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On This Topic

Queer/Korean Studies as Critique:
A Provocation

Todd A. HENRY

Beginning in the fall of 2016, political chaos riveted South Korea (hereafter, Korea) as enraged citizens took to the streets to protest years of scandal and corruption under President Park Geun-hye, while her conservative supporters aggressively confronted them to protect the controversial legacy of her father, Park Chung Hee. When the dust of that explosive conflict finally settled in early 2018, Park Geun-hye, whose impeachment by the National Assembly the Constitutional Court upheld, was sentenced to 24 years in prison for abuse of power and coercion. After her unprecedented ouster, some liberal pundits championed the election of Moon Jae-in, a student activist during the 1970s and a later a human rights lawyer, as the end of the Park era (and the more recent era of conservativism under Lee Myung-bak). Questioning his developmentalist legacy, LGBTI activists and other marginalized activists voiced optimism that long-standing forms of discrimination during the post-authoritarian period (1987–2017) would soon usher in a post-authoritarian era of legal protections, social welfare,

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and cultural acceptance.[1] However, even before Moon won the presidential race, it quickly became clear that, even under his liberal regime, sexual and gender minorities (*seongsosuja*) would likely remain outside of formal safeguards. In one prescient debate, Hong Joon-pyo, his ultra-conservative opponent, explained the military's controversial persecution of gay soldiers (for illegally engaging in consensual anal sex in private, according to military criminal code) as a legitimate national security concern that requires intrusive surveillance and inhumane persecution.[2] Importantly, Hong's homophobic stance echoed the political arguments of a growing number of fundamentalist Christians. In recent years, these hetero-nationalists have spuriously claimed that sexual and gender minorities invariably harbor North Korean sympathies and carry the AIDS virus (not HIV), stigmatizing them as social, political, and epidemiological threats to the nation's survival.[3] Fearing loss of support from culturally conservative voters, Moon responded to Hong's provocation that he, too, opposed the rights of sexual and gender minorities. In response, enraged activists demanded an apology for what they viewed as hate speech; one brave woman even rushed the stage with a rainbow flag at one of his speaking events. Only then did Moon distance himself from Hong by offering protesters a duplicitous statement that he did not countenance discrimination against sexual and gender minorities, while reiterating his opposition to same-sex marriage and other more basic legal protections.[4] After more than twenty years of LGBTI activism, sexual and gender

1. I follow Na (2014), a Seoul-based activist-scholar, in using the umbrella term L(esbian), G(ay), B(isexual), T(ransgender) and (I)ntersex. It should be noted, however, that each of these groups has its own distinct position and an unequal weight in coalitional movements advancing rights and protections for gender and sexual minorities.
2. For more on the effects of militarism on gay and transgender Koreans, see Kwon (2009), Chu (2013), Han (2014), Yi and Gitzen (2018), and Gitzen (Forthcoming).
3. On these stigmatizing associations, see Yi, Phillips, and Sung (2014), Han (2015), Na (2016), and *Bulon-han dangsin* (Troublers, directed by Lee Young, 2017).
4. The only politician to formally support LGBTI rights in the 2017 presidential election was Sim Sang-jung, who ran as the Justice Party's candidate. Earlier, in 2014, Park Won-soon, the mayor of Seoul voiced support for same-sex marriage, only to quickly retract his statement under intense pressure from fundamentalist Christian protestors.

minorities thus entered national politics but were quickly relegated to what, in another post-colonial context, Dipesh Chakbartry (2000) has incisively called the "waiting room of history."[5] Given these structural conditions of disempowerment, it is noteworthy that Korean LGBTI activists have responded to their ongoing marginalization by embracing the urgent motto that "There is no later, only right now" (*najung-un eopda, jigeum dangjang*). Over the last year, this life-or-death demand for human recognition and legal protection has frequently appeared on brightly colored signs and t-shirts from the 2017 pride celebration. Such public events have, in recent years, come to function as contested a battleground in defining the contours of post-authoritarian democracy, which sits at the complex intersection of religious nationalism, neoliberal capitalism, global human rights discourses, social justice movements, and dissident artistic expressions.

