

Human Traffic: The Fashionably and Unfashionably Marginalized in the Korean Cultural Context

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Abstract

This article will propose the novel terms ‘fashionably marginalized’ and ‘unfashionably marginalized’ to outline particular limits of description in cultural studies (broadly defined) of topics that are more easily and less easily discussed through the predominant vocabulary of the Humanities. This is not an attack on the aims of cultural studies and theorists. Instead, it will help to identify marginalized groups whose cause and advocacy require more consilient, interdisciplinary involvement to intersect public policy, theoretical discourse and media coverage in order to assist or give voice to groups of people who themselves may not have the means or wherewithal to address their own plight in the public sphere. We will outline the case of Korean elderly recycling collectors and how the academy has largely ignored them, despite the fact that they comprise a significant percentage of the Korean population. Then we will contrast them with two other marginalized groups, Korean shamans and the Korean LGBT community, groups which the academy has paid much more attention to, despite being smaller in demographics. We will use these contrasting groups as unfashionably and fashionably marginalized examples. We hope to demonstrate how the adoption of cultural theory’s vocabulary in the Korean academy illustrates areas where cultural theory may fall short of its proposed goals as a symptom of the broader tendency in the Humanities.

Keywords: marginalization, Korea, cultural theory, policy, recycling

Estimate of the value of any proposed policy is held back by taking the problem as if it were one of individual “forces on one side and of social forces on the other, the nature of the forces being known in advance”. We must start from another set of premises if we are to put the problem of freedom in the context where it belongs.

– John Dewey, 1939, ‘Culture and Human Nature’

Part I

In Seoul, you see figures moving through the busy streets, backs bent and angled like question marks, pulling carts by hand, carts piled with cardboard and Styrofoam and plastic, recyclable odds and ends. These carts are pulled by the elderly, most of whom are of retirement age, near it, or far past it and amid the busy rush of traffic they seem echoes of the past, of a harder and more antiquated way of life. The elderly citizens of Korea, having endured a war in their childhood, and then years under a dictatorial regime, emerged in the 1980s with democracy and the promises that such a government brings, but the means of social change and safety were never fully established. Today, many of Korea’s elderly population find themselves precariously close to total poverty, their meager monthly pensions barely able to cover the most menial costs of food, shelter, water, electricity. Many of them have been forced back into work, despite being over retirement age, collecting recyclable materials among the trash found all around Seoul. It is estimated that there are approximately 1,7500,000 trash collectors in Korea, mostly composed of the elderly over the age of 65 (Koo, 2014).¹ Since there are no direct statistics on the recycling collectors (the number mentioned above is an estimate collated by an NGO and derived from the number of existing neighborhood recycling centers and), the percentage of the elderly currently engaged in this activity could be between 15 and 35%, which is approximately 3.5% of the total population. The number of people over the age of 50 who are working and/or applying for jobs in 2015 surpassed 10 million individuals, with a third of retirement age individuals working in manual labor (S. H. Cho, 2016). Seeing that the poverty rate among the elderly above 65 is 49% – the highest rate among OECD countries (Koo, 2014) – it is not surprising to see them in need of extra income, and they are very often reduced to spending their days working, hunting around the city for recyclable materials, for which they receive the equivalent of a couple hundred dollars a month (Um, 2013). In 2010 when digital media overtook pulp printing, these recyclers lost the vast majority of their possible revenue in the form of paper recycling. Since then, their wages have declined and no strong governmental support has been offered to offset any potential loss. In fact, many of these elderly people, cut off from their families for whatever reason, are still considered under the care of these families with whom they have no contact, and thus are often disqualified from further governmental assistance (Y. Lee, 2014).

Seeing that such a large number of elderly citizens lives on the edge of total poverty, it should be reasonable to expect that this issue has been taken up by the political and academic communities, as well as the news media. Preliminary research into the recycling collectors in Korea led to several news articles and some policy debate, with several online articles in English cited in the previous paragraph. However, so far the topic has been ignored by academics in the Humanities. Searches among databases turned up only a few policy debates in particular journals (to be discussed later), and no articles on the subject from the perspective of the Humanities, and especially in cultural studies.² Considering the large percentage of the

¹ Coote places this number at 1.4 million while Um places it closer to 2 million.

