

## Spatial Imagination and Narrative Voice of Korean-American Experience in Gary Pak's *A Ricepaper Airplane*

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### Abstract

This study reads Gary Pak's *A Ricepaper Airplane* (1998) as a reflection of the Korean-American diasporic imagination in Hawai'i and their turbulent experience. Through Sun Wha's recollection of his eventful past as revolutionary, activist and labourer, both in Korea and Hawai'i, Pak dramatises the rootlessness which results from inability to be attached to a particular locality. The theme of exile features prominently in Pak's spatial imagination of both Hawai'i and Korea, illustrated through Wha's continuous fight for survival from the Japanese occupiers, Hawai'ian labour plantation owners, and his ultimately futile endeavour of returning home to Korea. This paper further problematises readers' active role in constructing a mental model of simulation through the textual cues of spatialisation and narrative voice in navigating Wha's narration. Narrative voices, especially the slippage between the Standard English of the omniscient narrator and the Hawaii Creole English (HCE) of Sun Wha's recollection problematises the issue of "who sees" and "who speaks" which highlights the polyvocality of Wha's narration. To conclude, the study posits that the spatialisation and blending of narrative voices in *A Ricepaper Airplane* catalyses the immersion of readers into a site-specific, creolised-world mediated by polyvocal narration which come together to represent diasporic imagination of Hawai'i and Korea.

### Keywords

Korean-American literature, spatialisation, narrative voices, diasporic imagination, econarratology

### Introduction

Diaspora has been a problematic and complex concept to define. It can be stated as a phenomenon related to the dispersal of people on a wider scale established due to circumstances of unequal power relation within the global context. Ashcroft et al posit that diaspora constitutes not only geographical dispersal of a significant number of people but concerns with the "identity, memory, and home

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which such displacement produced” (217–28). Within the displacement caused by forced removal, the sense of being diaspora is constantly being negotiated and reformed. The notions of homeland, tradition, heritage are constantly reinterpreted as alternative outlooks which continue to shape the present of diaspora in their new place of residing. It can be summarised that cultural identity has become a matter of becoming, as well as being, diasporic identities are those which are constantly reproducing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference (Hall 80). In the shifting consciousness of the diaspora, one’s perception of spatial or imagined homeland, identity, culture, memory and tradition are always in flux. Experiencing diaspora means to re-examine the conception of home viewed through the scope of where, what, and how.

Among various diasporic communities, the Korean diaspora is a relatively recent phenomenon that only emerged in the early 20th century. One possible reasoning behind the late emergence of the Korean diaspora is a strong sense of belonging and attachment for the homeland in which external migration was motivated by factors such as poverty, poor harvests, and oppression by the ruling class. Through interconnection between territorialising space and group formation, Korean people and their social identity have become intricately woven together with place (Yoon, “Migration and the Korean Diaspora” 413-414). The sense of being Koreans, as identified by Kim derived from two main aspects, genealogy from a shared lineage from the mythical *Tan’Gun* as their ancestor and identification of a sense of place towards the Korean peninsula:

Since our progenitor *Tan’Gun* was born in the Taebaek Mountains, founded our nation, and enlightened our future generations, the whole land of Korea is his industry; four thousand years history is his genealogy; mountains and rivers surrounding the boundaries of the land is the fence that borders his house. Our nation is no more different than a family. (215)

The creation myth of *Tan’Gun* unifies the people of the Korean peninsula into one ethnic group/*minjok*. From 1905 to 1945, during which Korea ceased to exist as a sovereign nation, memory of an independent Korea is constructed as an imagined homeland, both for the Korean living under Japanese occupation and the increasing number of the overseas Korean diasporic community. Within this context, Korean as a state is imagined as a political community in which its members were linked with a shared genealogical descent and sense of belonging toward a territorial place.