If sexual and gender minorities in Korea today struggle to survive and ensure their well-being in political, social, and cultural systems that tend to silence, displace, and erase them from national life, intellectuals who write about queer populations in the academy face similar barriers. Here, their critical perspective and professional existence are similarly minimized by powerful institutions that remain indifferent, if not hostile, to Queer Studies, Women's Studies, and other minority-based disciplines, such as Disability Studies.[6] To be sure, after the onset of democracy in 1987, a slow but ineluctable wave of articles and books, not to mention films and art works, on the place of sexual and gender minorities in Korean society have begun to emerge.[7] These pioneering studies are the result of courageous authors who, with little or no institutional support, have produced new knowledge about same-sex relations during the colonial period, homoerotic intimacies in the all-female theater (*yeoseong gukgeuk*) of the 1950s, the place of transgender men and women during the Park

5. On the development of LGBTI activism in Korea, see Bong (2009) and Kwon-Kim and Cho (2011).
6. For one new study that breaks these taboos, see Kim (2017).
7. See, for example, Seo (2001), Pak (2006), WIG (2008), Kim (2009), Han (2011), Kwon-Kim et al. (2012), Han et al. (2012), Pae (2012), Heo (2018), and Bak-Cha (2018).

Chung Hee era, and the still silenced histories of intersex communities. I still vividly recall a disconcerting conversation with one of these authors who, after receiving a doctoral degree from an overseas university and returning home, was determined to write in Korean for Korean audiences, but conveyed to me the difficulties of publishing about such topics in Korean academic journals. At least until recently, the referees for articles on queer Korea—often, ensconced academics whose own institutions have yet to hire Korean faculty who specialize on related issues—are not qualified to assess the merits of this growing field of study. Other Korean colleagues have conveyed to me related difficulties of gaining institutional support for their intellectual work. One friend, for example, revealed by way of complaint that even some self-professed feminist professors discourage graduate students from working on non-normative sexuality and gender variance, arguing that lesbian and transgender people are not legitimate subjects for dismantling patriarchy.[8] Without adequate support, many promising scholars have abandoned academia all together or remain in nontenure track positions with little job security. Still others have left Korea for overseas universities or remain at home in activist, artistic, and other venues that provide greater freedom for expressions of queerness.[9]

A white (Jewish) gay man with a tenured academic position in the United States but without ethnic connections to the peninsula, I, by contrast, am allowed and, at times, even encouraged to speak about such topics. Although participating in Seoul-based LGBTI activism since the turn of the century, I have done so without having to endure the daily struggles of Korean sexual and gender minorities. In 2013, for example, Arirang News, an English-language broadcast financed by the government, asked me to comment on the prospects of legalizing same-sex marriage after the public wedding ceremony of Kimjo Gwang-su, a gay activist and film maker, and his long-time partner, Kim Seung-hwan. At the time, I

8. For an early expression of this dilemma, see Jeong (2002).
9. In this regard, important new knowledge about queer subjects now appears in nonpeer reviewed, online venues. See, for example, the historical work of Do-ol who frequently posts newsletter columns (*sosikji*) on the website of the gay men's human rights organization, Chingusai, https://chingusai.net/xe/newsletter

suggested that LGBTI-identified Korean activists were far more qualified than I to occupy this position of authority, but TV producers insisted on my "foreign" and "objective" perspectives, perhaps as a strategic way of expressing their country's cosmopolitan credentials to non-Korean speaking audiences.[10] Rather than leave that space of articulation empty or yield it to an outsider with even less familiarity, I decided to share my first-hand knowledge of their tribulations and the media's own willful forgetfulness of them. An engaged intellectual who identifies with these struggles, I aim to support a critical dialogue between the fields of Korean Studies and Queer Studies which, as my edited conference volume suggests, have just begun to embrace one another (Henry, forthcoming). In my transpacific work, I also seek to bridge the insidious boundaries that continue to separate people working on queerness (and other topics) as part of Korean Studies, usually imagined as an area study of the peninsula conducted at overseas universities and/or by foreign scholars, and those living and working in South (and North) Korea who, to varying degrees, are still constrained by insular traditions of National Studies (*gukhak*).[11] So, when the *Korea Journal* asked me to guest edit this special issue, I decided to use this opportunity to solicit some new voices in what I believe is an urgent, if uncomfortable, debate that must transcend the Pacific divide (and, I hope, someday soon the 38th parallel as well). Although I have only been able to include three voices from a small but growing body of scholars, activists, and artists who work in/between South Korea and the world, I hope that this collection will lead to more border-crossing conversations that center the embodied experiences and marginalized viewpoints of queer subjects. By way of provocation, this extended introduction seeks to advance what I propose as a critically engaged Queer/Korean Studies.