² Cultural studies and cultural theory as labels will be used interchangeably along with ‘Theory’.

population that these recycling collectors constitute, the lack of attention by the academy and cultural studies came as a surprise. How could the larger academic community somehow be blind to this issue? If one of the aims of cultural studies is to give voice to those marginalized communities lacking a voice in the collective consciousness, then how have they failed to even mention these elderly citizens who have endured more than should be asked of any group and who are still subject to indignities one might expect of a third world nation, not one of the most educated, sophisticated and prosperous countries on the planet?

The answer to these questions is manifold. One reason that the elderly recyclers have been unfashionably marginalized by the Korean academy is that their identity is not abstractable into linguistic components or definitions. This linguistic move has loomed large over philosophy and cultural theory in the twentieth century, but has taken more and more radical turns in the past 40 years with the ascendancy of postmodernist and poststructuralist debates in the academy and in the Humanities. To address the socio-economic status of a marginalized elderly population as a function of policy failure requires a much more consilient plan for action, one that actively draws on theory, policy and news media. To return to Dewey's prescient essay from 75 years ago, he says:

Were it not for the inertia of habit (which applies to opinion as well as to overt acts) it would be astonishing to find today writers who are well acquainted with the procedure of physical science and yet appeal to 'forces in explanation of human social phenomena ... [These authors] know that reference to electricity or heat, etc., is but a shorthand reference to relations between events which have been established by investigation of actual occurrences. But in the field of social phenomena they do not hesitate to explain concrete phenomena by reference to motives as forces (such as love of power), although these so-called forces are but reduplication, in the medium of abstract words, of the very phenomena to be explained. (p. 685)

When the discourse about any marginalized group remains abstract or subject to forms of linguistic reduplication that dismisses other social forces as contingent or irrelevant then what may result is a situation like the elderly in Korea. Replace Dewey's 'motives of forces (such as love of power)' with any spotlight word (privilege, différance, discursive practices, the Big Other) in cultural theory of the past 30–40 years and it is indefinitely reduplicable. One cannot abstractly redefine what poverty is and what it does, especially from a critical cultural perspective. For example, the Humanities in Korea have been importing the language of cultural theory since the late 1980s. Its general vocabulary being relatively new there, has found a wide range of applications as an analytical and critical tool for examining literature and culture. Though mostly rebranded in America (for the lately more fashionable vocabulary of Foucault), the vocabulary of theorists like Derrida and Lacan and their disciples have found new audiences in the Korean academy. Papers published recently in Korea attest to this, often doing little more than explaining Lacanian concepts in relation to general cultural concepts. The vocabulary of Theory has suffused many of the discussions in the Korean academy and has provided much in the way of academic jobs without providing much in the way of actualizing social or political change. During the 2016 Korean governmental elections, there was a large debate about an Anti-Discrimination Act that would outlaw discrimination against individuals based on their gender, sexual orientation, or political affiliation. What was most surprising is that there was almost complete agreement on both sides of the usual political divisions of conservative and liberal to not pass this bill. On either the conservative or liberal sides of the government, 81.7% of the National Assembly members were affiliated with parties directly against the anti-discrimination legislation (Paek, 2016). That such uniformity exists in

support of active discrimination against vulnerable groups and minorities is symptomatic of deep social divides. Of course, marginalized groups in any culture and society actively need champions who can give them a voice in larger cultural and political arenas, but that support for the LGBT community and the elderly is notably lacking in Korean politics, despite the former being fashionably marginalized and the other being unfashionably marginalized. What should be a large and vigorous debate between political activism on one hand and the academy on the other through the news media and journals has not even risen to the level of discourse in the political arena because the language spoken by each group is not a vocabulary compatible with the others.