History of Korean ethnic dispersion can be broadly divided into following periods and distinctive trends: the old immigrations from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century up until the early 1960s, the new immigrations from the early 1960s to the early 1990s, and the return migration from the early 1990s until the present era

(Dolan and Christensen 73–76). The first period of Korean immigration was motivated by poverty, famine, and oppression in Japanese-occupied Korea. Koreans illegally crossed the borders to Manchuria, China, and Russian Far East and willingly accepted labour opportunities in the growing sugar plantation and industry in Hawai'i, U.S.A from 1903 to 1905 when further immigration was prohibited.<sup>2</sup> The second period, corresponding with Japanese colonial rule from 1910-1945, was marked by large scale immigration to Japanese-owned Manchuria and Japan itself, as movement outside occupied Korea was strictly regulated. During this period, the Korean population in Japan, known as *Zainichi*, was stated to be as many as 2.3 million by August 1945.<sup>3</sup> The third period from 1945 to 1962 and the resulting split of the peninsula was characterised by the establishment of official migration policy regulating education for South Koreans abroad and enabling the wives and families of U.S. military officers to be united in America. Lastly, the current trend of South Korean immigration (1962-present) was marked with the official government policy of collective immigration, mainly to South America and also Western Europe, the Middle East, and North America. This program stagnated after the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games in which the burgeoning economic capital of South Korea encouraged the return of Korean migrants. Even so, a study of 2019 indicates that around 7.5 million people of the Korean diaspora still exist in roughly 193 countries in the world (Yoon 68).

The formation of the Korean diaspora within the United States is intertwined with the Korean labour experience in the Hawaiian archipelago, which started in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century due to economic opportunities offered by the sugar industry and plantation in Hawai'i. Although already designated as an American territory in the early 1900s, Hawai'i has remained on the margin of American cultural and political hegemony due to the domination by a group of sugar planters commonly known as "Big Five" within its socio-political sphere.<sup>4</sup> Choi argues that this plantation-based economy in which oligarchy exercises authority, alongside Hawai'i's demographics in which the whites were only

<sup>2</sup> The first Korean immigrants in the U.S landed in 1888, shortly after Korea (at that time an independent nation) was forced to open its ports and establish diplomatic relations with the United States. However, since their number was so small, the consensus regarding the 'first-wave' of Korean immigrants in U.S.A. was the arrival of the labourers in Hawai'i in 1903. (see Hong 2018)

<sup>3</sup> By 1938, only around eight hundred thousand Koreans were living and working in Japan, mainly as labourers. World War II caused an explosion of *Zainichi*'s growth with the involuntary immigration and labour of Koreans, including a large contingent of women forced into prostitution as "comfort women." In the aftermath of the war, three-fourth of the *Zainichi* returned to Korea while around six hundred thousand remained in Japan. (Roh 2021)

<sup>4</sup> For decades, Hawai'i's economy was dominated by a handful of companies that controlled the sugar industry and associated businesses. Commonly referred to as the Big Five, four of them had gotten their start during the heyday of the whaling fleet. Most were founded by missionaries, or the sons of missionaries, and even into the 1930s, all had direct descendants of missionaries on their boards of directors. Their economic power translated into political power as well, an intricate cross-pollination between business and politics

minority enables the immigrants to preserve their self-identity instead of being assimilated into American society (148). Within this distinctive cultural and political situation, Hawai'i provides a space for Koreans to cultivate their diasporic identity based on the conception that Hawai'i or America in general is their temporary place of exile. Korean immigrants in Hawai'i were fostered with a deep connection of 'being Korean', in which organisation such as *Kungminhoe* (Korean National Association) were established to preserve their national identity (Hong 11).

Korean-American literature, mainly written by the earliest immigrants or their descendants represents the historicity of Korean experience in the United States through its various facets. The forced dislocation of a people without a country to identify with, struggling with racism and class oppression in the United States were represented through the autobiography/memoir of first-generation Korean immigrants (J. N. Park 105–08). One notable writer during this period was Young-Hill Kang with his two works, *The Grass Roof* (1931) and its sequel, *East Goes West* (1937), that explore the theme of racial discrimination and Chungpa's abandonment of Eastern spirituality due to the influence of Western materialism. Newer generations of Korean immigrants began problematising the cultural differences among *Il Se* (first generation), *I Se* (second generation) and also *Il Chom O Se* (generation 1.5, who were born in Korea and moved to the United States in their childhood).<sup>5</sup> Boo identifies how authors such as Chang-Rae Lee through *Native Speaker* (1999) and *A Gesture Life* (1999) and Hak Kyung Cha's *DICTEE* (1982) explore conflicts arising with the dislocation, relocation, pressure, and desire to assimilate generated by immigration to the United States ("Korean-American Authors, 588). Even within this broadening field of Korean American literary criticism, Park argues that the canonical works mainly concerns Korean experience in the continental U.S., and discussion of Korean American literature originated in Hawai'i remains limited (171).

