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This article examines the life story of Muhammad Kkansu (Chŏng Suil), a once distinguished foreign professor of Arabic history and culture at Dankook University and a prolific scholar on the Silk Road, who was indicted in 1996 on charges of espionage and use of a false identity as an Arab of Filipino-Lebanese descent to enter South Korea. It considers the complex circumstances that shaped his life choices as a diasporic Korean living in China and South Korea's blind and willful ignorance of the North, which ironically enabled a diasporic Korean from China, to pass as an "Arab" right under its nose. In contrast to accounts of North Korean spies, it humanizes the experiences of Kkansu, illustrating how a diasporic Korean learned to dissimulate by adopting an ambiguous identity and navigate the social and political realities of national division and anxieties caused by global and internecine hostilities during the Cold War. His imprisonment did not foreclose the possibility of becoming an academic again; in fact, he reemerged after a presidential pardon in 2003 and authored more than a dozen important monographs and encyclopedias on the Silk Road. While there are many contradictions and gaps about his personal life, Kkansu's life story challenges the master narratives of national culture, homogeneity, belongingness, and identity.

Keywords: Anti-communism, cold-war, diaspora, dissimulation, identity, nationalism, postwar North and South Korea, race

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> "Exile is predicated on the existence of, love for,
> and bond with, one's native place; what is true of
> all exile is not that home and love of home are lost,
> but that loss is inherent in the very existence of both.
>
> (Edward Said, 2000:185)

Introduction

On 23 July 1996, the *Tonga ilbo* reported that the Agency for National Security Planning (*Angibu*) had arrested Muhammad Kkansu, a 62-year-old distinguished foreign professor of Arabic history and culture at Dankook University, on charges of espionage and use of a false identity as an Arab of Filipino-Lebanese descent to enter South Korea. He would be sentenced to twelve years in prison. Kkansu was not only a prolific scholar but also the sole expert in Arabic Studies in South Korea at the time, conversant in twelve languages, and the author of half a dozen books and articles on the Silk Road. He was also a household name, frequently contributing columns as a guest writer for various local newspapers and magazines. Scholars were also familiar with his lectures on Arabic culture and history at different universities in South Korea. He attended the Seoul Central Mosque (which opened in 1976 in It'aewŏn) at least twice a month and was a respected figure in the Muslim community in Seoul. Adopting the persona of a real aficionado of Korean culture, Kkansu regularly visited historical sites around the country and contributed his impressions as a foreigner to various popular magazines and newspapers. His performance was so credible that his graduate adviser, Kim Wŏnmo, and colleagues in the Department of History never even once suspected that he was anything but an Arab (M.J. Yi, 1996a). Having successfully evaded suspicion for twelve years, Kkansu routinely faxed messages from various hotels in Seoul to a North Korean agent in Beijing. It was only through a simple twist of fate when a lobby attendant at the Plaza Hotel in Seoul misidentified him as a wanted drug dealer after a botched fax at the hotel's business center, that he was arrested. The shocking revelation that Kkansu was not really an Arab, but a North Korean spy masquerading as a 52-year-old academic took the country by surprise. Embarrassed over its failure to spot the fake identity and academic credentials, Dankook University immediately dismissed Kkansu and stripped him of his doctorate degree. In addition, the Ministry of Education quickly replaced an excerpt that he wrote for a

middle-school textbook in 1991 after revelations that they had been duped by a North Korean agent (M.H. Kwŏn, 1996). For the authorities, this case represented a far more serious breach of security than the common stealing of identities of deceased or missing Japanese by North Korean operatives in neighboring Japan (Boynton, 2017). In fact, this was the first spy case, which involved an international network and the adoption of multiple nationalities by an individual who had infiltrated deeply into South Korean intellectual and social circles. Based on the evidence that the *Angibu* presented at the Press Center on 22 July 1996, the court charged Kkansu with espionage and "abetting the enemy" by sending summaries of domestic events that he culled from public newspapers and journals to a North Korean agent in Beijing (Y.J. Yi, 1997). He confessed to the authorities during his interrogation that he had entered North Korea four times between July 1987 and February 1995 and received operational funds. He also corroborated the charges that he had received direct orders via radio 161 times since June 1984 and sent 80 reports via facsimile from the business offices at the Lotte Hotel, President's Hotel, Joseon Hotel, and the Plaza Hotel.[1]

Motivated by cold-war logics and reinforced by extensive coverage of other high-profile spy cases, the furor over Kkansu's elaborate scheme and ability to pass undetected generated widespread fear. The public expressed little interest in understanding the complex circumstances that gave rise to his life choices, in particular, the pressures that diasporic Koreans living in China like Kkansu were forced to experience in the post-liberation era with the onset of the Cold War and national division. Drawing on Kkansu's fascinating life story, this article argues that South Korea's blind and willful ignorance of the North due to its entrenched Cold War ideology ironically enabled a diasporic Korean from China to pose as a Lebanese-Filipino Muslim scholar right under its nose. Not only did Kkansu become one of the most accomplished scholars of Arabic Studies but also worked as a spy for North Korean intelligence until his arrest in 1996. It also offers a sobering perspective on the anti-communist propaganda and psychological warfare in South Korea under the draconian National Security Act enforced since 1948. In contrast to other accounts of North Korean spies, it seeks to humanize the experiences of Kkansu to illustrate how a diasporic Korean employed survival strategies that he learned during his early life in China to navigate the social and political realities of national division and anxieties caused by global and internecine hostilities during the Cold War. Kkansu successfully engaged in dissimulation as an exile-cum-cosmopolitan, relying on his linguistic abilities and erudition much like the