To be fashionably marginalized is to be part of a marginalized group whose identity may be rendered into linguistic terms, into those ‘motives as forces’ (Dewey, 1981). Here, we do not mean that such groups are more or less entitled to all forms of dignity, fairness before the law and equality of representation. Rather, we mean that certain groups will, by the very nature of their plight, be more amenable to cultural theory’s methods and approach, while others will be less approachable, and thus will become unfashionably marginalized. Again, this does not mean that fashionably marginalized groups somehow have less claim to equality or that cultural theory (broadly) is somehow to blame for ignoring those unfashionably marginalized. Much good has come of cultural theory, especially in the way of applied education, dissemination of cultural practices and their overlaps with other cultures, and with the growing acceptance of gay rights. The questions that need to be asked, however, “are questions that demand discussion of cultural conditions, conditions of science, art, morals, religion, education and industry, so as to discover which of them in actuality promote and which retard the development of the native constituents of human nature” (Dewey, 1981, 686). To cloak issues in generally slippery language that will morph later into another term or phrase with a related referent and valence may serve certain issues and needs, but this methodology will not cover the wide gamut of injustice done to voiceless.

We have put forth these two terms: the fashionably marginalized and the unfashionably marginalized. Our critique is meant to fit locally onto one particular issue -the elderly recycling collectors – in contrast with other marginalized groups, such as those more easily framed in the social constructivist debate. We see this failure of the academy in Korea paralleled with earlier debates in, for example, the American academy. An essay from 1999 by Richard Rorty describes this loss of hope and loss of agential relation. He frames his debate about ‘philosophy’ here to mean the sterilizing turn in the Academy toward language and away from the possible building of a Utopian vocabulary of inclusion and fairness. Rorty says:

I think this turn toward philosophy is likely to be politically sterile. When it comes to political deliberation, philosophy is a good servant, but a bad master. If one knows what one wants and has some hope of getting it, philosophy can be useful in formulating redescriptions of social phenomena. The appropriation of these redescriptions, and of the jargon in which they are formulated, may speed up the pace of social change. But I think we are now in a situation in which resentment and frustration have taken the place of hope among politically concerned intellectuals, and that the replacement of narrative by philosophy is a symptom of this unhappy situation. (p. 232)

It is precisely this intellectual abandonment identified by Rorty 20 years ago that has led to increasing disparities in the American cultural and political lives. On one hand, gay rights and more talk of egalitarian ways of life have increased, but so too have corporate rights, plutocracy and moneyed interests’ clear sway over policy and law become entrenched political realities.

Moving back to Korea, this disparity between the fashionably marginalized and the unfashionably marginalized, may well lead to some progressive change, as we certainly hope it will. But, it also creates vast chasms of attention on very real and very large subsets of the population that desperately need help, attention and a voice, both from intellectuals and policy makers. The elderly recycling collectors are not the only group like this in Korea, since any marginalized group like the LGBT or immigrant or feminist communities deserve their voice, but the elderly recyclers are symptomatic of the problem we identify in the academy.

Part of the problem on the academic left and the use of theory, at least considered in general, is the issue of praxis. Because cultural theory focuses primarily on language and grants agency to the ‘motives of forces’, as Dewey noted earlier, very often there is a wide gulf between praxis (or practicable application) and the articles and books that crop up decrying the lack of public action in regards to inequality or injustice. Roger Scruton has outlined the failures of many of the principle theorists of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, often coming down on this same issue again and again, namely, that of praxis. He says of the failure of liberal academics and theorists,

Occasional lip service is paid to a future state of ‘emancipation’, ‘equality’ or ‘social justice’. But those terms are seldom lifted out of the realm of abstractions, or subjected to serious examination. They are not, as a rule, used to describe an imagined social order that their advocates are prepared to justify ... It is as though the abstract ideal has been chosen precisely so that nothing actual could embody it”. (2015, p. 273)

Scruton’s own politics notwithstanding, his pronouncement here reiterates what Dewey saw in 1939, i.e. that lacking a viable praxis, theory alone does little except to reduplicate abstractions and redefine terms without realigning the social, cultural and political conditions that create them. Certainly, as in the case of the Korean elderly recyclers, a marginalized group may have millions of individuals. Or another group may have but a few. Numbers alone should never be designators for public and civic attention. The Korean academy’s silence on the recycling collectors is certainly a complex interrelation of causes, but that silence may well be due to the adoption of the language and methods of cultural studies, making these vulnerable elderly unfashionably marginalized.

