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The Urban Spaces and Politics of Hybridity: Repoliticizing the Depoliticized Ethnicity in Los Angeles Koreatown

Kyonghwan Park*

혼성성의 도시 공간과 정치 : 로스앤젤레스 한인타운에서의 탈정치화된 민족성의 재정치화

박경환*

Abstract : The term hybridity has recently emerged as one of the most popularized leitmotivs in contemporary diasporic and transnational problematics on migrants' nomadic experiences. Especially, in postcolonial politics, hybridity is argued to provide a critical 'third space' on which to challenge discursive boundaries and redescribe power-embedded history. However, this paper suggests that the hybrid subject position can be easily articulated in producing new cultural discourse and empowering hegemonic subjects in certain spaces. Based on distinguishing the intentional, conscious hybridity from the organic, lived hybridity, this research intends to investigate the Janus-faced, double-edged nature of the postcolonial politics of hybridity in the case of Los Angeles Koreatown. First, I discuss how a place of organic hybridity in Koreatown can lead to challenging invented and depoliticized ethnicity. At the second half of this paper, I focus on understanding the ways in which new Korean American professionals and elites employ the discourse of '1.5 generation' as an intentional hybridity for empowering their own political position at a local scale. I conclusively suggest that hybridity should be a deconstructive strategy to unlearn dominant socio-spatial boundaries rather than bring about the third space as a reterritorialized political position.
Key Words : hybridity, ethnicity, 1.5 generation, Los Angeles Koreatown, postcolonialism

요약 : '혼성성(hybridity)' 이라는 용어는 최근 초국적 이주자들과 같은 유목민적 주체들에 관심을 가지는 사회이론적 연구들의 주요 용어로 등장하였다. 특히, 탈식민주의적 정치와 관련하여, 혼성성은 담론의 경계에 도전하고 권력이 내재화된 역사와 문화를 비판적인 차원에서 새롭게 기술할 수 있는 제3의 공간을 제공할 수 있을 것으로 인식되고 있다. 그러나 본 논문은 혼성적인 주체의 위치성이 오히려 새로운 문화 담론을 생산하고 새로운 헤게모니를 잉태하는 데에 용이하게 작용할 수 있음을 지적한다. 본 논문은 의도된 의식적 혼성성을 경험된 유기적 혼성성으로부터 분리함으로써 탈식민주의에서 혼성성의 정치가 가지는 이중적 본질을 살펴보고자 한다. 경험적인 수준에서, 본 연구는 로스앤젤레스 한인타운에 입지한 '영빈관' 이라는 레스토랑의 시대공간적 변화를 혼성성의 관점에서 읽음으로써 어떻게 탈정치화된 민족성을 드러낼 수 있는가에 주목한다. 둘째, 본 논문의 후반부에서는 지난 10여 년간 로스앤젤레스 한인타운 내에서 새로운 헤게모니를 형성하고 있는 한국계 엘리트 및 전문가 계급들이 소위 '1.5세대' 라는 혼성성의 담론을 통하여 어떻게 그들의 정치적인 지위를 강화하는가에 주목한다. 결론적으로 본 논문은 혼성성이 새로운 대안으로서의 제3의 정치적 지위를 욕망하기보다는 사회공간적 경계들에 도전하는 비판전략의 하나로서 '스스로를 해체하기 위한 개념' 으로 이해되어야 함을 지적한다.
주요어 : 혼성성, 민족성, 1.5세대, 로스앤젤레스 한인타운, 탈식민주의

* Lecturer, Department of Social Studies Education, Ewha Womans University, kpark3@gmail.com

1. Introduction

Perhaps, the notion of hybridity must be one of the most popularized terms in contemporary diasporic and transnational problematics on migrants' transgressive experiences (see, for example, Rouse, 1991; Glick Schiller *et al.*, 1992; Bhabha, 1990, 1994; Clifford, 1994; Lowe, 1996; Mitchell, 1997; Smith and Guarnizo, 1998; Dirlik, 2000; Bailey *et al.*, 2002). Hybridity is defined as the blurred, ambivalent, and mixed situation produced or positioned by dominant social, conceptual or spatial boundaries (Safran, 1991; Clifford, 1992). Including transmigrants, exiles, biracials, and transgenders, hybrid subjects have been one of the most crucial foci that critical scholars draw on because their presence highlights various fissures in dominant discourses and challenges essentialized normativities such as nation, ethnicity, race, gender and sexuality. Especially, in comparison to the term ethnicity in which ethnic cultural dimensions have often been essentialized and depoliticized, hybridity in postcolonial studies is a useful concept to analyze complicated flexibility, multiplicity, and in-betweenness of migrants' collective identity. Hence, discussions of hybridity have not only undermined modernist fixations of subjectivity effectively but also explored liminal, often resistant epistemologies to imagine what Pratt (1997) notably called "contact zone of transculturation" across multiple social spaces.

