

NOUVEAU-RICHE NATIONALISM AND MULTICULTURALISM IN KOREA: A Media Narrative Analysis. *Routledge Advances in Korean Studies*, 31. By Gil-Soo Han. London; New York: Routledge, 2016. xx, 181 pp. (Tables, figures.) US\$145.00, cloth. ISBN 978-1-138-78150-4.

In this work, the author discusses the racism and discrimination that “new Koreans” confront in their everyday lives in South Korea, choosing the Korean media to analyze how this everyday racism is deployed on the individual and social structural level. He points out that South Korea has accepted massive numbers of immigrant workers and foreign brides since the 1990s because South Korean society urgently needed labourers for “3D” (dirty, difficult, and dangerous) work and brides for men in rural areas. So, these “others” have in fact contributed to Korean society by maintaining industrial production and the birth rate. Without them, South Korean society would face more severe problems. However, instead of receiving fair treatment from Korean society, these new Koreans are still suffering from harsh racism and discrimination. In the author’s analysis, he notes that “nouveau-riche” nationalism and “pure-blood” nationalism are the key factors in this situation.

This book is composed of nine chapters, including an introduction and concluding remarks. As each research-related chapter includes a short introduction, literature review, research methodology, and findings section, readers can easily read the chapters independently. In the introduction the author explains why he has examined this subject and how he has conducted his research. Chapter 2 defines his theoretical perspectives and research methods on racial discrimination in South Korea. He adopts the realist perspective of social sciences, which involves trying to determine the mechanism(s) of social phenomena through empirical investigations. The author posits “nouveau-riche” nationalism and “pure-blood” nationalism as the two major discriminatory operators in South Korean society. The former was generated by South Korea’s economic success, and as the term indicates, it is quite new, whereas the latter emerged as a self-empowerment tool against Japanese racism during the period of Japanese occupation, and remains a feature of Korean society. The following five chapters discuss concrete cases of race-related discrimination, except for chapter 7, on North Korean refugees. Chapter 3 analyzes the discourse of those who oppose the anti-racial discrimination law. Their main argument is that multiculturalism serves only a small number of Koreans, such as entrepreneurs, while the majority of Koreans suffer. Their logic is quite similar to that of other reactive right-wing groups, in that they argue that immigrant workers reduce job opportunities available to “original citizens,” and therefore the promotion of “multiculturalism” comes at the expense of the genuine “have-nots.” Confronted by strong opposition, this law has not yet passed. A small error in this chapter (49) is that the year of establishment of the first newspaper in Korea is April 7, 1896, not 1989.

Chapter 4 analyzes how migrant workers are exposed to “modern slavery” conditions. Two levels of discrimination oppress them: on the structural level, under the “industrial trainee” labour law system, they are exposed to systematic exploitation by entrepreneurs; and on the individual level, they experience racial discrimination in the workplace and in their everyday lives. Chapter 5 reveals clear racial discrimination cases in private teaching institutions’ English-teacher recruiting process. Their “valid” excuse is the customer’s preference for “white” instructors. Chapter 6 discusses a more “severe” discrimination case, according to the author, since it concerns children. The children of international marriages, especially those who have a Korean mother and an African-American military father, or a Korean father and a mother taken as an East Asian bride, suffer from social prejudice from an early age in school. The mechanism of this discrimination is based not only on

“nouveau-riche” nationalism but also “pure-blood” nationalism, which is a social historical product of the trauma suffered during the Japanese occupation and the Korean War, from which South Koreans have still not managed to free themselves. Chapter 7 examines whether North Korean refugees living in South Korea are regarded as “our Koreans” or “other Koreans” in their everyday lives. The book’s research findings are not surprising considering the evidence presented in the book’s other chapters; these “new Koreans” also face difficulties in integrating into South Korean society professionally and personally due to the discrimination operated by “nouveau rich” nationalism. Chapter 7’s title captures the treatment these new Koreans receive from the “blood-sharing” South Koreans: “What more do you want?: deserted North Korean refugees.”

Chapter 8 examines how nouveau-riche racism influences K-pop stars’ black-facing performances. The author analyzes Internet comments about these performances to better capture interpretations of “the other.” As part of his concluding remarks, the author suggests a list of policy or legal-level implementations for the healthy development of multiculturalism in South Korea.

If I could give another title to this book, it would be, “The disgraceful naked face of South Korean society in the twenty-first century.” The author successfully articulates his conceptual framework of research (a realist perspective of racism) and presents concrete analysis based on a thorough examination of primary resources, such as newspapers and interview records, and scholarly works mainly in Korean and English. Primary sources and scholarly works in Korean are always valuable for a better understanding of Korean society as they may contain subtle but essential elements of the study subjects that foreign languages cannot express. Therefore, this book will be helpful not only for Korean studies students but also racism studies scholars who want to enlarge their study horizons. A few small flaws of this book are that some arguments and citations are redundant (for example, “the future of mistreatment of new settlers is civil unrest,” 3D workers socio-economic conditions, socio-historical explanations of “pure-blood” nationalism, and Noja Pak’s research about the origin and false argument of Korean “pure-bloodism”). However, these small flaws should not undermine this book’s undoubted contribution to Korean studies.

This book’s groundbreaking analysis of everyday racism in South Korea inspires readers to ask new questions, such as whether South Koreans will be able to foster a healthy multicultural society or turn towards the establishment of an extreme right-wing party, phenomena which can be observed in other developed countries but not yet in South Korea.

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