K.A.L.F. 문학과 영상 2021 봄
https://doi.org/10.36114/JLF.2021.4.22.1.367

Coexisting With Others as *Homo Symbiøus*: From the Interracial Encounters in *The Tiger Factory* and *Bandhobi*

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I. Introduction: Persisting Imperialism and *Bandungist* Ethics

In 1955, an Afro-Asian conference was held in Bandung, Indonesia, an event which was destined to go down in the history books as a landmark or high point for post-colonial solidarity among Third-world nations. At this event, based on their shared colonial experience, a number of newly independent nations issued the call for a unified

policy of anti-imperialism and neutrality in the Cold War.[1] Nonetheless, these friendly ties proved to be short-lived, as implied by the fact that a scheduled subsequent gathering never happened; it left behind only the lesson that "a mutual hatred of colonialism would not in itself create lasting bonds between emergent nations" (Kalliney 26). As Kweku Ampiah pinpoints, "Bandung brought the Asian countries together and so, ironically, exposed their differences" as well (51). All the same, Bandung's anti-colonial spirit shook the world, challenging the imperial hierarchy with its endeavor to create forms of inter-subaltern partnership. Richard Wright, the African-American author who visited the summit, even remarked that "[i]mperialism was dead here" (134).

Yet, imperialism is still an ongoing issue even in this our own era of transnational cooperation. As societies become more hybrid and pluralistic amidst the globalizing force, the specter of *dead* imperialism appears to haunt the globe in the form of a variety of racisms. Just like European imperialists who otherized the Orient for the purpose of "dominating, restructuring, and having authority over it" (Said 3), we sometimes stigmatize different races with mythical prejudice, something which regularly leads to the discriminatory treatment of cultural or ethnic others.[2] Moreover, just as once Sigmund Freud famously called attention to the existence of the aggressive instinct

1) Three representative agendas of Bandung were as follows: "to demand recognition as autonomous political units" (Kalliney 26), to reject any form of marginalization or colonization, and to proclaim non-alignment in the Cold War.

2) For example, the current pandemic situation of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), which started in 2019, instigated discriminatory slurs about Chinese people, such as "eating strange foods and being [disease-ridden]" (Cheah et al. 2).

(113)—something now demonstrated by neuroscience in the form of certain areas of the brain, including "the hypothalamus and the amygdala" (Chen 1509)—some scholars like Frederic Jameson are now saying that "[m]odern racism" or the imperialist way of "group loathing" is both inherent and inevitable (35-36). Other voices contend that "there has been a cooling of the commitment to the more equal social and political membership encompassed by the term diversity [in many parts of the world], if not outright hostility to it" (Barry 83).

This ever-present impact of imperialism—or racism—renews the call for us to create new *Bandungist* discourses to probe the opportunities and challenges of inter-ethnic communication, asking the question: "*how can we coexist in this cosmopolitan world as ethical humans?*" Two independent contemporary Asian movies—*The Tiger Factory* (2010) and *Bandhobi* (2009)—contribute to this debate by featuring comparable relationships between Southeast Asian males who are illegal migrants and East Asian females who are also socially marginalized, against the multi-cultural yet still segregated societies of Malaysia and South Korea. Both films dramatize *Bandungist* allies of disadvantaged subalterns using interracial romance. The former is a Malay feature film by a young rising Malay director, Woo Ming Jin, and the latter is its Korean counterpart by Shin Dong-il, who often deals with idealized visions of humanity, making realistic representations of class issues within the contemporary South Korean society.

The Tiger Factory has been invited to several film festivals abroad, including the Cannes Film Festival 2010, and won Special Mention at the Tokyo International Film Festival 2010, but, to date, there have been few scholarly studies devoted to it.[3] Presumably, this is partly

3) *The Tiger Factory*'s scholarly references are limited to being cited as an

because it deals with such taboo Malay subjects as the trade in babies, "sexuality, race and ethnicity, gender relations and politics" (Ahmad et al. 9). As a result, it has remained an example of a Malay independent film that is "relatively unknown or unrecognized" domestically (Khoo, "Syiok Sendiri" 213).

In contrast, *Bandhobi* has been more actively discussed, mainly as a film that seeks to promote hospitality toward strangers within the new poly-cultural South Korean society (Ryu 149; Myung-jin Park 308; Oh 313-14), or as "a disturbing narrative" that brings out some fundamental questions about the covertly racist Korean ideology (Sun Park 342). What is more, the film seeks to represent migrant workers not as passive victims but as subjects of communication (Yang 344).[4] However, there has been no research on this film in terms of Immanuel Kant's *personalism*, which commands us to treat others "as an end, never merely as a means" (230) and thus is in collision with the reductionism inherent in Jacques Lacan's notion of *phallic jouissance*.[5]

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example of Cannes Film Festival's internal resistance, which presents "the conditions of uneven production that foster exploitation . . . [with] the Indonesian baby trade" (Broe 35) and as an example of a film which opposes the existing tropes of race in Malaysia (Ahmad et al. 9).

4) Otherwise, *Bandhobi* is interpreted as a *bildungsroman* of a teenage girl from a single mother household (Hyun-Ah Kim 229). The film has won a number of prizes, including the Utopia Prize in Castellinaria International Youth Film Festival 2010 and the Best Film Award in Festival of the Three Continents 2009.