Before explaining the benefits of viewing Korean society through

10. I suggested this possibility in my interview. See Henry (2013).
11. In 2015, at a Korea Foundation-sponsored event on "Korea and Korean Studies in the World: 70 Years after Liberation," I outlined the prospects and challenges of developing Queer/Korean Studies in global and transnational directions. This special issue is, in my mind, a productive continuation of that ongoing and necessary conversation. For a pioneering volume on the development of transpacific studies, see Hoskins and Nguyen (2014).

LGBTI vantage points and, conversely, for a Queer Studies still anchored in North America and Western Europe to recognize the value of sites such as the Korean peninsula, I want to briefly return to the political and academic contexts in which many people must currently express queer perspectives. As discussed above, the stakes of being and/or writing about being queer in South Korea (to say nothing of North Korea) and, to varying degrees, in the diaspora carries serious consequences, especially for ethnic Korean subjects. Such non-normative expressions can land soldiers in jail, lead to family and other forms of social alienation, induce physical violence against gender nonconforming people, erase homoerotic intimacies between lesbian, bisexual, and queer women, and burden intersex people to make their concerns known to Korean society. Laboring in institutions that still regularly disregard, silence, and subordinate queer subjects, we must, therefore, recall the precarity and urgency of intellectual work by, for, and/or about marginalized populations. Intellectuals writing on such topics, especially those located in or on the fringes of Korean universities, face a system that continues to relegate scholarship on LGBTI Koreans to a position of negativity and neglect. Even if published, their work remains outside the boundaries of acceptability and legitimacy in most disciplines, expect for some parts of literature, film, and other culture-related fields. Moreover, scholarship on queerness has yet to substantially reorient the objects of mainstream research and institutional support as well as the positivist methods and heteronormative assumptions of scholars in the "harder" humanities (i.e., history and anthropology) and the social sciences (i.e., sociology, and political science, and economics).

Queer Studies is a relatively new but rapidly diversifying field that offers much to the critically engaged study of Korea and its diasporas. Given its status in the modern world as an Asian, postcolonial, post-authoritarian, and capitalist/socialist divided society, Korea presents itself as an instructive site from which to question the US-centered assumptions that protect Queer Studies from a critical reorientation toward the non-West and the global South.[12] Although a comprehensive treatment of

12. For recent critiques of this sort, see Liu (2015), Arondekar and Patel (2016), and Amin (2017).

its origins and development lies beyond the scope of this introduction, American Queer Studies emerged in the 1990s as a crucial response to another related field, Gay and Lesbian (later, LGBT) Studies, which it challenged, expanded, and reoriented.[13] Inspired by Ethnic Studies, Women's Studies, and other identity-based social movements, Gay and Lesbian Studies first appeared in the US and Europe during the 1970s. Like other fields dedicated to the study of minority populations, it sought to document the suppressed histories of homosexual men and women as subcultural communities. As a political project, it promoted avenues for greater inclusion into a liberal, if still discriminatory, system of American politics. As such, the intellectual and activist concerns of Gay and Lesbian Studies cannot be extricated from the specific contexts of the US civil rights movement, especially efforts focused on the enfranchisement of African Americans during the 1950s and 1960s.[14]

If LGBT Studies took non-normative sexual identities as its primary object of analysis, Queer Studies, which emerged during the 1990s, maintained some of the minoritizing and inclusionary impulses of its predecessor. However, the AIDS crisis of the 1980s forced what later became known as Queer Studies (including its concomitant "Theory") to radically rethink the relationship between sexuality, identity, and the public sphere. As Susan Stryker has written, "Countering the homophobic characterization of AIDS as a 'gay disease' required a *postidentity sexual politics* that simultaneously acknowledged the specificity of various bodies and sexualities (such as gay men), while also fostering strategic political

13. On the contested relationship between these two fields, see Duggan (1995) and Piontek (2006). For some European trajectories, see Plummer (1992) and Perreau (2016).