multi-lingual surgeon, Yi In'guk, in Chŏn Kwangyong's short story *Kapitan Ri* (*Kkŏppittan Ri*, 1962) who is able to thrive under the Japanese, Russians, and then the Americans who shared the same skills. He was also similar to the Korean protagonist in Kim Saryang's award winning novel *Into the Light* (*Hikari no naka ni*, 1939), who could pass as a Japanese yet felt conflicted about his betrayal of his Korean identity (Wender, 2010). Even as Kkansu passed as an Arab, he longed to embrace his true ethnic identity that had been so central in forming his identity as a diasporic Korean. To add yet another twist to this fascinating story, Kkansu's arrest and imprisonment did not foreclose the possibility of becoming an academic again; in fact, he would reemerge with renewed enthusiasm after a special presidential amnesty by Kim Dae-jung on 30 April 2003 and subsequent naturalization as a South Korean citizen on May 14. Kkansu would author more than a dozen important monographs and encyclopedias on the Silk Road, as well as serve as the director of the Korean Institute of Civilizational Exchanges, the first privately run research institute solely dedicated to the serious study of the Silk Road. Kkansu could finally remove his mask of dissimulation and allow his inner diasporic Korean identity to find a home in his new national identity. Ultimately, the narrative of Kkansu's life—details of which still remain elusive—tells more about South Koreans than about the scholar-spy himself. Koreans were so monoethnic and homogenous that they lacked the ability to identify any discrepancies in Kkansu's identity—whether it be in his accent or mannerisms. To them, all foreigners were the monolithic Other, which made Kkansu's dissimulation all the easier to achieve.

From Routes and Roots: A Diasporic Korean-Chinese

Muhammed Kkansu (Chŏng Suil) was born on 2 March 1934 in Longjing City, Mingchuancun Town, Yanbian Prefecture, in Jilin Province in northeast China, formerly known as Manchuria. Like many impoverished tenant farmers who were dispossessed of their rights to farm after the Government-General's cadastral survey, which lasted for eight years, and other land reforms to improve agricultural productivity, Kkansu's grandfather decided to leave Hamgyŏng Province, and crossed the border with his family to settle in Jilin Province (which would later become the puppet state of Manchukuo) to escape poverty and seek a better future. Their invisibility as ethnic Koreans in China reinforced their marginality but proved to be invaluable in times of crisis such as in the Asia-Pacific War

(1931–1945). Caught between Japanese colonial power and Chinese natives, tenant farmers like Kkansu's grandfather deliberately took advantage of their ambiguous identities to "sustain their village communities and to survive the wartime" (Chong, 2013:11, 108). Their very marginality made it possible to remain under the radar and not attract attention. The collapse of the Japanese Empire in August 1945 did not result in a peaceful transition of power as almost two million ethnic Koreans would have to deal with two more deadly civil conflicts—the Chinese civil war and revolution in 1949. Ethnic Koreans also were impacted by the bloody war that ensued on the Korean peninsula between the northern and southern regimes for eight years—after the surrender of Japan, which profoundly shaped the trajectory of Kkansu's life.

Kkansu's struggles with his identity and pain of racism as a first-generation ethnic Korean resident in northeast China provides a glimpse into his complex subjectivity and relationship to his "originary homeland," which was now divided into two separate countries. While Kkansu had to learn Japanese in elementary school in Manchuria because it was compulsory during the wartime period (1931–1945), he would not undergo the same decolonialization processes as his compatriots in postliberation South and North Korea where people extricated themselves completely of Japanese by "unlearning" it and exclusively using Korean (Son, 2013). Rather, as the historian Chong Eun An (2013:11) observes, "Unlike colonized Koreans in the Korean peninsula, ethnic Koreans in northeast China survived colonization and decolonization with tactical ambiguity in their political and ethnic identities in the Japanese Empire and as active ethnic participants in Chinese nation building." While roughly 500,000 ethnic Koreans opted to return to North Korea after liberation, a significant number of farmers like Kkansu's parents chose to remain in northeast China, where they adopted Chinese citizenship under the People's Republic of China's (PRC) national classification project (*minzu shibie*) in 1954, comprising roughly 60 percent of Yanbian Autonomous Prefecture, a newly established district for ethnic Koreans in northeastern Jilin Province (Lankov, 2007a; Mullaney, 2010).

Between 1949 and 1951, during the height of the Chinese Revolution and Korean civil conflict, Kkansu attended Yanbian High School and began to learn formal Mandarin for the first time. Upon graduation, he was selected as one of the two first ethnic minorities from his prefecture to be admitted to the prestigious Eastern Studies Department at Beijing University, a major pipeline for students wishing to enter the Chinese diplomatic corps. Despite his surprising academic success as an ethnic

Korean-Chinese (*Chaoxianzu*) in the newly established PRC, his identity was still unstable and such uncertainty influenced the way he identified personally and socially with China rather than Korea, at least during his college years. It would not be a stretch to argue that Kkansu may have learned at a very early age how to dissimulate by adopting an ambiguous identity. Just as ethnic Koreans navigated between Japanese colonial powers and Chinese nationalists in Manchukuo, Kkansu would also have to negotiate his ambiguous ethnic position in the Chinese Foreign Service and later in North and South Korea.