5) The central concept of Lacanian phallic jouissance is to Otherize another into a convenient instrument (*pseudo-phallus*) to achieve an egoistic goal (object *a*) while paying absolutely no attention to another's authentic identity. Although Kant never entirely negates the need to use others sometimes as a *means*, he makes it a necessary condition to respect the different personalities as our *ends* for his *Sittengesetz* (moral imperative), something at which phallic jouissance intrinsically fails.

Nevertheless, a dialectic analysis based on these incompatible principles may shed valuable light on the complex interactions among *Bandhobi*'s characters and beyond. In addition, although *Bandhobi* and *The Tiger Factory* resonate with each other through their similar use of gender/racial settings and their representation of social bias toward minorities, it is noteworthy that they arrive at opposing conclusions: one film ends with deceptive dissolution, the other, with genuine solidarity.

In this respect, this paper attempts to uncover the basis for an ethics of inter-cultural symbiosis, focusing on how the two protagonists in each movie formulate, break, and perhaps re-connect the bonds with one another. It also seeks to discover the reasons why *The Tiger Factory* ends in a pessimistic way, in contrast with *Bandhobi*, mainly using Kantian and Lacanian lenses. In the process, Gayatri Spivak's concept of *planetarity*, a discourse that blurs the line between the ego and the non-ego, will redeem Kantian philosophy's critical basis. This theoretical orbit aims to enlighten further a new concept of *Homo Symbiøus*, those who live in mutual harmony with others. Such a cosmopolitan perspective will help elucidate *The Tiger Factory*'s and *Bandhobi*'s tropes of inter-subjective relations, creating a *Bandungist* diptych that portrays similar yet different couplings between socio-economic outsiders in Asia.

II. *Homo Symbiøus*: Planetary Personalism

The gist of this research, its methodological structure, needs to be clarified before an examination of the two films can begin. As President Sukarno of Indonesia remarked, the Bandung conference was "the first

intercontinental Conference of colored peoples in the history of mankind" with the clear objective of defying the western imperial powers (Ajami). In other words, it was a pro-active denunciation of western Europe's violent Otherization of the Third World. However, we can also diametrically re-think this systematic resistance with a question: *"Did not these Third-world nations also Otherize the European powers?"* Despite its metaphorical power as "an epiphany, one that brought hope to all those who craved independence and freedom from foreign domination" (Ampiah 1), it is true that these once-subaltern countries passively avenged the old Empires by silencing them; they did not invite any European countries, the United States, and the Soviet Union to the conference when the main agendas were to discuss the colonialism's aftermath and the Cold War. Such unilateral condemnation of the Others, along with their forceful declaration of neutrality in the Cold War, sadly leaves much to desire. It raises strong doubts whether this political gesture could truly signal the correct means for ethical fighting back. Even if we legitimately consider all the painful and unjust histories of colonization that the participating nations had to endure because of imperialism, it is hard to deny that the conference had a fatal weakness: it was, after all, nothing more or less than another form of the Otherizing practice, and this reductionist attitude was directed not only at the European powers but also at some of themselves, too. That is to say, although Bandung intended to forge new solidarity among the victims of imperialism, each agent had its own nationalistic and greedy programs—including China's "consistent policy of forward movements into [the border of India]" (Mukherji 169)—which resulted in the failure of further conventions in the Bandung spirit to materialize, as the conference participants had originally anticipated in 1964.

In mesh with the recent Asian-African Summit in 2005, which celebrated the 50th anniversary of the gathering, *The Tiger Factory* and *Bandhobi* repeat the same structure of Bandung, just like the concepts of the repetitive *Fort/Da* game of Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) or the Nietzschean *Ewige Wiederkunft* ("Eternal Recurrence of the Same") in *Ecce Homo* (1908). Both films seem to be possessed by the phantom of the *stillborn* second meeting, as their main protagonists belong to the lower tiers of society, being subjected to persecution and marginalized by the mainstream classes, and thereby relying on each other to overcome hardship and resist the oppressive power. To reveal whether these bondings in the two movies remedy the Bandung's shortcoming—the innate Otherization of Others—or eventually end up reproducing the same mistake, we need a pearl of wisdom that will allow us to avoid reductionism in human relationships.

One possible starting point would be the basis of the Western way of thinking. Ever since René Descartes spoke the proposition "*Cogito Ergo Sum*" (18; "I think; therefore I am"), thereby separating himself and the universe, Western philosophy has developed on the dichotomous view, by placing the most importance on individual *ego* and existence. Such consciousness, however, which perceives the world as divided into two parts—the *ego* and the *non-ego*—often, if not always, Otherizes others as a means to serve the individual's egoistic purposes. In other words, if we meet cultural Others within the binary structure of Descartes, western imperialism, or racism, we will likely enjoy Lacanian phallic jouissance while exploiting them as our *pseudo-phallus* or handy tool to satisfy our wishes. This tendency makes Kantian personalism, the ethical imperative to serve others as our ultimate purpose, remain some ways off from any kind of actual realization.