14. The connection between these two movements is a complex and vexed one, and ongoing efforts to analogize them is, in my view, problematic. My point here is simply to suggest that LGBT activists have intentionally drawn on connections between African Americans' efforts to recover citizenship rights to advance their own struggles of accessing greater legal and institutional resources. As evidenced by white- and bourgeois-dominated representations of the Stonewall Riots of 1969, it is also worth noting that the LGBT movement has marginalized people of color and trans-identified individuals in their struggle to empower America's sexual and gender minorities. For a classic account of the origins of the post-Stonewall LGBT movement, see D'Emilio (1983).

alliances between other, sometimes overlapping, constituencies similarly affected by the epidemic (initially African refugees from Europe, Haitians in the United States, hemophiliacs, and injection drug users). This new 'queer' politics, based on an array of oppositions to 'heteronormative' social oppression rather than a set of protections for specific kinds of minorities that were vulnerable to discrimination," she continues, "radically transformed the homosexual rights movement in Europe and America."[15] Given the need for a politics that transcended identity categories while simultaneously forging connections among differently positioned bodies, Queer (and, later, Transgender) Studies as well as people of color critique came to emphasize the universalizing and radical potential of this new field of inquiry and activism. By contrast, LGBT Studies typically assumed the existence of stable, sexual identities [except for the T, which remained a(n) under-theorized identity/sub-community that Transgender Studies later addressed as a related, but separate field of study].[16] On these individual and collective bases, LGBT Studies, both as an epistemological and political practice, tends to focus on social recognition and cultural assimilation into mainstream society—for example, through same-sex marriage, which the US Supreme Court legalized in 2015.[17]

For its part, Queer (and Transgender) Studies, some of whose practitioners question the recognition/inclusion model as one that enhances the privilege of middle-class, white, cisgender men at the expense of comparatively less powerful subjects, often bypasses the ontological existence of a single identity category or identity-based communities, whether tied to sexual object choice (i.e., L, G, or B), gendered self (i.e.,

15. Stryker (2006, 7; italics mine); note the groups who were (and still are) particularly vulnerable to HIV, including people of color and immigrants.
16. On the development of Transgender Studies, see Stryker (2006, 2013). For Korea/Asia-related work, see Chiang, Henry, and Leung (2018).
17. Upon publication of this special issue, 25 states have recognized same-sex marriage by law (nationwide or in some parts), with several others, including Taiwan, on the same path. Currently, three nations recognize same-sex marriages performed in other states where such unions are legal (Wikipedia 2018). For its part, Korea only recognizes the same-sex marriages of US military personnel according to the Status of Forces Agreement (Kim 2016). I thank Minhee Ryu for pointing me to this reference.

T), or bodily condition (i.e., I). Instead, this critical approach focuses on people, practices, and processes that disrupt, denaturalize, rearticulate, or visualize the normative connections we generally assume to exist between the biological specificity of human sexual variety. It also examines the social roles that certain bodies are expected to occupy in a given society as well as the subjectively experienced relationship between one's gendered sense of self and social expectations of gender-role performance. Furthermore, Queer and Transgender Studies seek to reveal cultural mechanisms that work to sustain or thwart specific configurations of gendered and/or sexualized personhood which remain subordinated to heteronormative structures.[18] However, homonormative efforts to assimilate into dominant systems of power and homonationalist claims of relative backwardness reveal that hitherto marginalized persons (i.e., Euro-American, middle-class, cisgender, gay men) can deploy their socially accommodated privilege to advance, rather than to oppose, other forms of social power, including white supremacy, bourgeois domination, and neo-imperialism.[19] Such critiques suggest the need to carefully interrogate the internal dynamics of queer movements and how they can critique heteronormativity and/or embrace this apparatus for self-aggrandizing purposes.