As an undergraduate student at Beijing University, Kkansu continued to hone his Mandarin language skills and became deeply immersed in Russian, which was considered a key language among diplomats during the height of the Cold War. After earning his bachelor's degree in 1955, Kkansu—encouraged by his mentor Ji Xialin (1911–2009), one of China's first Indologist and founder of both the Eastern Languages and Eastern Studies departments respectively at Beijing University—applied for a prestigious Chinese government scholarship and received a fellowship to study abroad in Egypt. Ji advised the precocious Kkansu to learn Arabic and introduced him to the *A Memoir of the Pilgrimage to the Five Kingdoms of India* (*Wangoch'ŏnch'ukkukchŏn*), a travelogue written by Hyech'o (704–787), a Silla monk who had traveled the Silk Road to India (C.H. Kwŏn, 2000). Seeking to emulate Ji's remarkable mastery of Indology through his experience of studying abroad at the University of Göttingen, Kkansu enrolled himself in the School of Humanities at Cairo University in Egypt from 1956 to 1958.[2] In Cairo, Kkansu also began to learn English, the official language of instruction. In order to read the secondary works on classical Arab texts, he worked to gain proficiency in German as well. Upon completion of his study in Cairo, Kkansu passed the Foreign Service Examination and took up a position in the Chinese Diplomatic Services as a second grade official in 1958 and accepted his first assignment abroad in Rabat, Morocco until 1963 (Yu, 1996).

Kkansu's Return to the DPRK

Kkansu could have worked as a career diplomat, yet the lack of opportunities to move up in the ranks may explain his return to North Korea with his wife in 1963 (Yu, 1996). Besides, given that many Chinese intellectuals, including ethnic Koreans, suffered from several waves of political persecution, violence, discrimination, imprisonment, and economic hardship during the

Anti-Rightist Campaigns of the 1950s and later the Cultural Revolution, intellectuals like Kkansu may have felt compelled to return to North Korea (Lankov, 2007b). In a Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Central Committee instruction regarding ethnic Koreans, it mandated that if this group desired to "have social relations with [North] Korea and they have applied to participate in the development of [North] Korea, then in general we should allow them to move and reside in [North] Korea. We will not make additional restrictions."[3] Despite persistent efforts by Zhou Enlai (the premiere of the People's Republic of China, who had run the Ministry of Foreign Affairs until 1958) to persuade Kkansu to remain in the Chinese Foreign Service, he secured permission to move to North Korea. After becoming naturalized as a North Korean, given his unique background and experience, Kkansu found employment as a professor in the Eastern Studies Department at P'yŏngyang International Relations University from 1964 and 1968 and then as a professor in the Eastern Studies Department at P'yŏngyang International Language University where he taught Arabic from 1969 to 1974.

Unlike the South, North Korea was a very attractive place to live in the 1960s with all the opportunities that it offered as the second most industrialized nation in Asia, trailing only Japan (Cumings, 2003). Like its patron, the Soviet Union, the North branched out to engage with developing countries that were beginning to undergo the complex process of decolonization. In contrast to its southern counterpart, which relied on American patronage through economic and military aid, the major international goals of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) was to project its assets and influence abroad by becoming a "beacon" to postcolonial states in Africa and Asia after the Final Communiqué of the African-Asian Conference in Bandung on 24 April 1955 (Young, 2013; Armstrong, 2013). By the 1960s, several new African nation-states started to embrace Kim's self-reliance (*chuch'e*) philosophy as an alternative to Western imperialism and as a model of autonomous industrialization and development (Gills, 1996). For example, in October 1961, the DPRK and Mali produced a joint communique entitled "Afro-Asian Solidarity against U.S. Imperialism," and in 1969, the DPRK organized the first *chuch'e* idea study group in that country and started to build their own brand of internationalism (Yonhap News Agency, 2003:536).

For Kkansu, the socioeconomic and political changes in North Korea during the 1960s represented a world apart from the poverty that he had experienced living among tenant farmers in Yanbian. In February 1960, Kim Il Sung introduced the "*Ch'ongsanri* Spirit and Method" to guide economic management, calling on higher institutions, such as the Party

apparatus and the Workers' Party's Propaganda and Agitation Department, to support lower organizations' implementation of party directives and policies to instill a sense of responsibility among workers (Gills, 1996:228). On the political front, the fundamentals of *juche* ideology, which emphasized political independence, economic self-sustenance, and self-reliance in defense, would become central pillars of the party, which Kim Il Sung spelled out in a speech at the "Ali Archam" Academy of Social Sciences of Indonesia on 14 April 1965 (Scalapino and Lee, 1972:1220).

Kkansu was also cognizant of the tumultuous events transpiring in the south. The raucous April 19 Revolution in 1960 that drove President Syngman Rhee out of power and the 1961 military coup paved the way for a military-sponsored developmental state, dubbed as the "Miracle on the Han River." In 1965, South Korea signed the Korea-Japan Basic Treaty, normalizing diplomatic relations with their former colonial rulers, receiving more than $200 million in public loans, $300 million in grants, an additional $300 million in commercial credits, as well as technological and business expertise, which would help "incorporate" South Korea into the Japanese economic zones (Lie, 1998:60–61). These separate ideological approaches to their economies set the two Koreas on divergent post-colonial paths. Whereas the South hitched its fortunes on the developments of the expanding Northeast Asian economic system anchored by Japan, the North increasingly turned inward toward self-sustainment, which would have ramifications for its future. Drawing on his earlier writings and interviews, one can make some conjectures about Kkansu's eagerness to assist the North's path of development, which would profoundly shape his career trajectory.