However, especially in relation to poststructuralist and postcolonial scholarships, the term hybridity was often phantasmatic in celebrating cultural ambivalence, multiple identities, and its possible third spatiality. Above all, accentuating the possible subversion of colonial authority through hybridization, Bhabha (1990, 211) suggested that hybridity is the "third space ... that displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives". In Bhabha's argument, hybridity automatically provides a critical third positionality on which to redescribe power-embedded human history and culture in a society. However, Mitchell's (1997) critique of the 'hype' of hybridity was a productive clue to think about the way in which hybrid subject positions are often articulated with hegemonic narratives and political economic process in capitalism. By analyzing how Hong Kong Chinese transnational capitalists manipulate the quintessential hybridized position, she illustrates the way in which hybrid subject positions are often articulated with hegemonic discourses and the political economic process of global capital accumulation. Mitchell (1997, 551) concludes that "although there is clearly the potential for resistance to hegemonic narratives of nation and race in these [hybridity] positionings, there is also the potential for collaboration in the hegemonic narratives of capitalism".

In this paper, I desire to suggest that there is no singular or quintessential hybridity. Contrarily, I argue that there could be different, multiple hybridities whose social and political investments are heterogeneous. I especially draw on Young's (1995) suggestion that hybridity has at least two 'doublenesses'. First, according to Young (1995, 22), "hybridity is itself an example of hybridity, of a doubleness that both brings together, fuses, but also maintains separation". Second, hybridity works simultaneously in both "organic" (dialectically creating new spaces, structures and scenes) and "intentional" (consciously intervening as a form of subversion, translation and transformation) ways. According to Young,

hybridity is "a third term which can never in fact be third" because hybridity "both exhausts and maintains" disjunctive differences in it through inversion and perversion of its progenitors (*Ibid.*, 23). In other words, what Young called "organic" hybridity stresses on the "lived" hybrid experience, while "intentional" hybridity implies consciously repositioned discourse in which certain group's power is inscribed.

At an empirical level, I discuss hybrid spaces and the politics of hybridity in Los Angeles Koreatown, in which Korean Americans' hybrid social, cultural, and political experience are embedded. Situated at the intersection of transcultural grids, Korean Americans' experiences provide a particularly interesting 'in-betwixt' position on which certain subjects not only challenge essentialized ethnic, cultural, or national discourses, but also consciously appropriate their 'lived' social position for inventing and empowering collective subjectivity. Immigrant communities are always in an internal tension in-between the critical position to challenge predominant national and ethnic consciousness and the needs to construct collective identity and political solidarity (Dirlik, 2000; Prazniak and Dirlik, 2001). In other words, immigrants' hybridity is not a fixed, cohesive or monolithic position, because hybridity constantly proceeds to negate cultural authenticity and pure indigenity. Rather, it is an incessant process of differentiation, integration and transition in accordance to immigrants' internal power relations. Therefore, the understanding of ethnic neighborhoods should dispense with the notion of monolithic ethnic community, and instead see ethnic community as always under construction in contested ways.

In this context, immigrant ethnic organizations and institutions that are dominant in internal power relations play a significant role in the development process of ethnic enclaves. At the same time they often incorporate heterogeneous and conflicting hybrid positions into a 'third positionality' in-between bifurcate national and ethnic consciousnesses. On the one hand, I discuss 'a' brief history of a restaurant located in Koreatown, a place of hybridity that illustrates historical as well as spatial transition of the area. By contextualizing the place in the socio-economic process, I particularly focus on how ethnicity is materially invented and negotiated. On the other hand, I draw on the discourse of '1.5 generation', which certain Korean Americans argue is an important socio-political position that connects the first and second generations of Korean immigrants. I especially discuss how such a new politics spawns not a critical grass-root position but a new hegemonic position that empowers bilingual elite class in Koreatown. By showing different hybridities, I would like to unfold the Janus-faced, double-edged nature of the postcolonial politics of hybridity in an immigrant urban space.

2. From Invented Ethnicity to Lived Hybridity

At 3014 W. Olympic Boulevard on the southeast corner of the intersection between Olympic Avenue and Irolo Street in Los Angeles Koreatown, is located a replica of traditional Korean architecture (see Figure 1). The building was originally a Korean restaurant, named the *Young-Bin-Kwan* (or the VIP Palace in Korean) constructed in 1974 by Hi-Duk Lee, who immigrated to the U.S. in 1968 (Lee, 2002). The

restaurant was exactly what the neighborhood needed, serving as a meeting place and social center, which hosted wedding banquets, end-of-school-year parties, political dinners, business meetings and family gatherings. The Los Angeles Korean community grew to rely on the *Young-Bin-Kwan* as the center of community life. The *Young-Bin-Kwan* was a symbolic place representing newly growing Korean-owned businesses along Olympic Boulevard. It not only served as a major community place for Korean Americans, but also began to attract an increasing number of Korean shops and small businesses along Olympic Boulevard in the 1970s.