That such critiques developed as part of American and European sexual politics means that they must be cautiously extended to Korea, where distinct (but not radically different) forms of institutional politics, family structures, and social mores have predominated for most of the recent past. Nevertheless, a focus on local articulations of queerness has the potential to disrupt all-too-familiar modes of analysis (i.e., ethno-nationalism, hetero-patriarchy, and sexual dimorphism) that tend to disregard, erase, and further marginalize Koreans' lived experiences of non-normative sexuality and gender variance. Elsewhere, I have argued that these "survivalist epistemologies"—the historical products of imperialism/colonialism, national division, civil/international war, and global capitalism—worked to subsume queer (as well as racial and impaired)

18. I drew this definition from Stryker (2006, 3).
19. For works that introduced these concepts, see Duggan (2003) and Puar (2007).

differences to "wholesome" views of the national body, which were often articulated in stark contradistinction to the alleged "perversity" of the West. Furthermore, when mainstream media did represent queer bodies after the Korean War, they tended to trivialize their subcultural existence as monstrous and unassimiable "deviations," thereby expelling them from an imagined community of Cold War citizens.[20] Even after sexual and gender minorities managed to organize and voice their positions from the fringes of Korea's procedural democracy, the IMF crisis of 1997 quickly pushed LGBTI-identified individuals back into the normalizing confines of the reproductive family, whose leading members viewed queer identities as an affront to filial piety, if not national allegiance (Cho 2009, forthcoming). In this context, activist efforts at social and legal assimilation (i.e., same-sex marriage) remain relatively unpopular because such forms of public intelligibility often threaten the hidden presence that many queer subjects have developed as a necessary mode of survival in a society permeated by homophobic and transphobic institutions.[21]

Strategic efforts at remaining invisible to such forms of social violence parallel the efforts of LGBTI activists who seek to convince elected officials to pass antidiscrimination legislation that, they hope, will better ensure the psychological and material well-being of sexual and gender minorities. Consumed by this thorny dilemma—of publicly coming out to pervasive forms of discrimination or remaining under the radar and thus less vocal—Queer Studies reveals how overlapping forms of power subject LGBTI Koreans to an ongoing position of abjection.[22] In this sense, the articles that follow do not simply examine the non-normative sexual/gender identities and the subcultural communities of which they have

20. See the introduction of Henry (Forthcoming).
21. On the other hand, a survey of more than 4,000 LGBTI-identified South Koreans in 2013 conducted by Chingusai found that nearly 60% of those surveyed favored the institutionalization of same-sex unions, while another 36% advocated civil unions, but only when posed with the *conditional* and *future-oriented* question: "If the following measures regarding same-sex unions were to become possible, which one would you choose?" (Chingusai 2014, 24).
22. On the politics of coming out in the wake of Hong Seok-cheon's controversial revelation and dismissal from TV, see Seo (2000).

become on- and off-line members. Even if identity- and visibility-based movements have not gained the level of political traction witnessed in the West, this style of LGBT Studies offers a necessary, if insufficient, way to understand the marginality of queer subjects. This "gheottized" approach to sexual and gender minorities may, in fact, allow detractors to, yet again, minimize these Koreans as numerically insignificant and/or unrelated to their primary object of study. By contrast, we also consider non-normative sexuality and gender variance as fruitful and necessary lenses to analyze such mechanisms of power as neoliberal capitalism, multi-culturalism, post-authoritarian militarism, and hetero-patriarchy. In this way, Queer Studies serves as a critical tool for scholars interested in questioning and intervening into the inter-related processes of economic (dis)enrichment, social (dis)enhancement, and cultural (dis)empowerment among differentially-ranked and hierarchized forms of human life.

As suggested above, the primary aim of this special issue is to demonstrate how Queer Studies can enhance the critical study of Korea. Once committed to this project, scholars of Korea will be uniquely positioned to engage in larger, global debates about Queer Studies which, although increasingly transnational in its trajectory, continue to highlight North American and Western European perspectives. In my brief account of LGBT and Queer Studies in the US, I highlighted the centrality of identity/visibility politics under the (self-) inclusionary logic of civil rights movements and, more recently, as critiques of homonormative assimilation in today's age of neoliberal capitalism. However, given Korea's singular history of Japanese colonialism, national division, and Cold War authoritarianism, the concerns that have preoccupied the practitioners of LGBT and Queer Studies in North America and Western Europe, although certainly impinging on the intellectual and activist work of/by queer subjects, do not necessarily capture their past struggles or current predicaments. Indeed, much work in the growing field of Asian Queer Studies has sought to "provincialize" this West-centric epistemology, the results of which may serve as a model for critically engaged studies of Korea (Sinnot 2010). In his landmark study of the place of Marxist thought in Chinese queer cultures, Petrus Liu offered the concept of