Kkansu's Second Conversion: Spying for the DPRK

Park Chung-hee's draconian economic measures to wrench his country out of poverty at any cost had a profound impact on the population. This included the 1962 emigration policy, which sought to earn foreign exchange as well as to relieve domestic population (and political) pressure. At the same time that United States Agency for International Development (USAID) sponsored 3,000 Koreans to study abroad in the United States for training in medical and other professions, the South Korean government actively promoted overseas adoptions of infants while the Hart-Cellar Act (1965) enabled Korean women entering the United States as wives of American military personnel to sponsor their parents and

siblings, triggering a chain migration. As the Korean diaspora began to increase exponentially during this decade with immigration to the Americas, between 1963 and 1965, South Korea dispatched the first wave of miners and nurses to West Germany, whose remittances would be used by the state to procure hard foreign currency (H.S. Kim et al., 2009). As these demographic shifts took place, both Koreas were drawn further into Cold War politics and war (especially the Vietnam War), resulting in rising hostilities between the North and South along the demilitarized zone (DMZ), which culminated into a series of provocations. It all started with the infiltration of the Blue House by a 31-member North Korean commando team, which would have a direct impact on Kkansu's life in the DPRK.

Given Kkansu's superb command of Arabic, four Asian languages (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Persian), as well as five Western languages (Russian, German, French, Spanish, and English), he stood out as an ideal candidate to be recruited by the DPRK authorities to become a spy (Son, 2013). The main duties of the No. 35 Department of the Workers' Party under the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Party involved espionage activities and terrorist operations in South Korea and other destinations abroad (S.H. Chŏn, 2010). Kkansu would be recruited to work for the North Korean espionage operations in the South unit (*Taenam gongjak*) starting in September of 1974, and he would be trained for the next five years in espionage while spending a considerable amount of time working on enhancing his spoken Arabic and grooming himself to resemble a typical Middle Eastern man. Very little is known about this chapter in Kkansu's life most likely because he was aware of the dangers of disclosing sensitive information which could result in the punishment of his family members back in North Korea.

Kkansu's First Assignment Abroad

Between the 1970s and early 1990s, several hundred North Koreans served in Africa as technical experts, propagandists, agricultural engineers, and military advisors, providing economic, cultural, and military assistance on a very wide scale up (T.J. Chŏn, 2003). North Korea also became a major destination for students among developing African nations, and would claim an important role in the "south-to-south cooperation" and Non-Aligned Movement (Ramani, 2015). Kkansu

joined this group of ideological workers and gained new credentials through his work abroad.

According to the *Angibu* reports, Kkansu left P'yŏngyang in January 1979 as Yi Ch'ŏlsu and acquired a Lebanese passport the following month with the help of the Lebanese-Friendship Association (Ch'oe, 1996). There is little information about how many years Kkansu spent in the Middle East and North Africa, but he claimed to have worked at the Social Economics Research Institute in Tunis as a researcher at Tunisia University and earned a Master's degree from 1980 to 1981. He allegedly claimed to have earned both his Bachelor of Science and Master's degree at Beirut Arab University in his early monographs, which he later deleted from his biography after being indicted. It is most likely that he obtained Lebanese citizenship during his studies as a civil war was brewing and as North Korean military involvement in both Syria and Lebanon started to increase in the 1970s. Yet, it became more apparent to Kkansu that it would be even extremely difficult to enter South Korea on a Lebanese passport without raising suspicion. Given the big void in his life narrative from 1979 to 1982, one might surmise that he was remaking his identity as an Arab from Southeast Asia to infiltrate into South Korea. Perhaps he believed that South Korea would welcome a visiting scholar or student from the Third World to promote the developmentalist narrative of Park Chung-hee's claim that his nation was a beacon to the poor developing countries of Southeast Asia. This belief could explain his itinerant life and travels to Papua New Guinea, Australia, and to several Southeast Asian countries in early 1982. Kkansu lived for a while in Indonesia before securing a position as a lecturer at the University of Malaya in the Academy of Islamic Studies from July 1982 to early 1984. In the end, after all these peregrinations, he somehow managed to acquire Filipino citizenship in February of 1984 (Yu, 1996). Although North Korea did not establish official diplomatic relations with the Philippines until 12 July 2000, it provided financial and military assistance to the Communist Party of the Philippines and the New People's Army, a Maoist guerrilla army founded in 1969, which could explain why Kkansu was able to forge citizenship documents and obtain a passport more easily in the Philippines (Gunaratna and Kam, 2016:561). All this goes to show how Kkansu's life reflected the rich contacts that North Korea had also fostered with developing countries, allowing the itinerant scholar to establish himself in so many countries. It also reveals Kkansu's ability to adapt to any culture, language, or people—like a chameleon changing his color to secure degrees, lectureships, even citizenship in other nations.