As the first complex in Los Angeles built in the style of traditional Korean architecture, the construct was part of Lee's dream to turn Hispanic neighborhood that began to attract increasing number of Korean immigrants into a place that architecturally rivaled downtown's Chinatown. In his interview with the Los Angeles *Times* in 2001, he said:

> They didn't have any good restaurants for entertainment or a meeting place. ... I planned to make Koreatown. Chinese people have Chinatowns everywhere: New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Montebello. But there's no Koreatown (Quinones, 2001).

The *Young-Bin-Kwan* was, however, not simply a materialized and spatialized form of his apparent ethnic consciousness. Actually, Hi-Duk Lee was a core member of several Korean American community organizations in Los Angeles Koreatown. Lee organized the so-called Koreatown Development Association (KDA) consisting of Korean immigrant business owners, capital holders, developers, and real estate promoters, and served as the organization's chief director in the 1970s. Korean developers in the KDA used to collectively purchase cheap land and property along Olympic Boulevard and rent it to Korean entrepreneurs (see Light and Bonacichi, 1991; Light, 2002). The KDA not only functioned an institutionalized capitalist, but also brought about cultural transformations in the area by launching several campaigns to put up Korean language signs on the Korean-owned shops in 1973. It also hosted the first annual Korean Street Festival in 1974 on Olympic Boulevard, terming the boulevard as the "main street" for the Korean American community in Los Angeles. In this sense, Light (2002) proposes the concept "immigrant place entrepreneurs" to describe the immigrant business owners and developers who participate in institutionalized promotion of development in ethnic spaces. They usually tend to ethnicize pre-existing urban spaces by "consciously" transforming place identities and institutionalizing ethnic networks.

The *Young-Bin-Kwan* was not simply a cultural artifact representing spatially the authentic Korean ethnicity. Rather, its symbolic value was grounded on the Korean migrant capitalists' and entrepreneurs' development strategy to "invent" Koreatown in an inner city area of Los Angeles. After all, by highlighting Korean cultural tradition, the *Young-Bin-Kwan* depoliticized ethnicity whose basic material production is a purely capitalist process. By 1977, accumulating a huge amount of wealth, Hi-Duk Lee planned to construct a new five-story building named the VIP Hotel, blueprinted to house 230 rooms at right next to the Young-Bin-Kwan. He invested a half-million dollars in the blueprints and in demolishing an old apartment building on the construction site. However, Lee was preparing to build when, under the Jimmy

Figure 1. The *Young-Bin-Kwan*, or VIP Palace, in Los Angeles Koreatown, 1984 (Photo from the Korean American Museum, 2004)

Carter's Administration, interest rates rose to 22 percent. Subsequently most of Lee's tenants in VIP Plaza fell behind on rent payments, requiring him to shell out $30,000 a month of his own money. Eventually, he filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection, and he had sold everything, including the *Young-Bin-Kwan* by 1982 (Lee, 2002). It symbolizes a failure of the conventional development strategy in Korean immigrant society based on strong ethnic solidarity.

In 1986, Oaxacan businessman Fernando Lopez converted the *Young-Bin-Kwan* into the new home of his Oaxacan restaurant, called *La Guelaguetza* (see Figure 2). Currently, on the outside, the architecture remains Korean-style, but the colors inside are traditional Oaxacan: bright yellows and reds, greens and blues (Quinones, 2001). The menu offers not Korean barbecue, but barbacoa, mole, tamales and tall glasses of pink horchata popular in Oaxaca, Mexico. Actually, the term *Guelaguetza* is a Zapotec Indian word meaning "offering" that implies cooperation and participation at the same time for them. It was used by indigenous groups in the state of Oaxaca, Mexico, to describe the ceremony and celebration held each year in July to propitiate the gods in return for sufficient rain and bountiful harvest (Glass and Ramirez, 2004). While the transition from the *Young-Bin-Kwan* to the *La Guelaguetza* could be a local contingency at a smaller scale, it simultaneously implies a significant geographic change that has been emerging in Koreatown since the late 1980s. Currently, *La Guelaguetza* functions as a community center for Oaxacans, primarily Indians from the Sierra Juarez, living in the southern part of Koreatown along Olympic Boulevard. Jung-Sook Choe, an old Korean woman running a small shoe store next to the

Figure 2. *La Guelaguetza*, or formerly *Young-Bin-Kwan*, 2004 (Photo by author)

restaurant told me that "when Latino people flock together to the restaurant, the scene always reminds of the 1970s' Koreans in Olympic Boulevard". According to the Korean Immigrant Workers Advocates (KIWA), the estimated number of Oaxacan population in Los Angeles amounts to 80,000~200,000, and most of them are Zapotecos who are the largest of Oaxaca's sixteen Indian groups. A significant number of these Zapoteco migrants settled in the southern part of Koreatown, working for Korean-owned businesses in the area. The Oaxacan purchase of the *Young-Bin-Kwan* at a larger scale illustrates the changing geographies of local demography and business in the southern part of Koreatown.

