1920. During the period of Japanese colonial rule, Koreans were at least legally Japanese. Thus Park was officially a Japanese although he carried a Chinese passport until he finally adopted the United States as his country. He continued to identify himself as Chinese until he died in Oceanside, California, in 1976, from a severe nervous breakdown that he had suffered from since the 1950s.

It is worth noting in passing that as early as the mid-1930s Park was welcomed as a Korean, not a Chinese, author. In the spring issue of 1934, the *Korean Student Bulletin*, a newspaper published in English by the Korean Student Federation of North America in the 1920s and 1930s, carried a very interesting article, "Our Own Hall of Fame." As its subtitle, "Five New Stars in the Firmament of Korean Scholarship," clearly indicates, the five promising young intellectuals would be expected to pass the torch of civilization to their fellow countrymen in the near future. They included No-Yong Park and Younghill Kang, or Kang Yonghŭl (姜鏞訖), Charles Choi, Ann Kim, and Horace H. Underwood.[35]

Chinaman's Chance as a Fictionalized Autobiography

Much of the confusion over No-Yong Park's life in the United States, as well as over his mysterious formative years on the Korean peninsula, emanates from *Chinaman's Chance*, "a delightful autobiography which has thrilled thousands of readers," as the jacket of its third edition puts it. In the book, Park presents a narrative of having grown up in Manchuria and witnessing China's changing society under Western influence at the turn

raphy," in *Global Perspectives on Korean Literature*, 145-172.

[35] *Korean Student Bulletin*, 12: 1 (1934), 7. For this matter, see also Kim Uk-dong (Wook-Dong Kim), 2004, *Kang Yonghŭl: Gŭ ŭi sam kwa munhak* [Younghill Kang: His Life and Work], Seoul: Seoul National University Press, 35-36.

of the century. As many reviewers lavishly praised on this book, there is no doubt about its popularity. For instance, James B. Pond, editor of *Program Magazine* published in New York City, argued, "[Park] begins by making you chuckle; he winds up making you ponder." A reviewer for *Washington Star* pointed out, "His words often sparkle like jewels." Professor Arthur N. Holcombe, then Chair of the Department of Government at Harvard University, to whom Park dedicated the book, regarded highly the autobiography as "a book of genuine delight." Most reviewers did not fail to find a good humor, keen wit, and pathos in Park's book.

However, that *Chinaman's Chance* is a pleasant, readable, and humorous book well received by the public is one thing; telling the truth about himself in the book is another. A closer scrutiny of the book reveals that it is far from being an autobiography as it has been generally defined—as a biography written by the subject about himself or herself. Written in an autobiographical style, the book tries to conceal, as much as reveal, factual information about the lives of the author and his family. In the book, Park more often than not provides inaccurate, false, and misleading accounts of his biographical data. It might be argued, therefore, that the book is not an autobiography in the strict sense of the word. Therefore, Park's book may be read as a fictionalized autobiography or even as an autobiographical fiction rather than an autobiography proper as the author wanted it to be regarded.

No-Yong Park distorted not only his life on the Korean peninsula but also his life after his arrival in the United States. His descriptions of how he was born into poverty and how eager he was to learn in his early teens is on the whole accurate. The same holds true for some of his life in the United States. For example, that Park worked his way through the exorbitant American colleges and universities in the United States is by and large accurate. At Evansville College, he devoted himself so indefatigably to the practice of speeches that he could join in 1924 the Chautauqua lecture circuit, a renowned adult education and social movement in the United States that peaked in popularity in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Later at Northwestern University, the University of Minnesota, and Harvard University, where he majored in history, political science,

and international relations, he was able to earn enough money for school through his continued lecturing activities. Park was in fact the first Korean to receive a doctorate from Harvard in the field of international relations in 1932. Directed by Professor Manley Hudson, Park's dissertation was entitled "China in the League of Nations: A Chapter on China's Foreign Relations." Park jokingly once said that the better title might be "The Story of a Little World War" because he often had to fight with his adviser over every line that he wrote.

For all that, *Chinaman's Chance* abounds with grossly exaggerated or fabricated descriptions. At the onset, Park tells us that his first job in Chicago was as a peddler of Chinese incense and Japanese silk stockings (all made in the United States) for it required neither a training of any kind nor special skill "except the art of telling a few lies without blushing."[36] He used this art rather freely, often more freely than is expected from an autobiographer. For instance, Park comments at the beginning of the book that an officer from the Immigration Department at Ellis Island came aboard, and after asking a few questions, allowed him to land without further investigation only because he was a first-class passenger. Ellis Island in New York Harbor, as he states, was a frightening place for immigrants, "a spot which [was] as difficult for an Oriental to pass through as it is for a camel to go through the proverbial needle's eye."[37] It is hard to imagine that Park, almost penniless and supposedly with a forged passport, travelled first-class.

At the University of Minnesota, Park once fell in love with a beautiful girl of Swedish descent. As he says about his courting of her, "I told her interesting stories about picturesque Japan and alluring China; and I wooed her with songs of love and dreams."[38] Korean readers might wonder why Park did not even mention Korea at that time. Located between China and Japan, Korea is no more picturesque and alluring as its neigh-

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[36] Park, *Chinaman's Chance*, 23.

