Modular Imagined Community:
Manila's Koreatown in the Time of Global Korea and the Popularity of Samgyupsal

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[*Abstract*]

Guided by the prism of cultural studies, this paper takes a look at the Manila Korea Town in Malate, Manila. The location, Manila Korea Town, figures as the paper's object of study by exploring, theorizing, and reflecting on its presence and location within the horizon of the signifying powers of Korea-Philippine relations in the contemporary period. With the subject position of this essay, the paper theorizes by responding to the following questions: How does the meaning-making of South Korea fare with other Koreatowns in the world from the scale of Koreatown in Manila? Subsequently, what happens to a place when a global cultural phenomenon evolves into a form of placemaking in a different nation and territory? As Koreatown finally grounds itself in the anarchic lifeworld of Manila, what does this historical development in our urban lives reveal about our contemporary times? Responding to this set of questions led this paper to foreground the idea of a modular imagined community within a four-part discussion. The body of the essay begins by theorizing on the concept that this paper proposes, modular imagined community, and such a

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concept work draws from the theories of nationalism by Benedict Anderson and Partha Chatterjee. Subsequently, the antinomy between Anderson and Chatterjee is pursued by looking at the history of such a place, and through this step, the paper unravels the character of the place of Manila Korea Town, which explains the conditions of possibility of such social and communitarian formation. Yet as the public is caught by the presence of such development especially at the heart of Manila, the paper expands the scale and viewpoint by shining light on the globality of South Korea in relation to the Philippines. Lastly, this paper closes with a discussion on the food culture facilitated by this recent development, which also pushes us to imagine its potential, especially in light of the critique raised against South Korea and the popular culture associated with this phenomenon.

Keywords: Nationalism, Modular, Friendship, Hospitality, Koreatown, Samgyupsal

Ⅰ. Introduction

Globally, we have marveled at the miraculous but also enchanting boom of the Korean wave. The Koreans have taken the spotlight of the global entertainment and creative industries, unraveling a different story of Asian success, which has overturned spaces that seem to be exclusive to the Western world, from Hollywood to European festivals. The craze of the world over Korean popular culture is a contemporary story, evolving from the stories of migration that can be gleaned from the classic work, *Pachinko* (Lee 2017). It is a novel turned into a movie that captures the history of World War II and the perpetual tension within the Far East Asian regional block, but eventually imbricated with the Asian American migration narrative within the scale of the history of the American empire. Yet with the present Korean wave, the struggling and oppressed migrant narrative of Korea has been crossed over, drawing what Jacques Derrida signifies as an X mark on its name (1997: 64). In turn, we are gradually becoming a witness to this nation's phenomenal rise through its Korean popular stars as figures

of success. Through these stars, our collective craze over Korean pop culture is consequently turning their visibility as a condition to efface a history of a past generation who have been subjects of global migrant labor oppression (Derrida 1997: 64). From such evolution of the Korean ethnicity, the global wave of Korean popular culture, at present, seemingly marks its crucial role at certain nodes of different global networks and assemblages at which nations, empires, and regional formations collide. The globality of the Korean wave, as a result, also becomes the horizon where stories of global history are changed, displaced, and at the same time, reinforced.

With such persuasion, it must be realized that stories of global transformation also crystalize in everyday life apart from the diplomatic talks of nations in high-power meetings. Everyday life, from building communities, daily domestic chores, popular entertainment, and up to restaurant visits, becomes the setting and the plotlines of modern stories of worldmaking, a story advancing the very rise of the Korean wave. Thus, over a coffee cup, upon seeing a Korean research informant who had lived in the Philippines for almost a decade, Danny Park (not his real name), I began recounting the present context of Koreatown in Malate, Manila. As I shared my research accounts, I told him about the rise of the Official Development Assistance (ODA) under the Korean Government that supports the construction of cities like Manila Korea Town in Malate (Park, Bang & Kang 2021: 1-3). The information I shared with him animated a sense of repulsion, and at the same time, bafflement. In our conversation, our exchange crossed the linguistic divide between Filipino and English languages, and his sharpest interpretation of such development marked through the political keyword: invasion. Such sentiment was animated by alarm. He weighed such social formation against a community he expected to be organic, which should capture a communal way of living, and at large, a social life immersed in Philippine culture. He cautioned us about such a scheme of the Korean Government, especially with its impact on its broader international relations with the Philippines.