At the same time, the Kantian perspective also has its limitations; as one of the successors of Descartes's philosophy, it is also based on the binary of *I* and *Others*. For example, although Kant insisted that we should respect others, he strictly bans sacrificing oneself for others. This is because oneself also is another *personality*, one which we should esteem as a moral duty. Kant says as below:

> If he damages himself in order to escape from a painful situation, he is making use of a person *merely as a means* to maintain a tolerable state of affairs till the end of his life. But a human being is not a thing—not something to be used *merely* as a means: he must always in all his actions be regarded as an end in himself. Hence I cannot dispose of a human being in my own person, by maiming, corrupting, or killing him. (230)

This *I-priority* regulation is why Kant manifested a conditional way of hospitality toward foreigners strictly based on concrete international law in *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch* (1795). However, such an attitude, which judges certain others as 'not worthy of being welcomed,' is based on egocentric standards and rejects the idea of accepting or helping them to pursue their happiness. Ironically, then, this does not accord with his earlier imperative in *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785). This potential inconsistency is because taking care of oneself preferentially while separating it from others inevitably causes a reductionist stance toward those others. Kant also recognizes such an unavoidable phallic jouissance, emphasizing the word "*merely*" and insisting that the others should *also* be our purpose. Nevertheless, such a contradictory imperative always involves the risk of not going further than using others as stepladders to fulfill our desire. Thus, despite its precious insight into intersubjective

relationships, the philosophy of Kantian personalism leaves an unsatisfied feeling since it isolates the ego from the non-ego in this way.

This trouble calls for the need to take note of traditional Chinese philosophy, which does not demarcate "the distinction between the individual and the universe" (Fung 3). Such an attitude has led Chinese philosophers not to take epistemology as their major concern and thus made their position humble in comparison with the philosophy of the West or India (ibid., 1-3). Nevertheless, only when we do not segregate between the *I* (*我*; wǒ) and the *not-I* (*非我*; fēi wǒ) like them, can we finally have a hope to cease objectifying others. Then how can we practically erase the line between the me and the Others in real life? One possible solution to get away from the comfort zone of this Western Otherizing dichotomy and fulfill Kantian personalism is Gayatri Spivak's concept of *planetarity*, a discursive system that makes "our home *unheimlich* or uncanny" (74). Spivak illuminates its notion in the form of the statement: "To be human is to be intended toward the other" (73), which means that a subject has to discover itself inside the cultural others, replacing their alterity with comprehensive we-ness.

While this act of incapacitating the line between the *ego* and the *non-ego* can establish a solid rudiment for Kantian personalist ethics, it can also be mathematically paraphrased as finding the subset between I and others, the empty set (ø). Just like ø is a subset of any set A ($\forall A : \varnothing \subseteq A$), there always is a certain commonality among us, even though sometimes it is hard to find any point of contact. Besides, although the number of elements in ø is zero, this does not mean that ø is essentially vacant; it is only that its facets cannot be articulated by the tangible language, such as cardinality (e.g., 1, 2, 3). In this regard,

subjects who intend to develop solidarity with others may as well remember that excavating planetary ø might be, most of the time, an indescribable job. Furthermore, another significant characteristic of ø is that its potential components are not homogenous under all circumstances ($x \in \varnothing, x \neq x$). This point lends extra insight into the idea that there can be innumerable kinds of companionship among us and the cultural others. In other words, discovering ø never includes being standardized, just as Ludwig Wittgenstein asserts with his concept of *Familienähnlichkeit* ("Family Resemblance") in *Philosophical Investigations* (1953). Rather, it means that we should coexist with diverse different planetary personalities, embracing others but not compromising our own distinct identities.

Therefore, the ethics of *Homo Symbiøus* can be defined in this way:

> Human beings who discover the unspeakable ø between themselves and the others, which must be done on a unique case by case and which does not forfeit the distinct identity of one or the other, can thereby deconstruct the dichotomous line between the ego and the non-ego that hinders a more profound inter-subjective encounter.

This idea of an ethical human being who strives to find the subset with others offers itself as a viable rephrase of the *planetary personalism*, a potent mix of Kant and Spivak. This will be the moral criterion of the ensuing analysis of both *The Tiger Factory* and *Bandhobi.*

III. Phallic Jouissance in *The Tiger Factory*

Woo Ming Jin's *The Tiger Factory* follows the trajectory of its heroine —Ping's consciousness. In its opening scene, the camera shows Ping

with her pregnant belly (Fig. 1), and from this moment on, the camera only reveals what Ping perceives and experiences from a detached third-person narrative. Ping is a 19-year-old overseas Chinese in Malaysia with no parents. She is managed by her aunt, Tien, although they do not live together. As a teenage orphan, Ping has to earn a living by working on both a pig farm and at a local restaurant that serves pork, while her housemate and only friend, Mei, also works for the same farm and a butcher's shop. This association of Ping and Mei's jobs with *pigs* indicates they are not Muslims, the ethnic group that comprises the majority of the Malay population and is defined in the Constitution as ethnic Malays. In other words, Ping and Mei's economic means, along with their ethnicity, imply that they are positioned on the periphery of mainstream society.[6)]