Embodying Korean architecture as its container and Oaxacan food culture as its contents, *La Guelaguetza* is a space of lived hybridity, which is not intentionally or consciously planned to represent the theme of "mixed fusion culture" but organically produced by people's economic and social life. In this sense, the lived hybridity that the *La Guelaguetza* illustrates is a spatial embodiment of social acceptance, coexistence, and patience. When I interviewed Fernando Lopez, the manager of the restaurant, he showed a strong pride in the *Young-Bin-Kwan*, saying:

> We didn't have enough money to newly build our branch in Koreatown. But, more importantly, you know, we wanted to preserve this beautiful architecture. ... Right, I'm Oaxacan and we also desire for Oaxacatown as Koreans have Koreatown and Chinese have Chinatown. But, I think that nothing is above beauty, even *cultural difference*. ... Luckily, our business has been quite successful. You see, we don't serve liquor here, but our customers including whites, blacks and

Asians keep standing in a line until we close (Personal interview, author's emphasis added).

Both Lee's and Lopez's businesses are ethnic small businesses, as the names of their restaurants commonly represent. However, while the *Young-Bin-Kwan* was a "reterritorialized space" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983) based on the destruction of lived space and the encodification of ethnicity, the *La Guelaguetza* is what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) called "smooth space", or "nomad space", which nomadic subjects like flexible transnational migrants create by crisscrossing such discursive boundaries as race and ethnicity. Korean immigrant entrepreneurs spawned strong diasporic nationalism and the discourse of 'ethnic solidarity' in the Korean American community, which operate as a key way in forming ethnic economic networks as well as internal socio-economic stratification. Unlike Korean immigrant entrepreneurs, Oaxacan immigrants are mostly the subalterns who are not only marginalized and oppressed people in the post-colonial history of Mexico but also the 'transnationals from below' challenging nationalism and ethnic solidarity. In conjunction to Oaxacans' transnational nomadism, the lived, organic space of hybridity like the *La Guelaguetza* constructed an emancipatory space without destroying the first, the second, and their heterogeneous histories. However, such hybridity is sometimes understood in the way that essentializing and naturalizing ethnicity. For instance, a young female employee working for Choe's store argues that:

I think they [Oaxacans] are more patient than us [Koreans]. At least, they didn't demolish or even remodel the exterior of the building. But we are dying to destroy and newly construct a lot of things. We don't even feel guilty for doing such bad behaviors. Look at that building [she meant a commercial building located right next to *La Guelaguetza*, which reminds one of popular buildings in South Korea]. That's exactly what you see on the street in Seoul. ... Koreans seems to have a more clear line between us and them. But, as long as based on my experience in Koreatown, Mexicans [she meant 'Latin American immigrants' by this term] are more patient in accepting difference and living with it (Personal interview, translated from Korean).

Her critical view on Korean immigrants' apparent ethnic solidarity and its exclusivity was not based on challenging the notion of ethnicity. It was rather resulted from essentializing such terms as Koreans and Mexicans and contrasting these categories. Such essentialism subsequently leads to the neglection of political economic difference between Lee's intentional invention of ethnicity and Lopez's individual cultural transgression. As the term guelaguetza literally means participation and cooperation, the hybrid space encourages us to 'unlearn' fictitious ethnicity and ethnic difference and 'learn' to culturally co-survive in a specific place. Truly, as Friedman (1997) argued, the logics of hybridity in migrants' underclass neighborhoods are likely to be a different nature from those that develop among the highly educated world travelers or capitalists of the culture industries. What Young (1995) called organic hybridity could not be an ungrounded political position but highly place-based, lived experience.

3. An Intentional Hybridity: Discourse of "1.5 Generation" in the Korean American Community

1) The Production of 1.5 Generation Subjects and Political Self-Empowerment

Unlike the lived, organic hybridity that I discussed above, certain Korean American political actors in Los Angeles Koreatown began to emphasize the so-called 'Korean Americanness', which is a political form of intentional, conscious, and repositioned hybridity, since the mid-1990s. Alongside of financial damage on Los Angeles Koreatown, the 1992 urban riots inflicted traumatic psychological impacts on the Korean American community in Los Angeles (Abelmann and Lie, 1995; Min, 1996). Despite Korean Americans' hundred-year-long history, many African American and Hispanic looters considered Korean business owners not as Korean 'Americans' but as 'Koreans', and thus often linked to the images of aliens. Simultaneously, many local Korean Americans resented dominant American mass-media, which stereotypically depicted Korean Americans as racists and exploitative capitalists during the riots. After all, realizing their collective position "caught in the middle" of two nations (Min, 1996; Park, 1999), Korean American organizations in Los Angeles Koreatown began to put their efforts into constructing their collective identity and mobilizing political solidarity.