The present study contextualises the Korean American diasporic imagination in Hawai'i through reading of the third generation Korean-American writer Gary Pak's novel titled *A Ricepaper Airplane* (1998). Pak, a professor of English at the University of Hawai'i in Honolulu and a community activist explores the cultural and ethnic roots of Hawai'i's diasporic Koreans through the legacy of plantation labour history. His novel traces the life of Sung Wha, a Korean nationalist who fled to Hawai'i to escape Japanese persecution and dreamed for his eventual return to North Korea. His lifelong dream was to create a ricepaper airplane that will reunite him with his beloved family and homeland but it was ultimately a futile task. In the present day, a dying Wha is taken care of

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<sup>5</sup> Although the large scale immigration of Koreans occurred in the aftermath of the Korean War, by 1965 the Korean American community remained small before the restrictive immigration laws were lifted through the passing of Immigration Act in 1965.

by his nephew, a second-generation Korean American named Yong Gil who is able to facilitate a short relief from his job as a teacher. It is in his deathbed that Wha recounts his experience as first-generation immigrant for his nephew through storytelling.

Mirroring the recurring theme of Korean-American literature, Pak's narration highlights the representation of "a diasporic immigrant community consumed by the politics of Korean independence that emerged from colonization" (Choi 107). Sun Wha's experience as first-generation Korean immigrant is intertwined within the historicity of plantation labour experience in Hawai'i and involves a journey that transposes multiple geographical and national borders. This perspective is juxtaposed with Yong Gil's account as second generation diasporic Koreans, detached and disconnected from plantation labour history and memory of Korea as homeland. Storytelling, the act of narrating and listening functions to preserve the memory of the earliest immigrants and bridges the generational gaps between first and second generations of the Korean diaspora. Furthermore, the addressee of Wha's storytelling is also extended to the novel's readers through their active participation in imagining Korean diasporic experience, both in Hawai'i and Korea. Pak's narration shifts deftly between first and third person accounts, standard and creolised English and is presented in achronological order. These narrative devices problematise the necessity of creating a mental model of narrative in the readers' mind to immerse themselves into virtual storyworld during the reading process.

Erin James explores the cognitive turn in literary analysis, in which narrative comprehension requires the formation of a mental model of narrative that readers must come to know and inhabit during reading process (8). As a performative act, reading enables the relocation of readers from the here and now of their immediate physical environment to an alternative space-time. Storyworld proponents argue that narrative comprehension is only possible through storyworld construction, readers' mental model of the contexts, and environments inhabited by fictional characters and simulated through the performative act in reading. James formulates that,

importantly for the considerations of narrative environments, the concept of storyworld calls attention to the worldmaking power of narrative, or its potential to immerse/transport readers into virtual environments that differ from the physical environment in which they read. (9–10)

James' model of reading, to which she refers as econarratology, focuses on the connection between formation of fictional model of narrative in readers' mind and its implication in fostering a sense of environmental imagination based on perception of space and place. This spatial turn in narrative analysis provides further insight to analyse how space that connotes abstraction is transformed into

place that connotes values and meaning. Likewise, the values of inhabited places introduce a cultural dimension to discussion of narrative spaces. She asserts that econarratology studies the storyworld that readers immerse themselves in when they read narratives, the relationship between these worlds and the physical/actual world, and the potential of reading process to raise awareness of different environmental imagination and environmental experience. (243)

Storyworld underlines the active process of interaction between readers and the contexts and environments of a narrative's characters by foregrounding the transportation of readers to the world of narrative during the reading process. Narrative mechanisms in form of textual cues facilitates the process of simulating a virtual storyworld. These textual cues manifests in several ways, words related with spatialisation to facilitate the mental simulation of narrative worlds and sensory appeals (qualia), describing a conscious experience narrated from a subjective consciousness and narrative voice of a narrator or focalising character. Furthermore, Buell argues that "spatial imagination is not value-neutral," but inevitably expresses the values and agenda of those in charge of them (85). Through textual cues that enable the construction of a fictional storyworld, storyworld formation problematises subjective consciousness mediated through textual cues provided from a character/focaliser in imagining material realities.