Figure 1. The opening scene of *The Tiger Factory*

What is more, Ping even sells her fertility to her aunt's illegal baby-trafficking business in order to raise the necessary funds she

6) Gaik Cheng Khoo and Jean Duruz comment that the increasing Islamization of Malaysia and the Muslim taboo of eating pork has led to the "shrinking of space for a national pluralist or cosmopolitan "we-ness" . . . [and] the disappearance of commensality between Malays and Chinese" (*Eating Together* Location No. 275).

needs to migrate into Japan. As the short spinoff of this film—"Inhalation" by Edmund Yeo—elaborates, Ping and Mei feel an intense urgency to escape Malaysia because they see no possibility for a better future here. Unlike normal Malay teenagers, they cannot get proper education because they need to survive by performing hard unrewarding labor. Thus, *moving to Japan* becomes their last resort to get out of their position as economic and racial minorities. To rephrase this in the language of Lacan, it is their strongest *objet-petit-a* that may restore their oppressed self within the Symbolic of Malaysia, a "terrain cleared of *jouissance*" (Lacan 220).[7] In pursuit of this goal, Ping commercializes her fertility when she becomes the tool of a baby factory.[8] The first scene in which it is suggested that Ping has had sex and is now taking a mandatory rest for implantation is depicted as mechanical and lacking in humanity, comprising a poignant juxtaposition with the farm's pigs that are bred artificially by Ping's hands (Fig. 2). Such an analogous representation of the human and the animal, Ping and pigs, emphasizes the inhumanity of Ping's capitalist Symbolic which puts less value on humans than on money.

What is worse, Tien, the baby factory owner and Ping's aunt, also treats Ping as a depersonalized means of human production, not as a

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7) Lacan insists that *the primal enjoyment*, which was perfect and intact by itself, has been erased in the Symbolic by its oppressive social law. Regardless of their countries of origin, all kinds of Symbolics do not provide the ultimate jouissance to their inhabitants in this sense, but in Ping and Mei's case, such universal castration by the Symbolic order is further enhanced and emphasized by their marginalized status in Malaysia.

8) Since the tiger is one of Malaysia's national symbols, *The Tiger Factory* may indicate the *Malay baby factory* for which Ping works. Considering the biological parents of the babies are, in fact, not ethnic *Malays* but migrant workers and overseas Chinese, it appears as a metaphor for the ethnically hybrid Malaysian society.

Figure 2. Juxtaposing the insemination of Ping with the insemination of a pig

cherished niece. For example, when Ping suffers from a fever, Tien only worries about the safety of her fetus, asking, "Did you take any medicine?" The aloofness of this comment contrasts with Mei's thoughtful reaction when she asks Ping if she wants her to buy medicine and rubs Ping's back when she needs it (Fig. 3). Moreover, Tien promotes Ping to her customers as a surrogate mother who can produce a "pretty and strong" baby, like Ping herself.

Figure 3. Tien and Mei's opposing reactions to Ping's fever

When Ping delivers her first child, Tien even sends it away to a Burmese nanny and lies to Ping that it was born dead in order not to give her the promised incentive. Tien also impounds Ping's passport and forms a secret relationship with the restaurant owner, another employer of Ping, to hinder Ping's mobility and continue to exploit her

labor. All these impersonal treatments violate the Kantian principle of personality that demands a human being not deliberately impair another's happiness and to endeavor "to further the ends of others" as far as one can since humanity should be "an end in itself" (Kant 231). In short, Tien's handling of Ping is unethical. This is because she utilizes her only as a symbolic phallus, which brings her financial profit and separates herself from Ping as an external object without forming a planetary subset (ø) with her, all the while thinking nothing of Ping's well-being. That is, Ping is only a vehicle for Tien's *phallic jouissance*.

Meanwhile, the only person in *The Tiger Factory* who treats Ping well, other than Mei, is Kang, an illegal Burmese migrant. Unlike the other foreign workers, he kindly stays with Ping after the fertilization and puts a pillow under her head, asking if she is comfortable (Fig. 4). Although Kang's reproductive ability is also commodified like Ping's, he knows how to respect her humanity and befriends her without asking for anything in return; for Kang, a good relationship with Ping is not a foothold but his destination.

Figure 4. Kang stays with Ping after the natural insemination

Later, Kang even invites Ping to his private realm where his wife and

baby live together, and they offer cordial kindness to Ping. In Particular, Kang's wife does not ask about Ping's identity or her relationship with Kang; instead, she naturally welcomes Ping into the house. This reception without a checklist accords with Jacques Derrida's "unconditional or hyperbolical" hospitality, which willingly receives others into one's territory, even at the risk of one's own safety and peace (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 135).[9] Amidst Kang's family and their Burmese neighbors, Ping is first shown eating food and faintly smiling; she finally appears to feel a form of human solidarity with these cultural and ethnic others in affective commensality, much more than her aunt, who never shares food with her (Fig. 5). Especially in this scene, although Ping remains silent among Kang's people, she seems very comfortable. This voiceless sense of belonging appears to derive from the fact that eating is essential in managing our bodies; it is not something that is entirely controlled by our rationality or language and is thus directly related to the empty set (ø) among humans. After this amicable evening, Ping calls Mei, who has left earlier for Japan, and says, "Maybe I want to stay here a little longer," verifying the positive

Figure 5. Kang's family and Ping's Commensality / Tien never sharing food with Ping

9) This *impossible hospitality* of Derrida contrasts with Kant's "conditional and juridico-political" hospitality in that it is not controlled by any "fixed principles of respect and donation, or by exchange, proportion, a norm, etc." (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 135-37).

power of *planetary personalism*—the altruistic hospitality which never attempts to utilize her for any selfish interests.