Kkansu in Anti-Communist South Korea

On 29 April 1984, Kkansu received a student visa and entered South Korea with a Filipino passport, claiming that he was a second-generation Lebanese born in the Philippines. While teaching at the University of Malaya in Malaysia, he befriended a visiting Korean professor whom he later contacted in February 1984 to inquire about the possibilities of honing his language skills at the Korean Language Institute at Yonsei University. Upon admission, he took a placement examination and qualified to enter the Korean Language Level 3 course. He was admitted to Dankook University later in September that year as the first international student in their doctoral history program. Between 1984 and 1989, Kkansu embarked on his lifelong dream to write a dissertation on the history of exchanges among civilizations—a manuscript that he entitled, "A Study of the History of Silla and Arab Islamic Empire Relationships" (P.J. Kim, 2008).

For Kkansu, performing his "Arabness" in South Korea required having an outward Arab appearance, displaying stereotypical dark curly hair, olive skin-tones, gold-rimmed spectacles, and masculine facial features, which included sporting a moustache, a sign of virility in some Middle Eastern countries (Roth, 2013:22–27). As Wendy Roth (2013:27) has observed in her study of Latinos in the United States, individuals "only have limited control over how they are perceived racially by others." While physical cues might have been adequate for Kkansu, he also strategically deployed cultural performance purposefully by altering his behavior, faking an Arab accent, or adopting a cosmopolitan persona, which led his colleagues to regard him as both as an Arab and a man of the world. His ability to act out everyday performances of the "Other" became so real that he not only deceived his own South Korean wife but colleagues in his department at Dankook University into believing he was an Arab (An, 2004). Perhaps the most fascinating aspect to Kkansu's life story is that it exposes in a disquieting way how master narratives of national culture, homogeneity, belongingness, and identity can be performative and predicated on "learning" certain racial schemas like "Arabness" or "South Koreanness" (Butler, 1990). In a rare twist, Kkansu was able to "act out" who he was and what he wanted to be seen as because of the grossly stereotypical ideas and visual representations of Arabs and North Koreans by the mass media (Aly, 2015:6).

For South Koreans, the Arab world was a major overseas destination for Korean male workers seeking employment in construction projects from the early 1970s to the mid-1980s (Choucri, 1986). While the typical

duration of their stint overseas was less than three years, a small percentage of these migrant workers who went abroad to Libya, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait converted to Islam. However, despite being a sending nation, the vast majority of Koreans could not distinguish the terms Islam, Muslim, or Arabs, lumping the Arab world into one collective of oil magnates and a desert scattered with sheiks and camels. These were common images Koreans encountered in western films such as the 007 James Bond series or imported Hong Kong films (Jarmakani, 2008). Ironically, masquerading as an "Arab" with a peculiar accent allowed Kkansu to pass without triggering any suspicion in a very monoethnic and homogenous South Korea; his North Korean accent would have certainly alerted the authorities that he was a spy. He did not need to worry about the South Koreans detecting an accent in his Arabic, which may have very well been the case despite his many years of study in Arab lands.

While Kkansu was able to exploit the profound cultural ignorance and general lack of awareness of Arabs or Muslims, he still had a lot to learn about the tumultuous political conditions in Korea and adapt to the realities of the Cold War. Kkansu had arrived in Seoul four years after the bloody civil uprising in Kwangju, South Chŏlla Province where Chun Doo Hwan's forces massacred more than 600 civilians, which generated mass protests against his military-style dictatorship, galvanizing the 386 generation (those born in the 1960s and who attended university in the 1980s) to become active participants in the democratic movement (N.H. Lee, 2007). Furthermore, tensions between the two Koreas worsened during the 1980s under President Ronald Reagan's anti-communist crusades, which tolerated and even abetted autocratic leaders like Chun Doo Hwan, who was cordially invited to the White House on 2 February 1981, despite his anti-democratic activities, to contain communism during the height of the cold war (C.J. Lee, 2006).

Domestically, under such volatile political conditions, South Korea's red scares offered a compelling rationale for not only expanding the military but also extinguishing any form of dissent against the dictatorship. This was no different than the United States where "Cold War rationality in all its variants was summoned into being in order to tame the terrors of decisions too consequential to be left to human reason alone, traditionally understood as mindful deliberation" (Erikson et al., 2013:2). These psychological warfare campaigns touched upon every aspect of everyday life from books and films to the regimentation of behavior. This "paranoiac style" had a huge impact on the cultural production during this period (S.H. Yi, 2003). Any 40 or 50-year-old South Korean today could

recount stories of being told in elementary school to draw pictures of red devils or to recite famous statements like "I hate communists" by Yi Sŭngbok, a nine-year-old boy whose alleged murder by North Korean commandos in 1968 was widely publicized to mythic proportions by Park Chung-hee's regime. These campaigns epitomized anti-communism in postwar South Korea and the draconian National Security Law, which allowed (and continues to allow until the present day) the government to violate people's civil liberties.

Much like the United States during the 1950s, red-baiting projects and anti-communist sentiment affected nearly every arena of cultural production to trigger fear, anxiety, and a new mode of hyper-patriotism (Mickenberg, 2005). For example, the state supported the remaking of popular western novels, such as George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, replacing the Soviets with North Koreans as pigs, the Japanese as dogs, and the United States as the lion (Y.E. Kim, 2006). In the famous children's cartoon *General Ttori* (*Ttorijanggun*) the protagonist kicks the "dictator Kim Il-sung" really hard with a taekwondo move which transforms him into a pig. By producing an authoritative version of the enemy that was dramatized and simplified, much like the United States during the cold war, the South Korean state expected its people to accept uncritically "the clear and present dangers that seemed to lurk around every corner" (Robin, 2003:7). A list of recommended anti-communist texts, including comics such as the aforementioned series were readily available in comic stores (*manhwabang*) and used to indoctrinate children. In addition, every year, the state hosted essay, poster, and oratorical anti-communist contests, highlighting the most damaging stereotypical ones that dehumanized the north as primitive, brutal, inhumane, poor, and oppressive, which certainly had a potent effect on how Koreans visualized their northern enemy through the manufacturing of fear of the northern wind (*pukp'ung*) or red reunification (*chŏkhwat'ongil*) (S.H. Yi, 2003).