nonliberal queer theory as a disruptive way to imagine the Cold War trajectory of Asian and other non-Western societies (Liu 2015). Eschewing a liberal pluralist conception of identity politics that lacks currency in a place like South (or North) Korea, this critical framework also allows us to question the common perception that, as a political and economic philosophy, liberalism has triumphantly advanced the well-being of sexual and gender minorities, or whether this model of inclusion can produce emancipatory results in the future. If one concludes, as I did at the outset of this introduction, that the post-post authoritarian conditions of Korean democracy will likely not lead to the enfranchisement of LGBTI subjects, it is worth pausing at this political impasse to survey how gender and sexual "deviants," migrant workers, and other marginalized groups have borne the disempowering brunt of capitalist globalization under a politically illiberal regime. Precisely because legal, social, and cultural mechanisms have not allowed for the inclusion of queer (and other minority) Koreans, their experiences of abjection, exclusion, and precarity offer a productive way to articulate a Korea-grounded critique of Queer (and Transgender) Studies.[23] This critique does not assume legal inclusion or neoliberal consumption as the only or primary modes of engaging with the current predicament of marginalized subjects. Nor does it suggest homonormative forms of cultural assimilation or homonationalist articulations of one-upmanship will, in teleological fashion, define the complex and unpredictable agency of LGBTI-identified Koreans. In other words, how do socially marginalized subjects articulate and enact modes of survival under the present conditions of increasing state/military scrutiny and intensifying fundamentalist homophobia? How do under-the-radar tactics of pleasure and community building respond to these disempowering conditions? What are the strategies, limitations, and consequences of LGBTI activists who publicly critique the everyday realities of their own alienation? These are some of the pressing questions that this special issue seeks to address.

In her article on recent celebrations of Seoul Pride, Woori Han examines what happens when Euro-American discourses on gender and

23. For a promising example of this endeavor, see Pae (2016).

sexual differences enter non-Western and post-colonial nations where, in the case of Korea, local subjects face an antiqueer backlash and insufficient state protections. More than a study about self-affirmation, she reveals how the contradictory forces of queer liberalism and what she calls transnational homonationalism express themselves in relation to political movements that must currently contend with the disempowering effects of hetero-nationalist exclusion. Through participant observation and on-site interviews, Han shows how organizers of Seoul Pride are caught between these powerful dynamics, but do not allow them to control their efforts at recognition and validation. As David Eng (2010) and other queer of color critics have shown, US institutions have, in recent years, responded to radical movements for social justice by deploying queer liberalism as an uneven strategy of biopolitical management. While further enfranchising middle-class, white, cisgender, gay men and similarly privileged subjects capable of legal inclusion and economic empowerment, this divide-and-rule tactic further marginalizes class, racial, and other minorities who are less well positioned to avail themselves of assimilation and consumption. Coining the term homonationalism to capture this dilemma, Jasbir Puar (2007) has similarly demonstrated how queer liberals further mask these internal power differentials by ranking the cultural development of nation-states in terms of their efforts to promote LGBT human rights. In this way, queer of color critics have exposed how the seemingly liberating dimensions of queerness often operate in tandem with such disempowering ideologies as racism, imperialism, militarism, and capitalism.

For Korean activists who encounter queer liberalism and transnational homonationalism as part of Euro-American diplomacy, these global forces have ambivalent effects on local efforts at empowering queer subjects. As Han demonstrates, some Western diplomats support Seoul Pride and related activism to advance the purported liberal superiority of their home nations. Thus, when one queer activist sought to protest the racist, militarist, and imperialist implications of using human rights to uncritically position their nations as more advanced, fellow activists distanced themselves from this agitator for fear of alienating their foreign sponsors. According to Han's ethnographic account, festival organizers relied on their

support to finance a yearly celebration that currently has few domestic patrons, unlike their more commercialized Western counterparts. More importantly, they sought to legitimize their unpopular activities through the perceived prestige of white men, a strategy revealing the insidious power of US neo-imperialism. At the same time, organizers have come to deploy developmentalist notions of the queer liberal self to engage with heteronormative ideologies of the Korean state that continue to exclude them from full citizenship status. Unlike Christian churches which draw on wholesome ideologies of national progress to advance their own power, queer activists, as Han shows, lack institutional support to enact such measures as nondiscrimination laws. Instead, they use a comparative politics of liberal developmentalism to demonstrate that their own platform better represents the cosmopolitan (Western) aspirations of the nation than those which atavistically resort to discrimination. In the end, Han's nuanced article shows how queer liberalism is becoming an increasingly popular rhetoric in Korea, at least among some activists and pride participants. But, in the face of virulent expressions of homo/transphobia among fundamentalist Christians and insufficient legal protections, she also implies that liberal strategies of recognition and inclusion may be working to foreclose other, more radical visions of emancipation for differently marginalized people.