However, as the film intentionally never discloses Kang's life more than to the degree Ping witnesses, Ping never tries to understand his situation, remaining self-centered for her own survival. At first, Ping develops a kind of amorous affection for Kang, asking him, "Do you want people to think I'm your wife?" Yet, this fondness turns out to be only for her own good in the scene where Kang says he does not like living in Malaysia and will go to Australia with his family. Thereupon, Ping, without noticing the subset (ø) between him and her—the urge to escape from an alienating society—gets upset that Kang does not want her romantically. Eventually, Ping betrays Kang by telling Tien that Kang told Ping her first baby did not die in order to get Tien's economic support to leave for Japan. As such, Kang serves as a piece of mere equipment for Ping to pursue her object *a,* the *phallic jouissance*; she Otherizes Kang as a handy tool for her, which may help her regain her lost self in the Malay Symbolic. In the meantime, Kang's genuine identity and his agonizing position, which corresponds with Ping's own, becomes her blind spot.

Moreover, the racism towards migrant workers in Malaysia exerts a decisive influence on Ping's treachery against Kang. When Tien persuades Ping to say who told Ping her scheme, she says, "You don't have to protect these foreigners," implying that foreign workers always betray us if they are given the opportunity. This act of social splitting between racial others and the individual echoes the opening scene that insinuates the stigmatization of immigrant workers as people often run away with no sense of responsibility (Fig. 6). In this way, *The Tiger Factory* depicts labor migrants in Malaysia as trifling tools of capitalist production even by the disadvantaged Others, such as Ping and Mei,

not being recognized as subjects who can interchange sincere hospitality. This lack of personalist ethics in the film obstructs genuine interracial understanding, not letting Ping discover her own excluded self (ø) within Kang's circumstances and causes Kang to be exploited in Ping's *phallic jouissance*. Such unethical human relations make this movie a mere recurrence of the miscarriage of the second Bandung conference in 1964, which resulted from the egocentric schemes of some Third World nations.

Figure 6. Stigmatization of foreign workers

In contrast, Kang appears to discern a commonality between him and Ping beyond their cultural and racial disparities, as *Homo Symbiøus*. Being aware that Tien is deceiving Ping, Kang recognizes his own belittled status in Malay society in parallel with Ping's wretched situation. Furthermore, he realizes the ineffable shared qualities with Ping, beneath their obvious similarity as socially weak and alienated, without sharing many conversations about it. This silent communion between Kang and Ping reminds us that the empty set's elements cannot be embodied in mathematical language. Although it is pitiful that each of the other characters fails to respect the subset among them in *planetary personalism*, Kang's act of erasing the dividing line between him and Ping hints at a meaningful insight on how to meet others

ethically. This moral implication makes *The Tiger Factory* end in an ironic and bitter manner with a song about friendship. This ending echoes back into *Bandhobi*, a Korean movie released one year before, to which we will now turn our attention.

IV. Planetary We-ness in *Bandhobi*

Shin Dong-il's *Bandhobi* provides a semi-planetary dialectical example against *The Tiger Factory* by its uncommon interracial love story about a South Korean high school girl, Min-seo, and a Bangladeshi factory worker, Karim. Unlike *The Tiger Factory*, whose narrative is confined within the perspective of the Chinese female character, *Bandhobi*'s camera follows the back appearance of Karim from the very start. In this opening sequence, Karim passes through a swarm of Korean people and enters a wealthy residential area of Seoul. This montage seizes Karim's alienated status in Korean society, as his direction opposes the road guidance, such as "*Chinipkŭmji*" ("prohibition of entry") and "*Ilbangt'onghaeng*" ("one-way street"), always going in the opposite direction to the others (Bae 99). Moreover, the statue of Jesus that the audience sees implies that Islamic Karim is also a religious minority (Fig. 7).

Figure 7. The opening scene of *Bandhobi*

Then, the scene shifts to the heroine, Min-seo. In the first half of the movie, Min-seo's mother is portrayed as not giving enough attention to her daughter, being busy at work and only taking care of her boyfriend. Since their economic circumstances do not allow her to attend an expensive English academy, Min-seo works illegally as a sex worker to earn money for tuition. In this way, Min-seo stands in for the marginalized group of South Korean female teenagers from low-income families. This pathetic situation is also reflected in her first encounter with Karim: she picks up Karim's wallet by chance but pretends not to know about it after seeing the money inside it.

Whereas it began in deceit, Min-seo and Karim's relationship reaches a turning point when they meet again in front of a police station, under false charges due to their minority status; Min-seo has merely defied a sexual harasser, while Karim has only tried to stop a fight.[10] Although unfairly victimized, neither can accuse their Korean male counterparts and barely manage to exonerate themselves. Thus, in this long take in the blue half-light of dawn, they recognize each other in a shady space of Korean society, and Min-seo does not walk away from Karim this time, instead asking, "Buy me some food" (Fig. 8).