[37] Park, *Chinaman's Chance*, 17.

[38] Park, *Chinaman's Chance*, 51.

boring countries. Regarding the American woman, Park says in *An Oriental View of American Civilization*, "she is as agreeable, as yielding, as any Chinese or Japanese woman."[39] Once again, Korean women are excluded from what he calls "our Oriental sisters." Regretfully, this problem can be applied to all the books by Park, where Korea is almost invisible. Park often uses metaphors which bear features of the cultural heritage of the Chinese nation. For instance, he says as regards American assimilation and multiculturalism, "Indeed, America has been the biggest melting pot and the most cosmopolitan *chop suey house* the world has ever known"[40] [Emphases Added].

One of the most outrageously misleading pieces of information in *Chinaman's Chance* is Park's description of his ethnic identity. Park calls China "my old homeland." He was so homesick that, despite all the dangers, he dared to find his way "to the edge of civilization on the border of Manchuria and Siberia."[41] This is far from the truth. In the early 1930s, Park once sneaked into Namhae Island and met his family for only one day because he was being trailed by the Japanese colonial police. He had to flee across the Namhae channel on a private ferryboat at midnight, landing on the Korean mainland and then escaping to China, never to return.

Park not only passed himself off as Chinese in public, but also adopted the Chinese way of living in food, clothing, and shelter. He named in Chinese style his two daughters Chin-lan (金蘭), or Golden Orchid, and Mei-lan (美蘭), or American Orchid, respectively. Thus, Chin-lan naturally thought of herself (and her sister as well) as Chinese until her early twenties. It was by chance that she found out that she was of Korean, not Chinese, descent:

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[39] Park, *An Oriental View of American Civilization*, 46. Park once mentions Korea in *A Squint-Eye View of America*. Park asks, "What have the rich people in China, Japan, and Korea done for the education and the welfare of their fellow countrymen?" It appears that Park forgot how much he was indebted to Kim Sŏngsu, the owner of Joong-Ang School, for his education and custodianshi.

[40] Park, *A Squint-Eye View of America*, 26.

[41] Park, *Chinaman's Chance*, 70.

> To complete my passport application, I needed to indicate the city of my father's birth; he confessed that the [he] was born on the island of Namhai [Namhae] Do, off the southern tip of Korea. "Oh," I surmised, trying to reconcile this new datum, "then you were a Chinese born in Korea?" No, it was revealed, he was a Korean born in Korea, as was my mother. Thus I turned out to be 100% Korean after spending my first two decades nominally Chinese; at the same time, I began to suspect the written word, for I had obtained these erroneous details of my father's Chinese heritage from his autobiography.[42]

Chin-lan's embarrassment over her father's ethnic identity is quite understandable. At home No-Yong Park wore a loose-fitting white Chinese robe and almost always associated with Chinese. Moreover, Park and his wife raised his children as Chinese, not Koreans—so much so that they found themselves much confused, and even betrayed, by their parents when they, as grown-ups, found out their true ethnic identity. In this strange process, his wife, Lanhei Park, played not an insignificant role. As Chinn Callan (née Chin-lan) indicates, "My mother felt that we should learn Chinese; we ate Chinese food; she tried to match us with Chinese boys."[43] As far as Chinese culture and way of life were concerned, Lanhei was far closer to the Chinese tradition than her husband, for her family had resettled in Manchuria at the turn of the twentieth century, and she received part of her secondary education there.

This new discovery of her Korean heritage must have been a great shock to Chin-lan—so much so that she came to distrust the written word itself. Here one is reminded of what Friedrich Nietzsche helped us understand about language: that it may become a tool that conceals rather than reveals the truth. As a matter of fact, Park had never revealed his exact birth place even to his wife Lanhei. She asked him the name and location

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[42] Callan, "Editor's Preface," xviii. Park's second daughter, Mei-lan Shaw, emailed me in the fall of 2005, saying that as far as her ancestry was concerned, she had had the same feeling as her sister. She told me that she was not a little confused when her racial identity was revealed.

[43] Chinn Callan, "Editor's Preface," *Facing Four Ways*, xviii.

of the island he was born just a month prior to his death in 1976. But due to severe amnesia he suffered in the mid-1970s, he could not remember anything about it. It was Chinn who told her that her father was born in Namhae Island.