Deriving from James' concept of econarratology through storyworld formation, this study analyses Gary Pak's *A Ricepaper Airplane* as a reflection of Korean American diasporic experience founded upon unique sociohistorical circumstances in Hawai'i. The analysis focuses on two main aspects relating to the textual cues necessary to construct a fictional storyworld, spatial imagination and narrative styles and voices of both the narrator and characters. First, this paper reads Wha's spatial imagination of Korean landscape especially Kungangsan as a form of escapism from his struggle in Hawai'i and how his spatialisation of Hawai'i highlights his alienation and defamiliarise readers from forming a storyworld. Secondly, the present study reads the diversity of narratorial styles in *A Ricepaper Airplane* as a celebration of polyvocal Korean-American experiences. The polyvocal narration, employing both first and third person, standardised and Hawai'i Creole English (HCE) catalyses the immersion of readers into a site-specific, creolised-world mediated by diverse voices, representing the diasporic imagination of both Hawai'i and Korea.

Several prior studies have been conducted on Pak's *A Ricepaper Airplane*. Boo reads *A Ricepaper Airplane* as a critique towards the American Dream as a master narrative and a core construct of American identity (593). Instead of a successful immigrant story who is later assimilated into American society, Sung Wha remains a poor labourer, he never adopted Christianity and continued speaking in creolised instead of formal English. Another finding by Eperjesi

positions memories of mountains in *A Ricepaper Airplane* through the depiction of Kumgansan as a material discourse which helps the reader imagine an alternative future beyond the present state of North/South demarcation in the Korean peninsula (114). Different from prior studies on Wha's novel, the present study emphasises the active role of readers in imagining the Korean diasporic imagination through textual cues to reconstruct a fictional storyworld.

### Re-Imagining Korea through Sun Wha's spatial imagination

The representation of space in Gary Pak's *A Ricepaper Airplane* implores readers to engage with the historicity of Korean-American diasporic experiences, differentiated through generations and across spatial and temporal boundaries. The spatial imagination of Sun Wha preserves the memory of journey across geographical spaces such as Korea, Manchuria, Japan, and eventually Hawai'i in the form of storytelling towards the younger generation of the Korean diaspora. During the act of storytelling, Yong Gil's imagination ventures across different times and places, allowing him to accept his uncle's memory and heritage regardless of the passage of time or spatial shifts. Similarly, Wha's storytelling provides a mental model of narration which enables readers from diverse cultural backgrounds to connect and relate to the Korean-American diasporic imagination. This process of narrative immersion is highlighted through Gil's internal monologue that reads:

When he tells these stories, I begin to live them. It is a bizarre feeling – frightening at times – to be suddenly thousands of miles away, or forty or fifty years in the past. When a story begins, I lose track of myself and time. I don't know how to explain it any clearer; pictures just start to come to my mind, but I can also smell, hear, and feel things. It is a real world. (Pak 14)

The spatial recollection of Sun Wha's past focuses upon the imagination of Korean landscape in his youth, especially the memory of Kumgansan. It first appears in Wha's narration when he is running from the *lunas* (overseer) of Waipahu Plantation after his failed attempt to organise workers' union. Exhausted, sunburned, and deprived of food and water for several days, he hides in Wahiawa Mountain and begins to imagine himself not being a runaway in Hawai'i, but on the slope of majestic Kumgansan in his homeland:

And far in the distance, almost completely hidden by clouds and perhaps held some snow, were the mountains. But they wouldn't have to cross those mountains, not right now, and... they weren't as beautiful and majestic as Kumgansan, but he liked all mountains anyway, no matter if they were low and rounded and their tops never dressed in snow; mountains were mountains and these Hawaiian mountains seemed more like foothills. (Pak 36)

Wha' flashback articulates a sense of displacement from his immediate physical

environment in Hawai'i which resulted in his attempt to imaginatively relocate himself across spatial and temporal boundaries in Kumgansan mountain. The drifting from Hawai'i to Korea and back again underlines both Wha's longing for Korea and his condition of unending exile as a fugitive in Hawai'i.