While they first eat together, Min-seo gets to know by Karim's advice that talking down to Karim or having prejudice against the Muslim diet as "strange" is "rude." In this way, the two begin to forge a form of *Bandungist* solidarity as socially vulnerable. As Namseok Kim

10) Notably, those who overturned their faults to Karim are a jobless and a part-timer who gets minimum wage; they insist to a police officer that foreign workers are "taking [their] jobs." This remark demonstrates that the Korean people's intolerance towards immigrant workers is partly rooted in their victim mentality within the system of capitalist competition. Indeed, "jobs for domestic workers have decreased" as foreign workers' number have increased (Ji-young Kim and Shim 31).

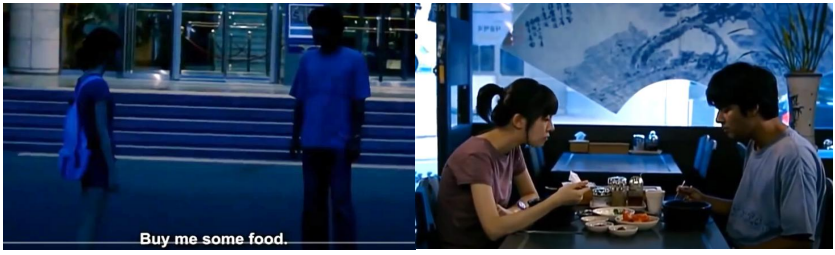

Figure 8. Sharing food as minorities

points out, the act of commensality connotes a friendship in many different countries, including Korea, since it often causes a change in the degree of intimacy between people (118-119). Indeed, this act of sharing food signals proximity between Min-seo and Karim, as it did in *The Tiger Factory* (Fig. 5 earlier). At their first encounter, Min-seo refused the invitation of Karim, a Southeast Asian stranger, to sit next to him on the bus, but after this meal, she finds a planetary subset with him as second-class citizens and rests her head on his shoulder (Fig. 9).

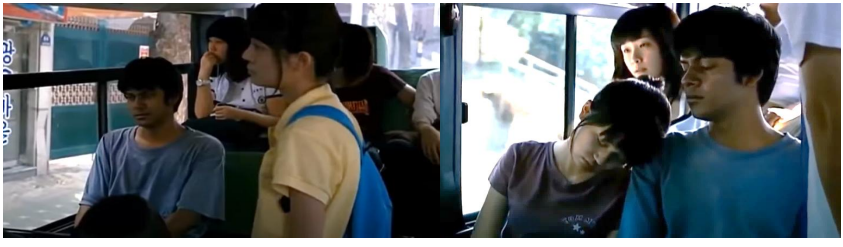

Figure 9. Minseo's transition after finding commonality with Karim

From this moment on, little by little, Min-seo, who used to consider Karim as an unwelcome outsider in her society and even attempted to rob him of his money, reducing him as a convenient other to manipulate, learns how to respect his dignity as a human being with

his own personalist value. For instance, she asks Karim the color of his dead skin and learns that it is the same as hers, finding another common feature between them. Besides, she helps Karim find Shin's house, his ex-boss who has not paid him for a year and who has maliciously filed for bankruptcy and not reimbursed his workers' back wages. When they are rejected at his door, Min-seo throws a stone over Shin's fence as "an interlocutor and a mouthpiece for Karim" (Sun Park 316). This incident makes them even closer, bringing about a multi-cultural meeting at Min-seo's home where Karim cooks Bangladeshi food for Min-seo, and they eat in their own culture's way: Karim uses his right hand, and Min-seo, a fork (Fig. 10).

Figure 10. Min-seo and Karim share Bangladeshi food

In addition, "Luxembourg" (2006) by Crying Nut, a South Korean rock song Min-seo and Karim later sing together, also creates a cosmopolitan polyphony. Titled after a representative multi-ethnic country, the song's verses introduce several nations with their stereotypical traits, such as "Saudi, where oil is overflowing" and "Brazil, two consecutive World Cup triumphs." Although some other parts of lyrics (e.g., "America, always waging war after war") connote an anti-American nationalist tendency, its chorus—"Regardless of skin

color and language, we are all proud people"—nevertheless conveys pluralist values. This duet calls on the audience to leave the comfort zone that divides different ethnicities and head toward the planetary contact zone, like Min-seo and Karim.

However, their friendship confronts some difficulties as Min-seo introduces Karim to her surroundings. One episode is where they two gather with Haines—Min-seo's White American English teacher—and other classmates at McDonald's (Fig. 11). This scene reveals Karim as the only person who cannot enjoy hamburgers, a *haram* American food, being alienated from the others. What is more, although Haines can show off his knowledge of Korean culture, such as *taekkyon* (Korean traditional martial arts), *soju* (Korean distilled spirits), and *kimchi* (Korean vegetable dishes), for Karim, a migrant Muslim factory worker who struggles to subsist in everyday life, these are not allowed either by economic barriers or by the Islamic rule. In this way, Haines's and Karim's lifestyles in Korea notably contrast due to their different ethnic and religious backgrounds, although they both are foreign workers.