Part II

At a more general level, this article addresses the incongruity arising when cultural theory is introduced to different cultural realities as an abstracted discourse, irrespective of that culture’s specific socio-political contexts. To inspect the full gamut of Korea’s contexts is a task that extends well beyond the aim and capacity of the current project. Yet, to simply hedge the article around a preliminary discussion and wait for a larger audience to heuristically respond to the questions raised here – that would be to repeat the fallacy the article initially sought to tackle. This is why we attempt to delineate, albeit in broad strokes, some of the pressing domestic circumstances that have eluded the abstraction of theory, thereby addressing the difficulties that any society will face in integrating abstract theoretical systems to the specificities of its time and place. This is similar to the task that Meera Nanda (2003) took up in her book *Prophets Facing Backward*, wherein she outlines how the Indian Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has conveniently appropriated post-modern critiques of “scientific objectivity” since the 90s to revive Hindu nationalism. As a result, the social relativist movements of the West in the mid-20th century that challenged “any claim of autonomy or the self-grounding of science” (p. 22) ended up serving the ideological basis for obscurantism and anti-realism by late 20th century

India. While this paper does not purport to match either the scope or the methodological rigor of Nanda's project, it certainly shares its spirit and concerns.

A good point to begin with is the historical context of Korea's rapid industrialization from the 1960s onward. Over the span of thirty years (1960–1990), the real GDP of this war-torn nation jumped from 3.89 billion US dollars to 263 billion (Nation Master). The fact that the period of Korea's highest economic growth coincides with the nation's two most notorious dictatorships leads to a rather uneasy acknowledgment that higher education in the country itself was in part only possible through a highly hierarchical, Confucian, and totalitarian culture as its fuel.³ As Seungsook Moon (2005) points out, post-colonial Korea in the mid-50s was faced with the two-fold demands of modern democracy and militarization, the combination of which would eventually lead to the paradox mentioned above. On the one hand, the national narrative of modernity was heavily indebted to the ideals of "a strong military and high productivity [...] that conservative nationalist leaders of the Chosun Dynasty had imagined at the end of the nineteenth century" (p. 2). This militaristic and authoritarian state narrative found historical justification in the persisting threat of North Korea from the 1950s until the current day (p. 9).

Such historical circumstances of the mid-to-late 20th century are one of the factors responsible for Korea's ongoing generational tension, in which the political and social demands that the younger generation makes – such as gender equality, a post-patriarchal social structure, or fair working hours – are often seen as a denial of the virtues and the sacrifice that the older generation thinks made possible the emergence of such discontents in the first place. Jae-Heung Park (2010), in his article on Korea's generational conflict, discusses the sharp discrepancy between Korea's birth cohorts of the 60s, 70s, and 80s. Those born in the 60s were the "standard-bearers of Korea's democratization movement that culminated in the recovering of the direct presidential election system in 1987" (p. 87, translation ours). Their epoch marks the watershed of Korea's modernization that led to the birth cohorts of the 1970s, which Park summarizes as an era of "economic growth, post-ideology, post-cold war, globalization and information" (p. 87).

The rather fantastic and disturbing consequence of Korea's hyper-express modernization is that it took only a decade for the next cohort to reap the tumultuous and blood-ridden sacrifice of the previous decade. When the historical transformations from one decade to the next is as drastic as to bar a common ground of experience between different generations, it is not all too surprising that intellectual liberalism runs the risk of coming across as a form of ingratitude. On top of that, Korea's ethnic homogeneity and the industrial mass-mobilization of the 1960s and 1970s allowed modernizing Korea to overlook discourses of diversity or equality in favor of a linear sense of progress. As NPR brought up in a recent broadcast, immigration is still a relatively new concept in the country. Foreigners make up about three percent of the population and can be legally barred from bars or restaurants, as there are no anti-discrimination laws to protect them against such measures (Hu, 2016).