In this context, since the mid-1990s, the term "1.5 generation" has been a powerful trope for newly emerging political organizations such as the Korean American Coalition in Los Angeles (KAC) (see Park, 1999). Mostly composed of bilingual Korean American college students and elites such as Attorney Angela Oh, the KAC argued that it played an important role in representing Korean American communities during the 1992 riots in public domains. While conventional Korean organizations consisting of Korean-speaking old Korean immigrants failed in transmitting Korean American's voice to mainstream mass-media and politics, the KAC was quite successful in strengthening Korean Americans' voice and getting relief funds from the federal government. Originally, the term meant the Korean Americans who maintain a convenient language access to both Korean and English, so that they could help Korean immigrant communities communicate with other ethnic groups. Currently, based on the metaphor of 'bridge', Korean Americans who now employ the term have accentuated their own hybrid position to connect multiple differences between Korea and America; Korean immigrants and their second generation; Korean-speaking Koreans and English-speaking Koreans; and, most importantly, Korean Americans who culturally identify themselves as Korean and those who view themselves as Americans. Director of the KAC Charles Kim, who firstly coined the term '1.5 generation' in 1983, argues that,

> By the "1.5 generation" I mean the generation between the first and the second generations - the ones who understand both Korean and American society, who understand the older and younger generations and can accept two different value systems at the same time.¶ As far as I am concerned, this transition generation is a generation which appreciates the traditions, history, culture and ancestors of Korea and, in addition, accepts practical American values. And members of this generation feel a strong sense of responsibility for the future of the Korean community and reject being identified either the

first or second generation (Korean American Coalition in Los Angeles, 1995).

In his narratives on the 1.5 generation, Kim implies that 1.5 generation is the subjects embodying both organic and intentional hybridities simultaneously. According to Kim, 1.5 generation is those who were born in Korea and immigrated to the U.S. when they are young. Such definition implies that 1.5 generation has a particular common historical experience, especially in relation to their immigration history. On the other hand, however, they are those who intentionally and self-consciously redefine their position as embodying different two traditions, two histories, two cultures, and two values. In this way, instead of challenging the discourse of ethnicity, nation, or cultural tradition, the term 1.5 generation essentializes and depoliticizes their progenitors. After all, Kim's definition reveals its own self-contradiction: How many Korean Americans who were born in Korea and immigrated into the U.S. can be the bilingual, bicultural subjects who understand two histories, traditions, and values, have their own historical responsibility, and reject to be identified as neither Korean nor American? Doesn't the discourse of 1.5 generation actually "produce" 1.5 generation subjects?

Kim's 1.5 generation discourse shows how the definition itself is ironically what many 1.5 generation, if there really is, would not comply with, because employing the term 'generation' for identification is a strong Korean Confucian discourse articulated with hierarchical as well as patriarchal familial structure. Desire for 'ethnic solidarity' is itself just a particular and specific form of politics among those that immigrants and their descendants can choose, such as class-based politics, gender politics, inter-racial politics, or transnational-migrant politics. For instance, the term generation is not a gender-blind term but highly 'gendered' notion that conceals the patriarchal social structure. It also excludes inter-racial marriages, especially those between Korean females and other ethnic/racial males, whose position could be sensitive to cultural, racial, and ethnic discourses more than the so-called 1.5 generation in reality. In sum, by prioritizing the ethnic politics over other forms of politics, the discourse of 1.5 generation excludes 'othered' histories and groups in Korean Americans.

Then, who are those particular subjects who produces 1.5 generation discourse and reproduces themselves? What are their goals? Actually, the task of 'connection' or 'bridging', that are argued to be organically given to 1.5 generation, doesn't mean horizontal communication between their progenitors, or Korean and American. What the KAC calls 'bridge' actually operates as the 'ladder', which is not for all Korean Americans but for a particular set of already advantaged professionals. Kyoung-Won Lee, a famous Korean journalist having a close connection with the KAC, argues:

> A dozen years ago a tantalizing term called '1.5 generation' debuted in the English language along with the Korean American Coalition (KAC). ... That new label - much like the ethnic appellation 'Chicano' coined by Mexican Americans to affirm their own identity - became part of the American parlance when KAC's first executive director [Charles Kim]¶ introduced his own peer group in the July 11, 1983 edition of the Koreatown Weekly. The headline read, "1.5 Generation a Bridge Between Cultures".¶ Their ranks are growing in number and influence. Mostly in their 20s and 30s, and armed with professional degrees, cell phones, beepers and computers, they run

> fund-raisers and political campaigns. They stage community forums and host radio talk programs. They teach shop owners and inhabitants, young and old alike, *how to gain access to mainstream institutions and government agencies. ... Korean participation in mainstream politics has been a fighting motto for 1.5ers* (*Ibid.*, author's emphasis added).

Lee's explication shows that 1.5 generation are young Korean American professionals embodying political orientation toward what he calls "mainstream society", which is the domain of power and influence that whites dominate. Lee continues to argue that such professionals will connect the "insular Korean community" with the mainstream politics (*Ibid.*). Thus, he claims the normativity of mainstream politics by finding insularity which is a form of what Kristeva (1982, 1987) notably called "abjection".[1) Hence, the term 1.5 generation is frequently employed for illustrating the economic and political success of professional Korean Americans. An article from the Los Angeles Business Journal reports that those who identify themselves as 1.5 generation have emerged a new hegemonic and powerful class in Koreatown.