The spatial imagination of Kumgansan features more prominently as Wha recalls his travels across the Korean border with his wife, Hae Soon. Kumgansan is described not only as a majestic mountain, but reinterpreted as a timeless utopian paradise for the newly-wed couple fleeing Japanese oppression:

Time does not dawn here. It never did. Today is yesterday is tomorrow is today... and there are no such things as villages or towns or societies. There is peace in nature, and nature is everything. There is no anger or sadness or happiness. There is no frustration or loneliness. And all is forgotten but the journey of the moment. (Pak 147)

Throughout his narration, Sun Wha's spatial imagination continuously returns to Kumgansan to recentre himself from a life shaped by perpetual displacement and dislocation. Eperjesi argues that memories of mountain, as represented in the imagination of Kumgansan in *A Ricepaper Airplane* function as a kind of collective or shared space of the Korean diasporic community displaced beyond the Korean peninsula (102). This attachment is transmitted to the younger generation of the Korean diaspora who might never have physically visited Korea, but is able to emotionally engage with a sense of place through the imagination of Kumgansan. Viewed from the concept of an imagined community as stated by Benedict Anderson (1991), Korea is culturally constructed through the imagination of homeland and belief of shared genealogical descents. Through the inherited story of Kumgansan, Yong Gil is able to visualise the majesty of Kumgansan, and participates within a collective space of imagined community for displaced Korean diaspora. Moreover, Wha's spatial stories are actively communing, producing an affective collective space which also invokes the readers' participation in reliving the memory of the earlier Korean diasporic community:

His eyes drooping. Deep lines on his gray face like the face of a mountain I know I have seen. Maybe Kumgangsán, those mountains I have seen so well through Papa's and Mama's and Uncle's eyes. (Pak 13)

Contrary with Wha's vivid reimagination of the Korean landscape, his spatial imagination is noted with the absence of information regarding his middle life in Hawai'i especially his time in Honolulu after escaping plantation labour. After narrating his failure in building a ricepaper airplane in his cousin's garage, the story moves forward in time during Wha's old age living alone in a decrepit apartment in Honolulu. This lack of spatialisation is linked with the idea of Hawai'i as a temporary place of exile and the possibility of eventual return to Korea. A passage in the text illustrates an event where Wha is invited to give a talk in the University of Hawai'i on labour history. In all of his life in Honolulu,



he never ventures towards this district and only perceives it from distance during his bus ride:

Sung Wha hobbled off the bus at the corner of King and University. He had never visited this side of town. Never. Often, after the war, he had ridden the bus through the area without getting off – back in those days in was called the trolley – all the way to Kokohead, where Eung Whan had a small truck farm. To get off in the university area was new to him. (Pak 192)

In his study of how narratives encourage mental modelling of space, Herman asserts that the representation of paths facilitates the cognitive mapping of storyworld. He defines paths as “the motion from one place to another and thus dynamic or emergent spatial properties of the sort characteristic of narrative” (271). While Wha’s narration manages to familiarise readers with imagination of the Korean peninsula and their active participation within a collective space, his account of Honolulu seeks to defamiliarise readers instead. The word ‘never’, twice affirmed in the prior passage further illustrates the sense of unfamiliarity and alienation in Honolulu. Readers are unable to properly construct a mental model of Honolulu as Wha’s narration never ventures into many districts beside his apartment building in Kekaulike Street and his cousin’s residence in Kokohead outside Honolulu. Another passage, “but where he was besides being next to this mad crossroad” (Pak 192), illustrates Wha’s confusion and alienation in Honolulu, although he had lived there for years.

Wha’s spatial imagination of Honolulu further highlights his dissatisfaction of living in an urban area, constantly fighting against eviction amid the squalor of the city. This is highlighted through two textual cues, visual and olfactory cues depicting the polluted water. Water is commonly associated as a source of rejuvenation, healing and signifier of hope in many cultures and Korean is no exception (Ingram et al. 15). As a form of escapism from his troubled life, Wha tries to look upon the waterway in Honolulu to reorient himself. Instead of being rejuvenated, he had to inhale the smell that “*stink like shit*” emitted from sewage water and perceives the dirtiness of its surface. These visual and olfactory cues force Wha’s consciousness to retreat back into his idealised image of the Korean rural landscape, clean water stream flowing from its majestic mountains. This is highlighted through the following passage, written in *Italic* to underline Wha’s inner thought and narrated through Hawai’i Creole English (HCE),