For Kkansu, the performance of his "Arabness" allowed him to completely fly under the radar of the Cold War, using his privileged position as a foreigner and scholar, frequently attending a mosque, to circumvent any charges of being a North Korean spy or engaging in any communist subversive activities. Ironically, his erudite scholarship offered a shield for him to do whatever he wanted and in a perversely ironic way thrive as a scholar in the most oppressive conditions. As a foreigner, Kkansu was not under any duress to engage in any of the anti-communist activities required of civilians. Every other citizen had to endure the anti-communist campaign instilled through civil training exercises, which were

regularly enforced on the 15th of each month at 2 p.m. for about 30 minutes. Schools conducted air raid drills as a state-wide synchronized siren would prompt students to duck under their desks with their hands clutched around their heads as everything was at a standstill in Korea. These drills often involved both civilian and civil defense corps personnel (C.M. Kim, 2006). In addition, anti-communist posters in the subways, buses, vending machines, bath houses, and public toilets urged citizens to "listen, to see, and to report" any spies by calling a special 113 hotline number. These redbaiting tactics calling for the "outing" of those who displayed leftist thinking (*chwagyŏng*) and pro-north (*ch'inbuk*) or pro-communist (*yonggong*) sentiments not only instilled fear but also hatred of the enemy, contributing to the internalization of anti-communism. The fear of being accused of being a spy also led to self-censorship and the surveillance of each other. When the national anthem played at 5 p.m. (winter) and 6 p.m. (spring, summer, and fall), children playing hopscotch or jump rope had to come to a standstill and wait until the anthem and flag-lowering ceremony was completely over. Moviegoers would also have to stand up and salute the flag and watch a one minute forty second national anthem clip before the screening of the feature film in the theaters (Min, 2009). Failure to observe these daily routines could result in arrest for violating the national security law (*ch'ianyujibŏp*), which went through several revisions and forty provisions, carrying a maximum penalty of death. Kkansu observed these rituals without participating, focusing on his work instead. He not only completed his degree at Dankook University but established himself as the foremost expert in Arabic culture, history, and society. Even though he was married to Pak Kwangsuk, a well-known dancer and choreographer, and was a father to three daughters in the North, he married a nurse by the name of Ms. Yun who was enamored by his cosmopolitanism (An, 2004).[4] His Korean degree and marriage ensured that no one would suspect that Kkansu was a North Korean spy.

South Korea's Globalization: Kkansu's Big Breakthrough

Kkansu—a foreigner—was offered the first visiting professorship in Arabic Studies at Dankook University in 1988. It was the same year that Seoul hosted the XXIV Summer Olympiad where a total of 159 nations, the largest number since the Cold War era, participated in the games (minus the DPRK). Two years earlier, Kkansu was hired as an instructor of Arabic to prepare docents and volunteers for the Asian Games. The South Korean

government used the Olympics as a "coming-out party" to celebrate its transformation into a modern, democratic, and industrialized nation, marking a significant shift away from the Cold War in which South Korea had been embroiled since its birth as a modern state. South Korea also established diplomatic relations with China and Russia, opening its borders to ethnic Koreans to return to their homeland in 1992, marking a historic milestone for South Korea. The rapprochement among two Cold War neighbors paved the way for ethnic Koreans from Russia, Sakhalin Islands, and China to file for immigration (Kristof, 1992; Pollack, 1992). For Kkansu, however, the new relationship worked the other way around: normalization with China allowed him several opportunities for debriefing on his activities with his superiors in North Korea, but to also reconnect with family members living in Yanbian and North Korea before his arrest (Cha, 2011).

On the political front in the south, Kim Young Sam's successful bid as the first civilian president in more than three decades marked the end of military rule, and his globalization (*segyehwa*) initiative opened up trade and pushed for financial liberalization of the South Korean economy (Koh, 2000). As South Koreans felt the impact of neoliberalism, triggered by free trade, market deregulation and state decentralization on businesses as well as their everyday lives, the North experienced a much more powerful "earthquake." Kim Il Sung's death on 8 July 1994 marked the first transition of power from father to son during a high stakes game of nuclear poker with the United States, which ultimately resulted in an Agreed Framework in Geneva in October 1994. Kim Jong-il, as the new leader of the DPRK, agreed to shut down the Yongbyeon complex and cease plutonium production in exchange for light-water reactors from the United States (Cumings, 1997). The unexpected regime change in the DPRK with an untested Kim Jong-il at the helm, certainly created a more complicated situation for Kkansu, which could explain his subsequent arrest.