³ The way that Christianity, Neo-Confucianism, and political conservatism all come together in the cultural texture of Korea is too socio-historically complex to do justice here. We would merely point out that it is in the historical context of post-war Korea that Christianity comes to form a prominent relation with political conservatism. As Dave Hazzan has stated in a recent journalistic article, Christianity was primarily perceived as an "American" religion in post-war Korea, and went hand in hand with the image of the United States as its political savior. For one of the more recent discussions of the interrelation between Christianity and Confucianism, see Buswell & Lee (2006).

The Crisis of the Fashionably Marginalized

These developments are some of the wider historical circumstances that we believe have contributed to the current gap between Korea's academic (theoretical, to be more precise) and political scene. On the one hand, the political culture is increasingly aware of problems of inequality that have been overlooked until now – problems that are often first acknowledged and promulgated by intellectual liberals – but on the other, the same culture is ill-equipped with a language to address those very issues. Throughout the debate over the Anti-Discrimination Act, the majority of the political sector coached its hostility against religious/sexual minorities in an overtly eschatological language,⁴ the psychological subtext of which does not seem too far off from the fears and anxieties underlying popular zombie/virus apocalypse films.

Against this milieu, an article was published by one of Korea's most influential LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and/or intersex) rights organization that identified the opponents' militant hostility to same-sex intercourse as a "repulsion against the anal, which occupies the position of the abject as an excretory organ" (H.-C. Kim, 2015, p. 34, translation ours). Another article from the web magazine "너랑나랑우리랑 (You, Me, and We) examined the controversy surrounding exhibitionism in Korea's annual gay parades, advocating it as "a political commitment before an erotic statement, as a questioning of the criteria that dictates which body is obscene and which is not" (Woong, 2014, p. 15, translation ours). Both articles addressed one of the most sensitive agendas surrounding the promotion of sexual minorities in Korea, i.e., the ideological and rhetorical coupling of the subject-hood of sexual minorities and their sexual experience. As interesting as the overall contents may be, the language employed in both cases only serves to overlook the more important contextual causes that fuel the crisis, such as the socio-political dominance of radical Christians in Korea, or the popular rhetoric that often pairs homosexuality with the ideas of sexual excess, hedonism, or even a pathological inability to restrain oneself.

We do not want to misrepresent the overall current of the LGBT debate in Korea. Their struggle has been persistent and surprisingly non-violent in the face of a conservative Christian society that will not hold back from condemning them to 'hell fire'. However, so far as the question of language constitutes the question of strategy, there is a need for the discourse to speak in a language that at least partially overlaps with that of the dominant political power. That is, there should be more talk about the political pressure from Christian fundamentalist groups, the discrepancy of language between younger and older generations, or the collision of a secular and religious culture. All of these require a concrete contextualization of an abstract theoretical platform. Such attempts are not absent, but they certainly could be more visible.

The injection of a new social language is integral to any social change, and Korea is much in need of it. But for better or for worse, the burden of social reconciliation falls on the reformers, as those who opt for the status quo will seldom venture to move outside the circuits of their own language. They have no need to. The grace of change will largely depend on the ability of the former to acknowledge the sacrifice of their previous generation and the values that allowed for such commitment. Only then will it be possible for the latter to recognize a better world that owes its existence to their sacrifice, and is now capable of extending its betterness and grace to those that had no place in the language of the previous epoch.

⁴ The 2016 election campaign flooded the country with comments such as that "homosexuality is the strategical temptation of the Antichrist and the heretics" (J. H. Lee, 2016) or that "the infiltration of Islam and homosexuality will dismantle the Kingdom of God" (Noh, 2016).