In addition to *Chinaman's Chance*, Park also published books on topics ranging from autobiography, history, international politics, and comparative culture between the United States and East Asia. In these books, his stance on his ethnic identity issues did not significantly change. In a letter to Mrs. Boyd while at the University of Minnesota, Park represented himself as "the Chinese student who made you laugh so much the other day," referring to a public lecture he had given. In another letter to Mrs. Comiskey, he called himself a "heathen Chinese"—unquestionably a phrase from "The Heathen Chinese," originally published as "Plain Language from Truthful James," a narrative poem by American writer Bret Harte.[44] In fact, Park quotes from the poem for another episode: "for ways that are dark, and for tricks that are vain, the heathen Chinese is peculiar?"[45]

No-Yong Park denied his Korean heritage and represented himself as Chinese for three main reasons: legal, political, and commercial. Whatever his reasons for identifying himself as Chinese, he adhered to his decision. In the first place, he could not call himself Korean simply because Korea had lost its sovereignty to Japanese imperialism and had become a Japanese colony. From 1910 to 1945, Korea was ruled as a part of the Empire of Japan under the name "Chōsen" (朝鮮), the Japanese reading of Chosŏn. "Chōsen" was recognized as Korea's name internationally until the end of the colonial period. During the colonial period, Koreans living in both the Korean peninsula and the Japanese archipela-

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[44] "Letter to Mrs. Boyd," February 24 (year unknown), Student folder for No Young Park, 29-31; "Letter to Mrs. Comiskey," date unknown, Student folder for No Young Park, 27. Quoted in Sungik Yang, "Korean Alumni Biographies Project," Harvard University. https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/koreanalumnibiographiesproject/people/no-yong-park-%EB%B0%95%EB%85%B8%EC%98%81

[45] Park, *Chinaman's Chance*, 89.

go were officially Japanese imperial subjects. In spite of colonial racism, Japanese law and official discourse decreed ethnic Koreans as Japanese nationals and the "Emperor's children."

Second, Park felt constrained to abandon Korean identity for political reasons. Park's autobiography and other writings are in a sense a vehicle through which he sought to hide his identity. As seen above, he played a very active role in the Korean independence movement as a Buddhist monk as well as a student and then fled to the United States to avoid persecution. Even in the United States, he felt compelled to abandon his Korean heritage because the Japanese colonial authorities kept a careful eye on Korean students studying abroad. Even in *Chinaman's Chance*, the book he called an autobiography, Park is noticeably silent on his active involvement in the secret society Hyeoksindan as well as in the March First Independence movement. In several books, such as *Chinaman's Chance, Retreat of the West*, *The White Man's Peace*, and *A Squint-Eye View of America*, Park strongly warned the United States against Japanese aggression; unless Japanese militarism was immediately checked, free and democratic nations, notably the United States, would be in imminent danger. Even so, he did this only from the standpoint of a Chinese political scientist. He often referred to himself as "I Chinese" or "We Chinese."

Third, Park claimed Chinese identity for the sake of saleability in American society. In the first part of the 20th century, no one knew much about Korea, which was commonly known as the Hermit Kingdom. The Chinese, on the other hand, had become a synonym for East Asians. During the Great Depression, Park once stood in a "soup line" near Chinatown in New York City. An American who stood next to him said, "To tell you the truth, you are the first Chinese that I've seen standing here."[46] Any East Asian was considered "Charlie," regardless of his or her ethnic or racial identity. Park's posing as a Chinese was thus far more marketable, if not prestigious, to the public than an obscure Korean.

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[46] Park, *Chinaman's Chance*, 68.

Park's "Chinese-ness" certainly helped him gain a reputation as an authority on the Far East. In this sense, he took advantage of his liminal status in the United States.

Conclusion

As socio-cultural transnationalism emerged as a critique of, and a move away from, the assimilationist paradigm to understand how immigrants were changing, a critical study of No-Yong Park is clearly belated but certainly much in order. His immigrant autobiography *Chinaman's Chance*, as well as his books on comparative culture such as *An Oriental View of American Civilization* and *A Squint-Eye View of America*, deserves more scholarly attention. In addition, given emerging geopolitical threats and their concomitant global security issues today, Park's statements on international relations turned out to be somewhat prophetic. For instance, Park predicted the coming of the Pacific era. As early as 1922 while at Evansville College, Indiana, he spoke in one of the earliest speeches ("America and Asia") of the positive role of the United States in East Asia. If the Pacific era, he asserted, is to be blessed with lasting peace and friendship instead of being cursed with hatred and jealousy, the United States must play the vital role of "a modern Moses" in leading millions of awakening Asians. Park also stressed the serious consideration of East Asian affairs and its significance for Western nations, particularly the United States. In his warnings to the United States regarding the dangers of Japanese totalitarianism, Park preceded Syngman Rhee (李承晩), who wrote *Japan Inside Out* with the same warning. Although Rhee's book was published about five months prior to Japan's attack on the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor, Park had given continuous warnings about Japan since the early 1930s.

Despite his notable achievements, one of the reasons for the serious underestimation of No-Yong Park stems to a great extent from the considerable confusion over his biographical details. Accurate biographical information is a prerequisite for any critical research on Park (and any authors, for that matter). One cannot emphasize enough the importance

of reliable information regarding biographical facts. This may be particularly true of Park because there has been, for one reason or another, so much confusion surrounding his name, the date and place of his birth, and his ethnic identity. A first step towards seeking a solution to the problem is to conduct a thorough fact-finding mission based on the available information. Otherwise, scholars will be in serious danger of committing the blunder of building scholarly castles in the air.

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