*“And why da stream so dirty and stink like shit? One stream from da mountains not supposed to be like dis. It supposed to be clean and cold and rushing and full wit’ life. It supposed to be living, one beautiful sight fo’ one pair tired eyes fo’ look at.”* (Pak 230)

Wha’s recollection of his eventful life for his nephew, Yong Gil illustrates contrasting spatial imagination envisioned by first and second-generation Korean-Americans. Wha’s spatial imagination that constantly shifts across spatial

and temporal boundaries underlines his inability to immerse himself within Hawaiʻian locality, different with Gil’s identification and rootedness of Hawaiʻi as a place. Viewed from the concept of exile narrative, Wha’s spatial imagination “tends to focus on what was left behind and reimagining the possibility of return” (Mardorossian 24). On the contrary, Gil’s spatial imagination of Korea, inherited through his uncle’s storytelling is mediated through his association with a localised sense of place, based on appreciation and identification with the Hawaiian natural environment,

Every Korean gotta go back Korea and see one sunset. You know, dey say Korea is da Land of da Morning, yeah?

“Land of the Morning Calm”

“I want to go Korea and see that sunset, “Yong Gil says, “If you say the one in Korea is more beautiful than this one –and this one is beautiful – then I gotta see the one in Korea. (Pak 121)

The prior utterances highlight Gil’s sense of place of being a local in the Hawaiian archipelago, based on the affective bond between people and place, or topophilia. The sense of being a Hawaiian, as Sumida proposed are tied to place, not to a particular ethnic group due to the historical circumstances of Hawaiʻi as a melting pot of the Hawaiʻian indigenous people (*Kanaka Maoli*), white settlers and Asian immigrants. In Sumida’s words, “local involves a connection to the place, its plantation/working class history, its languages, especially the plantation-derived Hawaiʻi Creole English, and one’s ethnic roots” (122). Conversely, the historicity of traumatic labour experience that shaped earlier Korean diasporic experience hinders them from fully embracing a sense of place of the Hawaiian archipelago, as highlighted through Wha’s monologue (Pak 212).

### **Polyvocal narration as the eclectic Korean-American diasporic imagination**

As discussed before, Gary Pak’s *A Ricepaper Airplane* employs polyvocal narrative voices in which Wha’s recollection of his past in third-person is supplanted by Yong Gil’s first-person perspective. This polyvocality creates an unsteady and inconsistent narrative persona, as it is not always clear who speaks when. Pak alternates between Wha’s recollection of his past, his inner thought/monologue and his conversation with Gil in the present day. Regarding the variety of narratorial voices in *A Ricepaper Airplane*, a general pattern can be identified by focusing on the point of view and the language used, whether it is standard English or Hawaiʻi Creole English (HCE). Yong Gil’s perspective employs first-person point of view, while Wha’s flashback is narrated through third-person omniscient narration and slippage into first person narration, using first-person plural “we” pronoun. The use of HCE in the story mainly concerns Wha’s inner thought, monologue, and dialogues with Yong Gil.

The first prominent narrative voice in *A Ricepaper Airplane* is delivered through first person account of Yong Gil as he struggles to come to terms with his uncle's sudden illness. His perspective describes his fascination of Wha's storytelling that manages to integrate himself with the memory of earlier generation of Korean immigrants, "when he starts telling his stories with no end, I am hooked, like an addict" (Pak 14). As highlighted by Patterson, by the 1970s second generation Korean Americans have adjusted to American culture in Hawai'i and achieve rapid social advancement, working in cities instead of plantation (83). Detached from the historicity of plantation labour experience, Gil's first-person perspective highlights both his filial piety and desire to reconnect himself with the memory of the earlier Korean diaspora through his uncle's storytelling:

Summer is ending and classes will be starting in a couple of weeks. This morning I called the school and asked my friend Joe Leong, the principal, if it was all right to take a leave of absence, without pay. I explained that there was a problem in the family, that my uncle, who was like a father to me, was dying, that it was important for me to be with him by his bedside. (Pak 3)

The first person narrative persona, or homodiegetic narrator, tends to give readers an insight into the qualitative, experiential, or felt properties of the speaking narrator's mental states. Gil's emotional and physical attachment towards Sun Wha, listening towards his prior struggles and stories highlights generational longing from one generation of the Korean diaspora into another.