The Crisis of the Unfashionably Marginalized

From the point of the academic culture, the language of theory abstracted outside specific contexts has been disproportionately oriented towards subaltern crises that *can* be theoretically or linguistically disentangled. The upside is that Korea is becoming a country much more sensitive to language, with cultural theory lending an important and strategic voice to certain socio-political exigencies that Korea faces at the moment. From the early 1990s, for example, the Korean society campaigned for the word “장애우 (*jangaewoo*: a disabled friend)” as a new term to refer to a disabled person, instead of the conventional “장애인 (*jangaein*: a disabled person)”. It was only in the early 2000s that the society as whole came to acknowledge the highly problematic implications of the substitute, that the term can never be used by a disabled person to refer to himself/herself.⁵

However, this increased awareness of language, coupled with a digitally overloaded society, is creating a culture more obsessed with being politically correct than looking at the deeper socio-economic injustices that require an institutional and political change. It has been eight years since the enforcement of the Disability Discrimination Act, but the number of relevant petitions against discrimination and human rights abuse has only been increasing (D. K. Kim, 2016). Telling someone to get their language straight is certainly easier than asking what political and social changes can be made to alleviate their conditions. Socially disenfranchised groups whose crisis cannot be solved in a “linguistic mode” tend to be pushed away for either politics or social welfare to deal with. Cultural theory in itself is not to blame for this, but it may stem from the combination of its appeal to social theorists who are solely interested in fashionable crises, the reign of the SNS (Social Networking Service) culture as the modern day language police, and intellectual/civic laziness in general.

The predicament of the recycling collectors is not linguistically resolvable and requires nothing short of an extensive welfare reform. Their circumstances turned for worse when the cost of paper waste plummeted in the early 2000s, aggravated by the repeated price rigging by paper companies and the governmental indifference to such cartels (Nam, 2015). The complexities are further heightened by the fact that the government still has to make up its mind on how to restructure the recycling industry. As of now, it is sustained by an implicit truce between the government and the mostly illegal recycling centers at the bottom of the industry’s pyramid. (Lee [Eutteum Recycling Center], Interview, April 14, 2016).

Given the socio-economic context behind the crisis of the trash collectors, it is not difficult to guess why the cultural theorists haven’t been too eager to address this particular social group, whose visibility and omnipresence in Korea’s urban settings should have merited them more academic attention as a metropolitan “subaltern” group. University databases yield a single article directly relevant to their cause, published in 2011 in a social welfare studies journal (B. H. Lee, 2011). A similar example is the Korean elderlies who live alone, often located at what is known as the welfare blind spots. Over a million people that subsist below the poverty threshold are excluded from financial assistances, due to an anachronistic provision of Korea’s Basic Living Security Act that makes it difficult for those with a lineal relative to receive governmental assistances. (K. W. Cho, 2014; Ministry of Health and Welfare). Elderlies that have been long out of contact with their family members are therefore non-eligible as

⁵ Even up to 2002, an official middle-school textbook will refer to 장애우 (*jangaewoo*) as the proper designation for disabled people, laying out the chronological evolution of Korea’s “political correctness” that finally culminated in this term (Son, 2002).

recipients. Their issue is almost exclusively dealt with in applied sociologies, that have already formed a hermetic culture with its chain of references that do not extend beyond particular journals specializing in welfare policies.⁶

It is not the favoring of one marginalized subject over the other that is problematic, but the rising trend of a cultural theory that runs the risk of furthering the incommunicability between different social sectors and academic disciplines, and pushing its existence out of socio-political relevance. To be fair, Korea's academic culture has not yet reached the same degree of crisis (pushing aside its other vices) that American academia has been diagnosed with already in the 90s by writers such as Edward O. Wilson in his book *Consilience* (p. 196–259). That is to say, the trend is still reversible. Korea is at a critical juncture at the moment, where the issues of gender, racial, economic, and social inequality are dealt with in multiple strata of language that seem incapable of converging. The chasm exists not only between the political and the academic culture, but also between the more theoretical and the applied sociologies.