> The 1.5 generation, who are now entering their 30s and 40s, are responsible for much of Koreatown's current dynamism - particularly the investment activity along Wilshire Boulevard, said Stephan Haah, president of Harvest Asset Management Inc., a real estate advisory firm that specializes in Koreatown. The 37-year-old Haah, who emigrated to California with his family at the age of 15, is good example of a "1.5-er" himself. After graduating from U.C. Berkeley, he worked for a large commercial brokerage for several years, before opening his own six-employee shop on Wilshire Boulevard. "Young professionals who have been working in mainstream America are coming back to Koreatown," said Haah. "They are bilingual and bicultural and they don't need retail space on Olympic. They need office space." ... This new Korean professional class is remaking the community's financial picture (Kanter, 1997).

Established as a non-profit community advocate in 1983, the Korean American Coalition in Los Angeles (KAC) is a non-partisan political organization "to facilitate Korean American participation in civic, legislative, and community affairs, encourage the community to contribute to and become an integral part of American society" (Korean American Coalition in Los Angeles, 2004). The 1992 urban riots were a critical turning point for the KAC, because bilingual Koreans in the organization played a key role in helping communications between Korean merchants and US politicians. Especially, the KAC succeeded in bringing in $500,000 grants to the victims of the riots from the New York Life Insurance Company, which was not a huge amount but enough to prove the organizations' "bridging" capabilities (Kim, 2003). In my interview, Charles Kim often criticized the inability of first generation Korean organizations including the Korean American Federation of Los Angeles, or the *Han-In-Hoe*, during the 1992 riots. Such a KAC's success was a result of its self-defined role as the representative of Korean American communities and its close relationship with what it calls "mainstream politicians". More recently, the KAC has focused on nationalizing itself by establishing its regional chapters in other states such as Colorado, Arizona, Georgia, Kansas, and, most importantly, Washington D.C.

Despite its overall contribution to officially representing Korean Americans in Los Angeles to the mainstream politics, the KAC is an

organization more vertically networked from above rather than horizontally united from below. Although the KAC states that one of its principal objectives is to be effectively bilingual advocate for the Korean American community by articulating community concerns and interests to elected officials, private and public agencies, the media, and the general public, it seems too abstract and disconnected from everyday community concerns and just empowers politics-oriented professionals, elites, and capitalists. For example, the KAC has organized periodic legislative luncheons providing opportunities for influential community actors to engage in dialogue with elected local politicians and civic leaders. In the 2003 Annual Gala, the KAC drew around 200 elected officials from the federal, state and city government level as well as professional and powerful Korean Americans including lawyers, politicians, and company owners. In sum, as seen in the case of the KAC, the discourse of 1.5 generation generated Korean American professionals' self-empowerment in the Korean community.

2) Space of the Intentional Hybridity

The KAC is currently located in a building called as the Koreatown Organization Association Center (KOA Center) located on the northeast corner of the intersection of 6th Street and Harvard Boulevard in Koreatown (see Figure 3). In 1998, the Community Redevelopment Agency of the City of Los Angeles (CRA/LA) originally planned to provide $250,000 for relocating the Korean American Museum (KAM) as a part of its redevelopment plan. However, the KAM viewed this offer as an opportunity to construct an independent facility for Korean American organizations located in Koreatown. In 1999, the KAM along with other 1.5 generation organizations established the Koreatown Organizations Association (KOA) as its separate institution to take charge of the construction project for housing five Korean American organizations including the Korean American Coalition in Los Angeles (KAC), the Korean Youth and Community Center (KYCC), the Korean American Family Service Center (KAFSC), the Korean Health, Education, Information, and Research Center (KHEIR), and the Korean American Museum (KAM) (Kim, 2003). All of these five organizations are the so-called 1.5 generation organizations, which claim their difference from what they critically call the first-generation '*chin-mok-dan-che*' (meaning 'organization whose principal objective is the members' mutual friendship and socializing' in Korean) such as the Korean American Chamber of Commerce of Los Angeles (KACC/LA) and the Korean American Federation of Los Angeles (KAFLA).

In 2001, the CRA/LA proposed an amendment of the redevelopment project to relocate the Korean American Museum (KAM), and suggested redirecting the fund to the Korean Organizations Association (KOA) in the meeting of city council members. The fund was originally a part of slum/blight area benefit funds (SBA) provided by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, which were allocated for activities that address prevention or elimination of slums or blight in a designated area (Community Redevelopment Agency of the City of Los Angeles, 2000). However, according to the file on this revision from the Office of City Clerk, the agency later suggested to change the objective from slum/blight area benefit to low/moderate

area benefit so that it could transfer the funds for the KAM relocation project (Office of City Clerk of Los Angeles, 2001). The amendment shows how a specific set of redevelopment projects, goals, and their grounding discourse can be easily transformed not by a rational process of decision-making but by unofficial networks among entangled development actors including city council members such as Tom LaBonge and 1.5 generation professionals in Koreatown. Changing the object of the project contract illustrates that the rationales grounding government-led redevelopment are actually operating as discourses. Alongside of the funds from the CRA/LA, the KOA also raised funds from Korean-established Ma-Young-Sook Foundation, Korea Times USA, Korean-owned Nara Bank (Kim, 2003). After all the KOA Center congratulated its opening ceremony in June 2001 (Gilman, 2001), and all of the KOA member organizations except the KYCC has finished moving into this facility until 2003. The increasing expansion and growth of these 1.5 generation Korean American organizations was possible through their unofficial but apparently public partnership with local politicians and the city government's agency. In such a process, what these organizations call 1.5 generation has been a powerful discourse through which they can empower their own organizations in Koreatown.