Right off the bat, Park incites a critique whose idea of invasion can be rooted in the tradition of anti-colonial and anti-imperialist

nationalism in the Philippines, which has also served as a dominant discourse of local activism and postcolonial critiques (Patajo-Legasto 2008: x-xxiii). Yet such responses of alarm and surprise do not come from a Filipino. Instead, it is voiced by a Korean who has been here in the Philippines since the turn of the millennium. The steam of his apprehension seethes from the depths of experience in the vernacular Philippine popular culture, and at the same time, as someone who has reached exasperation whenever his racial visibility gets recognized. He has felt nothing but loath whenever one scrutinizes his racial otherness as people inquire about his place of origin in South Korea, or acknowledge his presence as if an ambassador of South Korea, despite almost becoming a migrant native—thinking, living, and speaking like a normal Filipino. He has almost reached the point in which he gives the impression that he wants to settle questions on his racial otherness by simplifying his identification as a naturalized Filipino.

Yet the idea of invasion has been imbricated and entangled with Korean Popular Culture, and in such a double bind, it has been, in fact, normalized, losing its symbolic and material damages to a nation-state. Our global reception to Korean popular culture allows us to realize how the idea of invasion has been generalized, turning it into South Korea's latest soft power. With such global popular appeal of South Korean popular culture, the response of Park can be a sentiment that evokes a forbidding future. After all, it is an invasion. Yet by highlighting such sentiment, I am not interested in sowing discontent between and among South Koreans who enjoy their citizenship in the Philippines. Instead, I seize this as an opportunity to look at this remark as a case of a critique of the city formation of Korea Town within the transnational sprawl, while sedimented by the history of the city of Manila. From such an angle, South Korea figures as a transnational society that serves as an allegory, structural edifice, and categorical index. As a result, this paper, despite the popular temptation, is by no means participating in identity politics. Much so, by having such a predisposition, I begin to ask instead, how does the meaning-making of South Korea fare with other Koreatowns in the world from the scale of Koreatown in Manila? Subsequently, what happens to a place when

a global cultural phenomenon evolves into a form of placemaking in a different nation and territory? As Koreatown finally grounds itself in the anarchic lifeworld of Manila, what does this historical development in our urban lives reveal about our contemporary times?

Answering these questions will be approached by using cultural studies, a method and perspective that, on the one hand, borrows from what John Jackson calls "thin fieldwork description," (2013) and on the other hand, views Korea Town in Manila as a site that will be read by what Stuart Hall calls "a signifying practice" (2003). The imbrication of the two—thin description and signifying practice—propels us to see the Korean informant who expresses the keyword such as "invasion" as not someone who appears to be an inhabitant of a place whom we can observe and follow his personhood and placemaking within a locality for a long time. Instead, we situate him in this study as an individual whose presence can be apprehended with depth through his ability to "signify" (Hall 2003: 5) within a "representational system" (2003: 7) which, in fact, has been in a condition of struggle as his presence also serves as the "circuit of meaning" (Hall 2003: 16), making oneself a conduit and pathway in which the present worldmaking can prevail, remake itself, and in turn, apprehend his self-representation by virtue of only being, after all, "constitutive" (2003: 6). Thus, in this context, the informant has never been the bearer of absolute meaning. Instead, by following Jackson, one appears as a figure from whom we "slice into a world from different perspectives, scales, registers, and angles—all distinctively useful, valid, and worthy of consideration" (2013: 16-17).

The method of cultural studies, as a result, writes naturally a thin description that slices into the larger world of metropolitan Manila, and at the same time, the global migration of Koreans and Filipinos. Through this scale, we are going to describe the depth and larger worlds that govern the sentiment of the Korean informant through the circulation and signifying the presence of the category Korea within the scale of Korea Town in Manila. Thus, this paper contributes to the Korean-Philippine relations from thin, fragmentary, and microscale measures. The thin description draws

out traces of such international relations from the cultural history and practices of the people involved in such relations through Korea Town in Manila which serves also as the locus. Responding to this set of questions led this paper to foreground the idea of a modular imagined community within a four-part discussion. The body of the essay begins by theorizing on the concept that this paper proposes, modular imagined community, and such "concept work" (Stoler 2016) draws from the theories of nationalism by Benedict Anderson (2002) and Partha Chatterjee (1993). Subsequently, the antinomy between Anderson and Chatterjee is pursued by looking at the history of such a place, and through this step, the paper unravels the character of the place called, Manila Korea Town, which explains the conditions of possibility of such social and communitarian formation. Yet as the public is caught by the presence of such development especially at the heart of Manila, the paper expands the scale and viewpoint by shining light on the globality of South Korea in relation to the Philippines. Lastly, this paper closes with a discussion on the food culture facilitated by this recent development, which also pushes us to imagine its potential, especially in light of the critique raised against South Korea and the popular culture associated with this phenomenon.