We would like to briefly introduce the case of Korean shamans here, for a side project on shamanism has yielded an appurtenant point of reference for the current discussion, both as a potential subject of the fashionably marginalized and as an instance of the crossroad that Korean academics finds itself at the moment. We say potential, for the domestic discussion on shamanism is, as of yet, neither popular nor asymmetrically theoretical. Yet, the noticeable disparity between the (older) domestic and (newer) international discourse on the subject suggests a different future. The Korean shamans are predominately female and occupy an interesting place in the country's cultural fabric. Their domestic discussion, however, tends to cluster around a handful of sociological journals dedicated to the aim of preserving local shamanistic traditions. Most of the articles focus on the shamans as the practitioners of local traditions, discussing the specific rituals and theologies behind the shamans of different regional backgrounds. With the exception of a few that incorporates anthropological giants such as Claude Levi-Strauss, the overall scholarly discussion is devoid of a wider theoretical framework.

The international discourse (composed of Korean scholars writing in English, usually with a graduate background in the US) shows a marked contrast. Already from titles such as “The Mudang: Gendered Discourses on Shamanism in Colonial Korea” (Hwang, 2012) or “Shamanism in Korean Hamlets since 1990: Exorcising Han” (H. Lee, 2011), one witnesses the shift from description-oriented studies of local tradition to theory-oriented studies of identity. The disparity is suggestive of what would happen once Korea's cultural analysts turn their eyes towards this fertile ground for theoretical abstraction, or when there is a wider interest and demand from the international audience. The patent contrast between the domestic and international articles seem to foreshadow the crisis of non-communication that has already befallen other discussions of the fashionably marginalized.

It is neither feasible nor compelling to argue that social studies or cultural studies should take it upon themselves to tackle an issue from all conceivable angles. A good starting point, however, would be to increase the number of journals with a more conciliated vision, instead of encouraging different academic disciplines to divide themselves into small islands of professional territories. What should be encouraged is not necessarily a polymathic academic

⁶ Law enforcers Seong Jo Yang and In Soon Nam recently (June 2016) hosted a panel discussion on Korea's Basic Living Security Act, inviting law enforcers, legal experts, and professors with a legal or cultural studies background to discuss the matter. It is a positive example of an integrated discussion on social policies that should be more encouraged (Gongam Human Rights Law Foundation).

culture, but rather the understanding that the mutual indifference between the theoretical and applied studies can only be sustained at the expense of certain social groups whose crisis cannot be successfully integrated into either paradigm. And this is a suggestion perhaps most pressing for cultural theorists, whose most compelling contribution has been the insight that the structural condition of any discourse involves the exclusion of those who precariously exist at the fringe of that very discourse.

When Noam Chomsky (2006) spoke of intellectual progress as articulating a “clearly formulated, abstract theory which will have empirical consequences” (p. 13), he was speaking more or less in the context of the history of science. But it is certainly a relevant question for anyone whose aim it is to outline the very margins of a society – i.e., what are the empirical consequences of my task? If an article that brings to light the conditions of disenfranchisement has no empirical consequences of challenging those very conditions, then its mission must be renegotiated as being infinitely more pertinent to itself than its avowed subject. Even the hope that a discussion will trigger a societal change of perception requires the existence of someone else to take part in that change; and the primary concern of this article is that the current breach across different social sectors may very well prevent that someone from understanding which language you are speaking in and whose cause you are speaking for.⁷ As this article was written in the reconciliatory hope for a clearer language, the weight of the concern is meant to fall most heavily on itself.

⁷ Foucault, in 1971, identified the “real political task” as criticizing the seemingly neutral and apolitical operation of institutions through which political violence “has always exercised itself obscurely” (Chomsky & Foucault, 2006, p. 41). This article by no means disputes the validity of such tasks; only that a criticism written in a language as obscure as the political mechanism of the selfsame institutions easily defeats its own goal.

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