In 2004, on the fourth floor of the KOA Center, the Korean American Museum (KAM) held an exhibition named "LA Koreatown: Celebration of Continuity and Change" on May 6, 2004. Ki-Suh Park, President of the the KAM, announced that the exhibition would show the challenge that immigrants had faced with and the spirit through which they have overcome it. Around 50 "leading" people joined the opening reception of the KAM's exhibition including City Council member Tom LaBonge and Korean Consul General Yoon-Bok Lee. Among those participants, the most spotlighted figure was Tom LaBonge, who Ki-Suh Park announced has been one of the most enthusiastic supporters not only to the Korean American Museum but also to the Korean American Community in Koreatown. Tom LaBonge responded that he would continue to be one of the closest friends to the Korean Americans in Koreatown, which actually meant the 1.5 generation Korean American professional class.

Aiming at tracing the remarkable blossoming of the Korean community in Los Angeles (Korean American Museum 2004), the KAM divided the history of Koreatown into five phases: (1) Independence Movement Generations 1904-1929 Bunker Hill Era; (2) Independence Movement Generations 1930-1950 Jefferson Era; (3) Korean War and Aftermath 1951-1964; (4) Olympic Boulevard Era 1965-1992; and (5) Wilshire Era and Beyond 1992-present. Spatially the Olympic

Figure 3. The Korean Organizations Association (KOA) Center, 2004 (Photo by author)

Boulevard Era is characterized by Korean-owned small businesses in southern Koreatown while the Wilshire Era is represented by office buildings, professional services, and large shopping malls along Wilshire Boulevard. The photos and other visual materials for this exhibition mainly illustrated how Korean immigrants and their descendants have survived various difficulties, challenges, and discrimination. In that context, the KAM's exhibition conceptualized Koreatown as a "product" of such community efforts to construct Korean-owned town in a foreign land. In such concept, space was often viewed as the *tabula rasa* on which Korean immigrants inscribed their history, culture, and, most importantly, growing community power. On the contrary, the existing local neighborhoods' history and culture with which Korean immigrants interacted was invisible in the KAM's exhibition. What was visualized in this exhibition on Koreatown was how Koreans succeeded, although such success is the crystallization of the partnership among some Korean American investors, professionals, and their allied local political supporters. The exhibition also shows how they were often challenged, while such challenge is not a one-sided racial violence against Korean Americans but a consequence of complicated socio-economic conflicts and contradictions. For example, the picture of the 1992 riots focused on how Korean owned businesses were destroyed, while it leads to forgetting the spatial-historical context in which the riots happened (see Figure 4). It finally shows how they are now empowered in terms of economic dominance in the Koreatown area, although such dominance ironically implies an increasing socio-economic polarization in Koreatown. The history that the KAM represented clearly illustrates how those hegemonic Korean American actors in Koreatown view and understand Koreatown. After all, in the KAM's exhibition, Koreatown acquires its meaning, its own place-identity, through the growing political and economic power of Korean Americans.

The current "Wilshire era" is not a prosperous era for all people in Koreatown but for powerful development actors and their allies, such as David Lee, a 1.5 generation Korean American owning the Jamison Properties Inc. located at the heart of Koreatown in Wilshire Boulevard. He was also a board member of the Korean American Museum (KAM) and the Korean American Coalition (KAC). He immigrated to Los Angeles along with his parents who purchased a small grocery store in Koreatown in 1971. After the 1992 riots, a lot of businesses moved out of the office buildings located in Wilshire Boulevard, which caused increasing vacancy rates and dropping property values in the area. It was the exact time when Lee along with his Korean investors began to aggressively purchase office buildings including the Los Angeles World Trade Center in downtown Los Angeles. Currently, he owns more than 70 buildings of which nearly a half of them are located in Koreatown along Wilshire Boulevard (Fixmer, 2004). In a sense, David Lee is contributing to the local economy of Koreatown by inviting an increasing number of professional businesses into the area, because he requires 1~2 dollars per square feet for office spaces, which is 50~80 percent lower than buildings in nearby areas (*Ibid.*). Actually, the vacancy rates in Wilshire Boulevard are as low as five percent. However, such an argument doesn't consider the immense competition caused by the increase of retail

stores and professional businesses in contemporary Koreatown, which engenders an increasing number of low-paid part-time jobs for local residents and subsequently aggravate the conditions of poor residents. In this way, the economic boom in Koreatown's property market followed by redevelopment projects increases the overall cost of living and creates low-paid poor jobs.