Kkansu's Third Conversion

On 3 July 1996, the *Angibu* arrested Kkansu for sending a fax at the Plaza Hotel in Seoul to a North Korean contact in Beijing. The agency charged him with sending more than eighty reports via fax or airmail to contacts in the North, a serious violation of national security. Using SIGNIT (signals intelligence) surveillance to monitor Kkansu, agents confiscated $19,000 in cash, short-wave radios, cryptograms, ampoules, and other spy paraphernalia from Kkansu's home (Bae, 2013). So routine was his faxing

to Beijing that he neglected his responsibility to carry ampoules with him to the hotel and violated the spy protocols that he had learned in the North. On 21 July, Kkansu confessed to the authorities his true identity and involvement in various espionage activities, which included reading local print media to access the South's political position vis-à-vis the North, as well as making several clandestine visits to North Korea between 1984 and 1996. Before being sentenced to twelve years at Hwawŏn prison at the age of 62, Kkansu offered a conversion (*chŏnhwan*) statement, expressing a complete disavowal of the northern system and major anguish for being a cold-hearted individual and abandoning his family in the North. For him, the only way to attain atonement was through renunciation of his past and articulation of his wish to live like a "righteous Korean" and resume his studies (Sŏ, 1996). Dankook University cancelled all of Kkansu's courses and revoked his doctoral degree on the basis of identity fraud and the dishonor of the integrity of the university (M.J. Yi, 1996b). In an interview with *Sisa Press*, Kkansu, who changed his name to Chŏng Suil after his conversion, compared the "piercing pain" that he endured to the experience by the Han dynasty scholar, Sima Qian, the father of Chinese historiography and author of the *Records of the Grand Historian*. Sima Qian had to atone for his crimes for defending General Li Ling, who had failed to defeat the Xiongnu confederation, by undergoing castration so that he could complete his histories, rather than committing suicide, a method expected of a gentleman-scholar (An, 2004).

While Kkansu's sentencing to prison made major headline news, two calamitous events occurred in the North and the South, which would again change his life and contribute to his early release. A major famine in the North triggered by floods and drought resulted in the widespread starvation and child malnutrition, with the death toll reaching the thousands by 1997 (Haggard and Noland, 2005). In the South, a severe financial crisis compelled the state to seek a bailout from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in the amount of $60 billion to counter the near depletion of its foreign exchange reserves. The crisis sparked bankruptcies of many of the *chaebol*, South Korea's industrial conglomerates, and massive layoffs during this period (Holley, 1997). On the political front, Kim Dae-jung's presidential election victory in December 1997 prompted a détente with the north as Kim's "Sunshine Policy" sought to ease tensions on the divided Korean peninsula. His desire to bring about peace and reconciliation culminated in a historic summit meeting in 2000 in Pyeongyang with Kim Jong-il (Cumings, 2003). As these major events took place outside the prison gates, Kkansu, using the bottom of a pail as his desk, in his 26.6 square feet prison cell, started to write

his 1,092-page tome by hand on the Silk Road, which went through 25,000 pages of drafts (S.J. Pak, 2001). Just like Berlin-born Jewish philologist, Eric Auerbach, who was unable to communicate with other scholars while in exile in Istanbul, Kkansu, stripped of everything he was or was not, discovered his humanity in prison. Unable to negotiate his situation, foreclosing any possibility of returning to North Korea, the process of dissimulation, which seems rather unique in many respects is an all too common tale of the Korean diaspora experience, which challenges the master narratives of national culture, homogeneity, belongingness, and identity.

Conclusion

On 15 August 2000, Kkansu was released after four years and a month in a solitary cell and subsequently given a presidential pardon in 2003 with 3,586 other prisoners by Kim Dae-jung and then naturalized as a South Korean in 2005 and changed his name to Chŏng Suil (T.H. Lee, 2009). At one level, Kim's "Sunshine Policy," which created a less hostile stance vis-à-vis the North and an atmosphere of peace and reconciliation, allowed Chŏng to stave off execution or life imprisonment for espionage. A commuted sentence allowed him to adjust back to a life of normalcy, which meant a return to scholarship. Chŏng published more than a dozen books on the Silk Road with reputable presses such as Ch'angbi, Han'gyŏre Press, Hakkojae, Sagyejŏl, and Sallim, in addition to important translations of *Ibn Battuta's Travels* and Hech'o's *A Memoir of the Pilgrimage to the Five Kingdoms of India* (*Wangocheonchukgukjeon*). A walking encyclopedia, Chŏng's works rest on a careful analysis of a variety of texts and artifacts in multiple languages, linking the Silk Road for the first time to the Korean peninsula. Marshalling an impressive array of original archival documents, he offers a kaleidoscopic overview of "civilizational exchanges and fusion" rather than conflict and conquest, connecting the Silla kingdom to the Muslim world. His research has wedged open new avenues for research, while reminding scholars to reevaluate the term "barbarian" so commonly used to identify nomadic people. Like Eric Auerbach, who revived his career in the United States at Yale University, in 2008, Chŏng established the Korean Institute of Civilizational Exchanges and continues to serve as the director at the age of eighty-four (Son, 2013). In 2013, Ch'angbi published Chŏng's magnus opus, *The Encyclopedia of the Silk Road* (*Silk'ŭrodŭ sajŏn*) a 1,089-page encyclopedia on the Silk Road, a project he started in prison where he completed 974 entries by hand. He spent an additional fifteen years of research and forty trips abroad to