Ⅱ. Manila Koreatown: A Modular Imagined Community

Park's discomfort with the ODA as they support the rise of Korea Town in Manila has also been historically a strategy of the Korean government in dealing with other nations. The Korean government aims to take advantage and capitalize on the survivalist ethos of the transnational Korean business entrepreneurs across the world, a concern and historical development Jinwon Kim has also particularly explored among the diasporic Koreans in California and New York (2020). Kim and others have historicized the progress of the college-educated Koreans who have experienced "downward occupational mobility because of language barriers and general racial discrimination against Asians" (2020: 41). These Koreans have worked as "self-employed in the grocery business, dry cleaning, and wholesale retail Korean-imported merchandise" (2020: 217). Yet these Korean migrant workers have evolved from such a predicament

and eventually, have served as examples of "entrepreneurs [who] have practiced transnationalism from below" (2020: 215). Through such sociological character of the Korean diasporic presence, Kim shapes a concept called, "transclave" (2018), a conceptual rubric capturing the sociological imagination of the Koreans' socio-economic existence, specifically in Manhattan, New York. Through this concept, Kim gives shape to the expansive reach of such Korean migration by illuminating the transit between the US Empire and the South Korean homeland. On the one hand, transclave captures how such migration brought the revitalization of Korean brands (2020: 42-44; 228-231) especially with the Korean Americans, and on the other hand, it also operates as a placeholder for the "transnational flows between two societies" (208: 2) that may pertain to economy, culture, and ethnicity. With the latitude of Kim's transcalve, the concept also plots the crucial sites for "government investment in the overseas" (2018: 2).

With the situation of the Korean migrants in the United States of America as a backdrop, the informant's response, such as invasion, speaks of the cultural logic of nationalism. The response taps the process of forming communities that implicitly highlights the idealizing process of the localities. The intersections between the formation and idealization of communities foreground an important crossroad, especially with the broader politics of popular culture. In this context, Louie Jon Sanchez frames and ascertains such development through the category of "Korean turn" (2014: 68). The temporal marker of a Korean turn does not only capture what he describes as "merely an existing peak in the televisual process of change" (2014: 68). More so, it refracts our local cultural literacy (2014: 67-68), especially as the racial and national signifier, Korean, has been mediated as we enjoy the Korean televisual productions (2014: 70), whether in the form of "Tagalization" or translation into Tagalog of Korean soaps (2014: 70), or by adapting Korean television drama. These Korean televisual cultural productions, as our viewing evolves, have become a reservoir for our respective popular culture, which turns Korea, more than as a racial identity, but as a text that we presently read in the Philippines (2014: 83). Through such televisual experiences, the idea, name, or signifier, Korea, has

circulated and traveled across the Philippines in the contemporary period. By now, it has also become a name that has been affixed with a place that has a longer colonial and imperial history such as Malate Street. By drawing a sequence, beginning with the problem of Park regarding the transnational relations of South Korea with the world, followed by the nature of Philippine popular culture with its' Korean turn, and then the rise of Manila Korea Town—all of these can be considered as developments that expand the meaning of place, locality, community, and nations.

With the expansions of the categories for our placemaking, we must recognize that these categories stand on sediments of discourses that also support such relay of signs and ideas. Thus, Korea Town may not only be viewed as a mere place in Malate, Manila. The category, "Korea," also characterizes the racialization of a town. However, this racial affixation of Korea has a long history that can be complex, especially in a place that has served as an epicenter for the people's imagination of the Philippine nation, such as the city capital of Manila. After all, this place has become an important place from which we have anchored our imagination and theory of communities. Yet as we probe the substantive quality of placemaking of sites and nations, Benedict Anderson laments how these "have proved notoriously difficult to define, let alone analyse" (2002: 3). The difficulty he faces also has laid out its disperse and mobile capacity in its meaning-making for it has shown to be "'modular,' capable of being transplanted, with varying degrees of self-consciousness, to a great variety of social terrains, to merge and be merged with a correspondingly wide variety of political and ideological constellations" (2002: 4). Drawing from Anderson's perspective, we may recognize the very visibility of Korea Town as an effect and perhaps a consequence of also precisely the persuasive power of nationalist discourses, and at the same time, the nature of nationalist discourse for it is endowed with modular qualities.

However, if the problem of defining the terms and limits of nationalism lies between expansiveness and certitude, the Korea Town of Manila subsequently also exposes how these names for places may also lack finitude. The name, Korea Town, may also exemplify as bi-products of historical and cultural experiences of

transplantation, migrations, and constellations of a prevailing political and ideological reality. Thus, by decentering empirical proofs to substantiate and solidify the meaning of placemaking categories, Anderson shows that nations can be mutable and shapeshifting, especially as the category also enables people to be granted imagination as a form of power. Imagination discloses its propensity to be the mechanism to advance the meaning of nations, and at the same time, to privilege human consciousness as a rationalizing agent when one faces the conflicts, emerging out of the attempts to particularize such category. For Anderson, imagination has been the stuff that provides the foundations of the communities, which shows nations to be capable of evolving into a limitation when it comes to basking on the nation's sovereignty, and at the same time, belonging in a community (2002: 7). As a result, communities of nations figure into our discursive communities, linguistic exchanges, and political relations through our cognitive ability. However, in the absence of such epistemological privilege, nations would have difficulty recognizing themselves, losing their power in representing people, society, and culture.