4. Conclusion

I particularly focused on analyzing the discourse of '1.5 generation' frequently employed by new professional Korean American community organizations. Evoking such metaphors as bridge and in-betweenness, the discourse of 1.5 generation politically grounds newly emerging Korean American organizations such as the Korean American Coalition (KAC) whose mission is to empower Korean Americans. Let alone its general contribution to the Korean American community in Los Angeles, 1.5 generation discourse is problematic at least in three ways. First, the term essentializes and depoliticizes nation, ethnicity, and ethnic identity, and subsequently divides Korean Americans into two major categories, that is, first generation Korean immigrants and second generation Korean Americans. Second, the discourse conceals a variety of social, political, and economic fragmentations within the Korean American community. The politics of 1.5

Figure 4. Representation of 4.29, or the 1992 riots, at the Korean American Museum: Images of destruction de-contextualize the riots, 2004 (Photo by author)

generation is not a place-based grassroots movement but a top-down political empowerment led by a group of Korean American professionals, politicians, and business owners who actually empower their own positions through the discourse of 'empowering Korean Americans'. Third, this discourse is based on a problematic dualism between what they call 'mainstream society' meaning hegemonic, normative, and powerful social/political space and the Korean community that they often regard as a space of abjection signifying the oppositional side of mainstream society. In this context, ethnic solidarity is a strong element in their efforts to 'save' their co-ethnic community and connect it to the mainstream society, that is, a space of power and dominance. I argued that what they call a bridge operates as a ladder leading a particular group of Koreans to the space of power that they desire.

The significance of migrant communities is in its 'lived' collective position to challenge such essentialized notions as nation, ethnic identity and gender. Many of my interviewees living and working in Koreatown already knew how it is fictitious to argue ethnic solidarity or Korean American identity based on their everyday experience. It was a knowledge formed through their lived experience in Koreatown. Such a fact implies that the lived politics of organic hybridity is not detached from its material basis, which Lukács (1971) showed in his Marxist analysis of consciousness. Critical consciousness of hybridity is not based on intentional self-empowering politics but grounded on the subject's material experience positioned in the social structure in a specific space. Hence, repositioned intentional hybridity is none the less an ideology that empowers its own position while giving up the critical task of hybridity consciousness. If such terms as hybridity, in-betweenness and even nomadism have emerged as some of the most popular leitmotivs employed, that automatically means that such hybrid and mobile practices have now become one of the central strategies for hegemonic development actors of global capitalism. How joyfully is the term "globalization" employed by those who regards the term as a strategy?

The lived hybridity of diasporic Koreatown is in the middle of the total deterritorialization and reterritorialization by hegemonic development actors that conjoined for empowering their own political voice. The "inbetwixt" Korean Americans' collective identity and history is now institutionalized by new hegemonic groups such as the KAC. As the KAM exhibition shows, Koreatown's history is decoded as the history of patriotic Korean nationalists and immigrant entrepreneurs, which overcame challenges, survived destructive discrimination, and contributed to bridge Korea and the U.S. Yet, there was no history of lived hybrids and their consciousness in the museum. There was no history of those who crisscrossed the ethnic boundary and desired to build Koreatown as a place of transculturation.

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Note

1) The term 'abject', originally meaning 'cast out' or 'excluded', comes from the French psychoanalytic feminist Julia Kristeva's (1982; 1987) critique of the Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis. In Freudina-Lacanian psychosexual structure, the incestial desire and its immediate prohibition by the Father, which is the social, is a fundamental ground on which a lack generates the external object of desire that subsequently allows the self to be incorporated into the symbolic social order of meanings. According to Kristeva (1982), however, the Freudian-Lacanian system grounds secondary, paternal, and phallo-centric fantasy in individual psychosexual development. She argues what comes first is the material, physical detachment of the baby's body from the mother, which subsequently produces the baby's desire to deny its dependence to the mother. The baby finally declares 'I am free!', and simultaneously represses the mother (or the maternal), termed as "primal repression". Here, the abjection implies the cast-out, i.e., repressed maternal, sexual and filthy attributes, represented by such objects as menstrual blood, masturbation, prostitutes, urine, excrement, and so on. By expanding the notion of 'abjection', McClintock (1995) argues that certain social elements in abjection are not fully expunged, but trace the silhouette of society on the unsteady edges of the self. The expelled abject haunts the subject as its inner constitutive boundary, and it forms the self's inner limit. Alongside the normative masculinist spaces of modernity, there are not only abject people such as prostitutes, the colonized, the non-whites, the unemployed, and the insane, but also 'spaces of abjection' in societal margins such as the slum, the ghetto, the garret, the brothel, and the convent.

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Correspondence: Kyonghwan Park, Department of Social Studies Education, Ewha Womans University, 120-750, Seoul, South Korea (e-mail: kpark3@gmail.com, cell phone: 010-6377-1283)

교신 : 박경환, 120-750 서울시 서대문구 대현동 11-1 이화여자대학교 사회생활학과 (이메일: kpark3@gmail.com)

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