various sites after his release from prison to complete the second half of the manuscript. In 2014, Ch'angbi published Chŏng's two other volumes, *The Encyclopedia of Sea Silk Road* (*Haesang silkeu rodeu sajeon*), another staggering piece of research with 621 entries related to exchanges between civilizations through maritime networks and *Silk Road* (*Silkeu rodeu*), a book featuring 900 photographs with commentaries. Reflecting on his whirlwind life in an interview with the *Korea Herald*, he notes, "I am a nationalist and I have no problem saying that to people . . . I would have been successful in China if I stayed as a Chinese national, but I have considered myself a Korean. As a young intellectual I wanted to contribute to my people. I have no regrets. I never wished I was Chinese" (C. Lee, 2013, para. 15). While there is much irony and ambiguity in this statement, Chŏng's life story exemplifies the way in which historical circumstances forced many diasporic Korean populations in to live parallel lives, at once demonstrating a sheer will and a remarkable ability to survive under hostile conditions in a foreign land and the ability to dissimulate by adopting an ambiguous identity. Despite suffering various setbacks, Chŏng was never deterred from his true passion—to study the Silk Road. He took advantage of every opportunity that came his way, such as using a rusty pail as a desk to write manuscripts in his prison cell. For twenty-five years Chŏng lived as a diasporic Korean in China, fifteen years in the DPRK, another ten years as an itinerant around the world like his favorite Silla monk, Hech'o, and the famous Moroccan scholar-cum-traveler, Muhammad Ibn Battuta. He lived another twenty some years in South Korea. He changed his citizenship a total of five times (Cha, 2011). In many respects, in Chŏng Suil's case, the truth is stranger than fiction; he was a remarkable chameleon who knew how to adapt to every new cultural situation whether it was in Beijing, Cairo, P'yŏngyang, Beirut, Tunis, Kuala Lumpur, Manila, or Seoul. If a country blocked his access to the "Gansu corridor" (perhaps a derivation of his own name), the main artery of the ancient Silk Road, which he undoubtedly loved, he improvised his identity to prioritize his scholarship. To be sure, there are many contradictions and gaps about his personal life but his unwavering commitment to his research did not wane despite all of the hardships he has gone through. While he is well into his eighties, Chŏng has yet to retire and is still one of the foremost experts of the Silk Road and is completing the final volume to his Silk Road trilogy entitled "The Encyclopedia of Civilizational Exchanges," which will feature more than 5,000 entries and include North Africa and Latin America. To return to the epigraph drawn from Said, for exiles like Theodor Adorno, Eric Auerbach, or for that matter Kkansu, the condition of displacement is not a matter of choice but an alternative, where "homes are always provisional."

Dissimulation allowed Kkansu to survive and detachment through exile afforded him the chance to "stand away from home" and to grasp "the human experience and written records in their diversity and particularity" (Said, 2000:185).

The Kkansu episode was also a sobering moment for Koreans who were caught unaware in the fantastic deception. It revealed the deleterious results of ignorance about places like the Middle East, understood only through simplistic stereotypes and images. The fact that not one Korean saw through Kkansu's performance of Arab identity reveals the limits of a monolithic culture. Yet, while the number of foreigners—migrant workers, spouses, North Korean defectors (*saet'ŏmin*), and ethnically diverse students from different countries—has dramatically increased since Kkansu's release from prison, South Korea still remains a culturally insular and monolithic nation. Social attitudes have not changed substantially to reflect the diversity of the country's new arrivals. Chŏng's exilic circumstances and lifelong passion for the study of the Silk Road allowed him to value multiculturalism and the coexistence of different ethnic groups and civilizations. In a recent conference on reunification, Chŏng eschewed the long-standing belief of an ethnically monolithic society and proposed that Koreans should be viewed as a mixed-blood people, pointing out that 130 out of its 270 common surnames having origins outside the peninsula. Pressing historians to consider his new findings, Chŏng hinted tantalizingly at the possibility of real change on the peninsula by moving beyond *minjok* (ethnic race) by drawing on examples from the Silk Road, which exemplified both diversity and acknowledgment of the other and, above all, a "meaningful vision for the peaceful coexistence of nations and societies" (C.G. Kim, 2009, para. 8–9; C. Lee, 2013, para. 20).

Notes

1. When reporting domestic problems to an agent in Beijing, Kkansu referred to Kim Dae-jung as his elder brother, Kim Jongpil as his younger brother, the New Korea Party as the bank, the national conference as the board, the Democratic Party as the executive, the United Liberal Democrats as the pastor, and independents as merchants. When reporting about international events, he referred to North Korea as the head office, the south as a sub agency, the United States as the house of the eldest son, Japan as the younger brother's house, Russia as the rented house, and India as the son's house (H.G. Kim, 1996).

2. Ji Xialin enrolled in the doctoral program at the University of Gottingen in 1935 to study Sanskrit and other ancient Indian languages under the direction of Ernst

Waldschmidt and Emil Sieg. He returned to Beijing University after World War II and founded the Department of Eastern Languages (Singh, 2009).

3. For more on this mandate, see Instructions from the CCP Central Committee on handling the issue of ethnic Koreans in the northeast to Korea (Wilson Center, 1963).

4. At the time of his arrest, his wife Park Kwangsuk (61) was working as a choreographer for the famous Moranbong (Moran Hill) Troupe. His eldest daughter Chŏng Miran (33), who studied French at Kim Il Sung University was working as a public relations officer in P'yŏngyang, while his second daughter Chŏng Talmi (31), a graduate of literature at Kim Il Sung University was working as a reporter for the KCNA, while his youngest daughter Chŏng Sona (30), a graduate of P'yŏngyang Commerce and Trade University was working at a trading company (Y.J. Yi, 1997; An, 2004).

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