Figure 11. Haines, Min-seo, and Karim at McDonald's

Moreover, when Haines tells Karim that he should get a "sweet" Korean girlfriend, Karim does not answer and is thus rebuked by Min-seo as

"small-minded." Min-seo also adds that Karim does not "enjoy life in Korea like Haines" because Karim is from "a poor country." Karim retorts:

> *. . . But how ridiculous are you, Koreans? You brown-nose white people and look down on us with contempt. You hypocrites . . . You know what that white guy meant by saying 'Sweet'? He meant you look liked whores.*

These lines bluntly criticize South Korean society's double standards that prefer whites to people of color, demanding a planetary awareness (ø) to Min-seo and the film's Korean audience by arguing that Korean people are sometimes similarly ignored and discriminated against by white people, even as they disdain Southeast Asian migrants as social minorities.[11)]

In the same vein, Karim later shouts at the sea, "You crazy Koreans! You're all slaves like us!" in Bengali (Fig. 12). Although Min-seo may not have understood what he meant, his utterance is translated via subtitles for the viewers, encouraging them to think seriously about the covert xenophobia within South Korean society, where the tendency to favor Caucasians and "homogenous nationalism" still dominates (Ji-young Kim and Shim 6). Karim has migrated into Korea, hoping that it might improve his and his wife's

11) Although *Bandhobi*'s problem-posing on Korean's double-face toward the racial other is legitimate, it is arguable whether this film also sets another racist prejudice on European-Americans, with the negative depiction of Haines. The movie repeatedly satirizes Lee Myung-bak's government (2008-2013), which maintained a pro-American stance, by implanting a repeated series of insulting meme images of Lee on-screen and directly mentioning Lee's disgraceful nickname, "mouse." Thus, it might be necessary to have a critical awareness that its American representation may also have been politically biased.

lives, but as he complains, "[he] has only been used like a dog," being cheated by Korean bosses who make bad use of the ambiguities in Korean law that fail to provide sufficient protection for the rights of foreign workers. Most of the Korean adults in *Bandhobi* are depicted as unethical in terms of Kantian personalism, exploiting Karim as a mere means for capitalist production, as Tien did to Ping in *The Tiger Factory*.

Figure 12. Karim's shouting on the beach

Furthermore, these racist assumptions that Karim clashes with are made even more complicated due to the belief in South Korea that Southeast Asian foreign workers are prone to violent crime. Indeed, the crime rate of foreigners in terms of rape, robbery, and homicide is higher than that of locals (Kang 4), enhancing the discriminatory public sentiment against them. Min-seo's mother and Ki-hong, her mother's boyfriend, worry about Min-seo in this respect, considering Karim to be "too dangerous," and, in the end, reporting him so that he is deported once again to Bangladesh. However, no matter what good intention they may harbor for Min-seo, they should have first attempted to "open [their] mind" to Karim as Min-seo requests or, at least, should have made a single effort to figure out Karim's true personality. Instead, they arbitrarily suppose him to be a potential

criminal only on the basis of his ethnicity. Such a stigmatizing attitude contrasts with Kang's people in *The Tiger Factory* (Fig. 5 earlier), who offer Derridean hospitality and reminds us of Tien and Ping, who end up remaining with their negative prejudices regarding foreign workers (Fig. 6 earlier).

Despite all the Koreans who otherize or exploit him, Karim never utilizes them for his own greedy benefit, thereby remaining committed to his ethics of *planetary personalism* as *Homo Symbiøus*. He does not use Min-seo to stay in Korea to the last, mildly rejecting her repeated appeals to marry, and chooses to remain as a genuine friend "who makes [Min-seo] laugh." Min-seo, on the other hand, also sustains her sincere bond with Karim in his absence as his *bandhobi* ("female friend"). In the ending scene, she appears as a mature young woman in her twenties who, while visiting an Islamic restaurant, naturally orders Bangladeshi food and uses her hands and a fork alternatively for eating (Fig. 13), sometimes mimicking Karim's gesture with a smile. As such, She celebrates her intimate memories of Karim, merging his culture with hers. This long-take scene indicates that Min-seo has truly grown out of her initial otherizing attitude toward Karim; he is no longer a *non-ego* for Min-seo since her identity has already embraced his in the planetary understanding (ø).

Figure 13. The final scene of *Bandhobi*

Besides, although Min-seo is depicted as learning her ø with Karim due to certain specific events, the movie does not completely unveil their communal presence by its cinematic language, just as human language never can embody the totality of our existence. Further, since the concept of *Homo Symbiøus* never includes eliminating our own distinct identities while fusing with others, Karim has clung to his cultural and ethical creed, and Min-seo has created her own way of life, not replacing her identity with Karim's in the process of finding a humanistic bond. Min-seo's relationship with Karim, in this way, develops not into a means for phallic jouissance but as the purpose itself.