The narratorial voice shifts into third-person heterodiegetic narration as Wha begins to recall the memory of his past. This narratorial style, identified by Gerald Genette (1980) as a narrator who is not a character in the story highlights how Wha's flashback is framed from the perspective of an omniscient narrator. The omniscient narrator hovers above the story, presenting Wha's inner thought and action through free indirect discourse. The following passage describes how Wha's account of his life in Hawai'i is mediated through narratorial voice:

As Sung Wha treks up the trail on the slopes above the plantation camp to his cousin's homestead, tears fall from his eyes. He is thinking of all the good people he has met since arriving in Hawai'i, forget about all those bad eggs. Then he dreams of home, Korea. And of his marvelous ricepaper airplane, flying in a clear blue sky. (Pak 78)

In the prior passage, the external narrator talks about Sun Wha's character in the third person, providing information about his inside thought. The use of phrases such as "he is thinking", "he dreams" illustrates how Wha's subjectivity is submerged under the mediation of an external narrator, evoking a sense of distance from both Gil as the listener of his tale and the readers. This perspective of a heterodiegetic narrator hinders the readers from experiencing qualia, or "what it is like for someone to undergo conscious experience" (Weik von

Mossner 7) as Wha's inner thoughts and perspectives remained closed for the readers.

Wha's own voice, unmediated, emerged through a slippage of narrative voice which shifts the narratorial perspective. These passages, set in Korea during Wha's time as a runaway from Japanese authorities, are narrated using the first person plural 'we' view, free of narratorial mediation:

We travel south along gentle running brook; our feet numb from morning cold. Old snow still clings to banks and broken-off bits drift down with lethargic whorl of water. But is beautiful, this time of year; birds awakening, quarrelling, and singing spring songs; green buds pushing out like barnacles on bare branches; the fecund odors of a reviving earth rising in wild, clean air of country. (Pak 93)

The prior passage, narrated through the first person plural 'we' pronoun encourages readers to actively simulate Wha's escape across Korean landscapes through evocative descriptions. The sensory imagery in the passage is not solely visual but also involves other senses such as smell, "fecund odor of a reviving earth", auditory reception, "birds singing spring songs", and touch, "numb from morning cold." Caracciolo compares literary narratives to "instruction manuals... which contain a set of instructions for mental composition and active process of readers' to follow those instruction" (172). Textual cues highlighting sensory appeals enables readers to better envision a subjective experience narrated through Wha's own voice as an experiencing agent. Similar with first person perspective of Yong Gil, readers are given direct access to Wha's consciousness, sharing his perceptions, sensations, thoughts, memories, and emotions. Moreover, the use of the first-person plural "we" pronoun echoes the collective memories of the first-generation Korean diasporic community, the emotive textual cues highlight a deep sense of longing and yearning for the lost homeland.

While Wha's flashback is narrated through standard English and a variety of narratorial perspectives, the use of Hawai'i Creole English (HCE) marks a temporal transgression from Wha's storytelling into the present time. HCE originated from the need of a common language among a diverse group of plantation labourers, consisting of Native Hawaiians, Asian and Central American immigrants, and their European/North American supervisors (*luna*). Miyares identifies the main characteristic of Hawaiian Pidgin as "a creolized form of English that employed Hawaiian grammatical forms and sentence structures and a synthesis of English, Hawaiian, and labourer-contributed words" (512). Although second-and third generation of plantation labourers tend to achieve social mobility and conform to Anglo-American culture and the use of proper English, HCE remains in use to connect themselves with their families and friends who are more comfortable speaking in HCE instead of standard English.

For many people in Hawai'i today, pidgin is synonymous with localness, an identity that encompasses different ethnicities and cultural backgrounds (Drager 64). HCE is also prominently employed in Hawaiian literature especially written by native Hawaiians and writers from Asian descents, in which the use of pidgin is seen as a sign of authenticity due to shared plantation labour history. Writing in HCE symbolises an "act of identity, a counter-discourse of colonial language that embraces the culture, identity, and solidarity of the local working class" (Romaine 533).

Dialogues between Wha and Gil, signifying a transfer of knowledge between first and second-generation Korean-American, is mediated through the use of HCE, a language deeply rooted within the historicity of labour experience. The following passage establishes how the legacy of Korean diasporic groups is intertwined by the use of Creolised English.