As Kyungtae Kim's article suggests, similar tensions between liberal and revolutionary visions of queer politics divide the world of Korean film. Given the difficulty of achieving social justice for LGBTI people, cinema has emerged as an important counter-cultural space in which to express the lived experiences of queer subjects.[24] Kim focuses on the oeuvre of Leesong Hee-il, a gay film maker and an early member of Chingusai, the Korean gay men's human rights organization established in 1994. According to Kim's analysis, Leesong's anarchic films radically depart from those of Kimjo Gwang-su, a gay activist and an active member of Chingusai today. A(n) (in) famous celebrity for seeking to marry his boyfriend in 2013, Kimjo's feel-good films, such as *Dubeon-ui gyeolhonsik-gwa hanbeon-ui jangnyesik* (Two

24. For a historical account, see Kim (2007).

Weddings and a Funeral, 2012), express the fairytale wishes of gays and lesbians who, albeit numerically insignificant in the LGBTI community, actively seek legal inclusion. Kim argues that Kimjo's cinematic activism seeks to instill pride in closeted Koreans whom, by implication, he urges to come out and integrate themselves into the country's system of hetero-patriarchy. By stark contrast, Leesong, he posits, uses gay shame to impart to his viewers a critical consciousness that allows them to see the inherently limited nature of state-sanctioned freedoms. According to Kim's analysis, the scared but ecstatic bodies of escapees in Leesong's films urge us to radically refashion this system of controlled liberties into an anarchic community that encourages the development of what Axel Honneth calls "social freedoms." In this queer utopia, all subjects, both LGBTI- and non-LGBTI-identified, can find paths toward human emancipation.

As Kim's study reveals, it is no coincidence that several of Leesong's films foreground the politics of conscription to envision such liberatory possibilities. Although avowing to protect Koreans from a communist invasion, the military mobilizes the collectivizing power of national security to seek the total compliance of male soldiers, while subordinating women to a position of secondary citizenship.[25] In his analysis of *Talju* (Break Away, 2010), for example, Kim focuses on the inability of conscripts to adapt to the hyper-masculinity of military life, a toxic environment that especially plagues effeminate (gay) men and transgender-identified women. Drawing on the sanctity of the Korean family, this film foregrounds the struggles of one recruit to expose the rapacious nature of military service, which prevents him from caring for his own sick mother. Escape from this inhumane institution, a practice criminalized by military law and stigmatized by Korean society, becomes the only way to seek what Kim calls "absolute freedom." In another film, *Namjjok-euro ganda* (Going South, 2012), Leesong similarly underscores the critically queer position of soldier-citizens in building an alternative community. According to Kim's careful analysis, when the unabashedly queer protagonist fails to convince his lover to accompany him on a journey away from Korean militarism and

25. For feminist critiques of this institution, see Moon (2005) and Kwon (2005).

its enforcement of hyper-masculinity, he rejoices in an inebriated queer dance. The deserter's ecstatic gyrations thus symbolize a desire to break free from the oppressiveness of the hetero-patriarchal order, rather than to seek inclusion in it through assimilationist conformity.