Nonetheless, some may argue that Min-seo was able to understand Karim since she is not in an urgent situation of survival like Ping, and that is why *The Tiger Factory* and *Bandhobi* end differently. After all, Min-seo has her mother and Ki-hong who support her, and although she once worked as a sex worker to further her private education, this did not take the form of mere subsistence faced by Ping. However, as Kang's and Karim's cases show, *planetary personalism* does not necessarily require a positive economic situation. Besides, Min-seo also has gone through her own painful adversity and finally flees from her Symbolic—the Korean education system—by voluntarily dropping out of school, just as Ping leaves Malaysia to fulfill a form of resistance against an alienating society. In this process, Min-seo does not use anyone, demonstrating that her act of jouissance is not *phallic* like Ping's manipulation of Kang. Therefore, it would be more logical to claim that the opposing ethical choices by Min-seo and Ping result from their dissimilar attitude of treating others—or the way they define themselves within their inter-subjective relationships—and also from their various degrees of planetary we-ness.

V. Conclusion: Symbiøtic Meetings of the Marginalized

Beyond every obstacle that inherent human antagonism posits before interracial relations in this pluralistic world, the lesson from *The Tiger Factory* and *Bandhobi* is evident. That is, the other should not be a mere tool for achieving one's selfish interest, but rather serve as a purpose in and of oneself. This Kantian personalist virtue is embodied by the stories of Kang, Karim, and Min-seo, against the foils of Ping, Tien, Min-seo's mother, Ki-hong, and Karim's hypocrite employers. The latter coterie of characters is unethical regarding Kantian *personalism* in that they tend to practice the completely opposite virtue, Lacanian *phallic jouissance*, which reduces their counterparts as dehumanized methods to pursue their egoistic desires. Most importantly, they fail to conduct Kantian ethics because they cannot unearth some piece of themselves in others, as Spivak argues they ought to with her notion of *planetarity.*

As their counter-example, Kang penetrates the common empty set (ø) between himself and Ping as second-class citizens, so he willingly provides friendship and Derridean hospitality to her, not requiring any egoistic demands in return. Karim and Min-seo also find some shared qualities between themselves beneath their skin-deep racial differences and their socio-economic similarities due to their marginalized status in Korean society. This act of incapacitating the line between the *ego* and the *non-ego* establishes a solid groundwork for Kantian personalism since finding the planetary subset between the I and the Other helps us to leave the comfort zone—where we selfishly distinguish ourselves—and go to the upper dimension of the relationship, the contact zone in *planetary personalism*.

The resonance of such ethical enlightenment is further enhanced

when Kang takes care of Ping based on their ø without much communication and when Min-seo and Karim eventually build a strong bond despite their different genders, race, and cultures. In particular, the act of commensality, which takes them closer to their bodily experience, brings about their ineffable communion, transcending both the racial barrier and human language. Furthermore, Kang, Karim, and Min-seo succeed at coexisting with others using an awareness of the planetary subset while still maintaining or re-creating their distinct identities, as examples of *Homo Symbiøus* who have an insight on the unspeakable ø between themselves and others. This understanding does not relinquish each of their distinct identities, thereby allowing for the deconstruction of the binary structure of imperialism, racism, and Lacan's desire theory.

In this way, Kang, Karim, and Min-seo surmount the ethical vulnerability of the other coterie of characters and the Bandung conference 1955, suggesting the solution for the authentic perpetual peace in human coexistence. If and when this humane symbiosis becomes commonplace in the real world, ahead of the *Bandungist* meetings of the marginalized in *The Tiger Factory* and *Bandhobi*, we may belatedly be able to say that we are finally reaching each other.

Keywords: Bandung Conference, Kantian Personalism, Lacanian Phallic Jouissance, Spivak's Planetarity, Cosmopolitan Ethics

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Coexisting With Others as *Homo Symbiøus*: From the Interracial Encounters in *The Tiger Factory* and *Bandhobi*

This paper creates a *Bandungist* comparison between *The Tiger Factory* (2010), a Malay independent film by Woo Ming Jin, and *Bandhobi* (2009), a Korean counterpart by Shin Dong-il. Although the two movies both present relationships between Southeast Asian males who are illegal migrants and East Asian females who are also socially marginalized, they arrive at contrasting endings: one finishes with betrayal, while the other finds genuine solidarity. Thus, focusing on how the characters in each film formulate, break, and perhaps re-connect the bonds with one another, arriving at different conclusions, this paper seeks an ethical direction regarding inter-subjective communion. In this process, most characters in *The Tiger Factory* are revealed as primarily depicting an otherizing tendency of Lacanian *phallic jouissance*, which reduces the other as a mere means and thus violates the imperative of Kantian *personalism*. On the contrary, *Bandhobi*'s main protagonists, Karim and Min-seo, discover themselves within each other, thereby replacing alterity with Gayatri Spivak's *planetarity*. Therefore, the paper concludes that Karim, Min-seo, and the sole personalist character in the former movie, Kang, are *Homo Symbiøus*—human beings who coexist with others based on the hybrid of Kant's and Spivak's ethics—borrowing the mathematical concept of the empty set (ø).

Keywords: Bandung Conference, Kantian Personalism, Lacanian Phallic Jouissance, Spivak's Planetarity, Cosmopolitan Ethics

논문투고일: 2021년 3월 4일 심사의뢰일: 3월 29일 심사완료일: 4월 12일 게재확정일: 4월 15일

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