No forget what I telling you Yong Gil. Dis is history. Dis is what happen in da past. No forget all dis. Even when I *make*, you remember what I telling you. No can forget how things was befo. (Pak 25)

Wha addresses the discontinuity of second-generation Korean settlers from plantation history as they slowly assimilated into dominant American culture and the use of standardised English. As an integral part of hybrid culture founded upon the legacy of plantation labour, the use of HCE in dialogues highlights a distinctive immigrant identity that differs from the standard English of assimilated immigrants. Eperseji argues that Gary Pak "does not develop Sung Wha as a proper Korean immigrant, as he is uneducated and does not embrace Christianity compared to his cousin Eung Whan and nephew Yong Gil" (103). On the contrary, Gil as a second-generation Korean immigrant manages to identify with the sense of being American, educated, speaking in proper English and acquiring a decent job. Although already 'Americanised,' Gil's conversation with his uncle underlines his participation in creolised English. Their dialogues highlight how HCE provides an avenue to mediate Korean-American diasporic identity, differentiated through the spatial imagination and conception of homeland, but linked through creolised English that preserves the historicity of plantation labour experiences:

"Uncle, I know you no like hear what I have to say."

"Den no say it. You know my answer already", he says. He clears his throat.

"But I like you think about it," Yong Gil says, "And there's something else."

"What?"

"Uncle Sung Wha.... I don't think you should get so involved with all this business, all this radical stuff, making all the trouble with the landlord." (Pak 208-209)

The use of HCE signifies how creolised English is employed as the shared language of consciousness among the characters, narrators, and also the participating author. Among a plethora of narrative voices employed in the text, active participation and reproduction of HCE provides a shared legacy between first and second-generation Korean-Americans who are differentiated by distinctive socio-historical circumstances. HCE functions as a set of textual cues, facilitating readers' active participation to reconstruct the Korean-American diasporic imagination within the historicity of plantation labour experience in Hawai'i. The language of characters and narrators in Pak's novel catalyses the immersion of readers into a site-specific, creolised-world mediated by polyvocal narration which comes together to represent the diasporic imagination of Hawai'i and Korea. This polyvocality reconciles various facets of Korean immigrant experiences, represented by Wha's spatial imagination that invokes his alienation and displacement in Hawai'i, Gil's identification as both American and Hawaiian, and the use of creolised English as a legacy of plantation history. These diverse voices contribute in creating an eclectic Korean-American diasporic experiences mediated by both standard and creolised English.

### **Conclusion**

An analysis of spatialisation and narrative voices in Gary Pak's *A Ricepaper Airplane* underlines polyvocal narration that contributes to creating an eclectic Korean-American diasporic imagination. The spatial imagination of Sun Wha's recollection remains rooted within a sense of longing and nostalgia towards a lost homeland in which the Mount Kumgansan is continuously re-imagined as a refugee from displacement and alienation in Hawai'i. Different from the vivid description of Korean landscape that seeks to familiarise readers within localised environmental imagination, spatialisation of Hawai'i fosters a sense of distance and defamiliarises readers from immersion within Hawaiian locality. Hawai'i in Wha's spatial imagination is filtered from his alienation as a pariah, constantly reconstructing the spatialised memory of Korea. Wha's rootlessness and displacement mirror the conception of Hawai'i as place of exile for first-generation Korean immigrants, a view challenged by Yong Gil's immersion as second-generation Koreans within the Hawaiian locality.

*A Ricepaper Airplane* can be considered a polyvocal narration which employs diverse narratorial and character voices, both first and third person, standard and creolised English in the form of HCE. Wha's account of his past is narrated through a mediation of an external narrator, highlighting his fractured sense of self and inability to narrate within his own voice. This sense of distance is supplanted by the slippage of narratorial persona into first-person that evokes *qualia*, both Wha's act of storytelling and Gil's account of himself. The use of creolised English in narration represents a shared legacy of diverse groups of

Korean descendants, distanced from the history of plantation life and retrospectively reliving it through narrative. Polyvocal narration, through the usage of diverse narratorial styles and creolised English provides textual cues for readers to imagine a diasporic Korean experience rooted within Hawaiian socio-historical contexts. This conception of hybridised culture formed by diverse narratorial and character voices contributes to the formation of an eclectic Korean-American diasporic imagination.

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