In the final article on *Jugyeojuneun yeoja* (The Bacchus Lady, 2016), Ungsan Kim reveals a similar radicality in the cinematic work of E J-yong. Characterizing this film as part of a broader current that he describes as a critical social turn, Kim shows how Korean directors are actively rearticulating the "anti-social" commentaries of New Queer Cinema by capturing the everyday struggles and collective aspirations of marginalized social groups, such as transgender women, migrant workers, mixed-race children, disabled people, and the elderly. Transcending film narratives of validation typical of queer liberalism, these directors highlight discrimination against a wide variety of subjects whose exploitation and abuse connects them regardless of their social and cultural identities. Echoing the post-nationalist tendencies of Leesong's films, *The Bacchus Lady*, as Kim argues, visualizes novel modes of resistance that are grounded in affective intimacies. He also shows how the marginalized characters in the film offer each other what Kim identifies as "absolute hospitality," rather performing their duties based on blood relations or remaining in kin networks because of bureaucratic formalities. Adding to Kyungtae Kim's critique of the militarized state's use of targeted violence, Ungsan Kim reveals how biopolitical management also works by neglecting bodies whose abjection forecloses their ability to claim legal or cultural belonging in the national community. In place of a negligent state, a queer family emerges in *The Bacchus Lady* as an alternative network of affective bonds. Replacing the patrilineal family, the elderly sex worker protagonist, So-yeong, thus cares for an abandoned Kopino child (Min-ho), who is also nurtured by a transgender entertainer (Tina) and a man with an amputated leg (Do-hun). Together, this queer family cohabits a multi-room residence in Itaewon, a neighborhood in central Seoul known for American troops stationed on the Yongsan military base, gay and transgender bars and, more recently, multicultural restaurants, sleek coffee shops, and hipster boutiques. So-yeong also maintains intimate relationships with elderly men

whom she helps take their own lives as a response to being abandoned by their biological families and the state. Through a focus on the intimacies, interdependencies, and absolute hospitality of variously marginalized subjects, the critical social turn of Korean queer cinema, as Kim aptly describes it, questions the rationalized temporality of hetero-patriarchal life courses, while offering alternative modes of belonging and kinship that can emancipate a variety of socially marginalized subjects.

In sum, these articles not only examine the institutional politics and artistic expressions of sexual and gender minorities. They also demonstrate that the embodied experience and precarious position of queer and transgender subjects are indispensable for engaged analyses of contemporary Korean society and the global forces that currently impinge on it. In this sense, inquiries into the queerness of Korea and of Korea's place in transnational articulations of queerness must not simply engage in the empirical recovery of silenced minorities (although such efforts are, of course, a necessary first step to document their stories and struggles). Even more fundamentally, the queer problematics of these articles reveal how centering marginalized subjects can enhance and reorient discussions aimed at critiquing such intersecting forms of power as global capitalism, Korean militarism, American neo-imperialism, post-authoritarian patriarchy, heteronormative academism, transnational homonationalism, human rights movements, religious homo/transphobia, and social justice activism. Only when queerness is approached as a broad-based analytic does it gain its own resistant power to tackle the uneven and disempowering effects of powerful forces that structure the everyday lives of Koreans on the peninsula and, to varying degrees, in its diasporas.

In imagining the engaged potential of queer critiques, I return to the coalitional force of candlelight vigils that, for nearly six months between the fall of 2016 and the spring of 2017, revolutionized the cityscape of Seoul and other Korean cities (but from which foreigners were warned to avoid, lest we risk prosecution). In the US and Europe, this revolutionary movement inspired progressive citizens to take to the streets to contest the racist, anti-immigrant, transphobic, and misogynistic tendencies of homegrown authoritarian regimes, including that of the Trump presidency.

Having organized their own local activist organizations in cities from San Francisco to New York, left-leaning Korean Americans played an especially important part in these ongoing protests, forging transpacific connections that link Korea to the US through their own marginalized experiences of division, war, and diaspora.[26] In movements across the world, ongoing conditions of oppression thus connect tens of thousands of individuals who—although separated by geographic space, ethnic heritage, class disparities, generational background, and other social differences—are forging powerful coalitions to express their dissatisfaction with the status quo.[27] Even as such coalitions reveal the transformative power of dissident energies, queer, transgender, and people of color critiques continue to remain on the edges of (trans)national movements in Korea, the United States, and beyond. Responding to this impasse, the articles that follow (and ones, I hope, will follow in their wake) offer urgent perspectives on how grassroots movements for human liberation and a radical politics of social justice can survive yet another illiberal crisis.

26. These organizations include the San Francisco-based HOBAK (Hella Organized Bay Area Koreans), the Los Angeles-based SOOBAK (SoCal Organized Oppression Breaking Anti-Imperialist Koreans), the Seattle-based Sahngnokosoo (Evergreen), and the New York City-based Nodutdol (Bridging stepping stone).
27. Massive protests by women against the police's unfair treatment of illegal filming is one recent example of this public culture of resistance. On these developments, see Kang (2018).

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