Yet crucial in Anderson's use of imagination is a response to Ernest Gellner's inability to appreciate, and process the rupture of the real of the nations as they "invent" themselves (2002: 6). As Gellner fails to grapple with the idea of invention of nations, he also fails to capture its complexity, and seize the possibilities of invention as a social process. The limits of Gellner, in this case, allow us to appreciate Anderson's critique to consider alternative ways communities can be realized, apart from hard and empirical evidence. Anderson paves the road for us to seize the community through what the mind can visualize and imagine, making the nations, whether the Korean, Manila, Filipino, Koreatown, and even Malate, Streets as not names that can be confined to substantive and empirical existence of such categories. These names also signify a process of creation, imagination, and to a certain extent, invention, which, for Anderson, may be developed through language, literature, notions of time, maps, museums, and other records of cultural importance. Thus, as all of these have shown the capacity to facilitate the practices of imagination, whether literature, language, maps, or others have also

shown the signifying possibilities for the nation, nationalism, and its citizens.

Apparently, Anderson's idea of imagined community has never been invincible from critiques, specifically from Partha Chatterjee. For the latter, he acknowledges the modularity of nations, and in this emphasis, he takes Anderson to task for his inability to provide more inclusive possibilities for the idea of imagination. With such problem, Chatterjee expresses his objection: "[i]f nationalisms in the rest of the world have to choose their imagined community from certain "modular" forms already made available to them by Europe and the Americas, what do they have left to imagine?" (1993: 5). Targeting the heart of Anderson's imagined community such as its implicit sanctification of Europe as whether the cornerstone, "cultural roots" or "official sources" of nationalism, Chatterjee illuminates what may be normally eclipsed: "anticolonial nationalism creates its own domain of sovereignty within colonial society" (1993: 6). In shedding light on this aspect of nationalism, Chatterjee, in fact, sharpens and places to the fore the power of imagination, veering away from an Andersonian perspective that dwarfs the cognitive ability of imagination as a causality of existing and prevailing structures.

Nations and nationalism, coming from the antinomy between Anderson and Chatterjee, reveal how these have been the manifestations of the signifying ability of imagination as well. However, both of them have also traced the modularity of nations in which it draws, maps, and plots the mobility and mutability of such concepts. Unfortunately, such use of modularity as a category to show the utility of nationalism as a paradigm needs to be galvanized by mobilizing its meaning through its crucial role in other fields such as architecture and urban construction. After all, modular is not only limited to structures, frames, and scales. It is also a vocabulary that has been utilized to enlighten us regarding how architecture, as a field, tries to provide an alternative housing system for people who are perpetually haunted by the problem of homelessness (Wallace 2021: 8). Ironically, nationalism, apart from imagining one's community and sovereignty, also traces the natality of a citizen, which also serves as one's home, and at the same time,

the precarity of nations as well to allow people to have a dwelling place that they can call, home.

However, homes, like the Korea Towns, would vary as well, especially with Kim's idea of a "transclave" (2018), which firmly presses the transnational umbilical cord of any ethnic community. Migrant communities could not help but be involved within the transnational sphere, and in this situation, it complicates nationalism as either, on the one hand, sovereign freedom of a specific nation-state, and on the other, a component of a prevailing nationalism that participates in the political sphere of international relations. Such nature of nations informs Kim's move to thresh out the complexity of this category, transclave, as he traces and outlines the vast network of Koreatowns in the United States of America. From his research journey, these places have shown participation and activities in the global transnational capitalist arena. With the breadth of the scope of Koreatown's transcalve, the transnational sphere has also empowered Korean Americans, local Korean entrepreneurs, and the Korean government to turn their local towns into "a global city [that] can play the role of a public advertisement within a nation branding effort," yet it has also become, as he cites Jerome Krase, "an 'ethnic theme park,' or 'a place where the experience of the ethnic, 'other' is for sale, particularly to tourists'" (qtd. in Kim 2018: 18). With Kim's use of transclave, nationalism evolves into a marker and a conduit of transnational economic transactions, making the fulfillment of the nation as a perpetual drive for economic relations, with the Korean national government as a big investor.

Apparently, the transnational relations, at the heart of it, continue to be reliant on the logic and capability to imagine. In this case, as the transclave continues to signify its meaning in certain parts of the West, especially with the development of Koreatown in America, it must be also recognized that its qualitative character lies also in its ability to function as a modular formation within the broader frame of a nation. Transclave, as it appears, is born out of the imagination of different state actors between the United States of America and South Korea. Yet the modularity of such formation needs to be ascertained while recognizing the energy and dynamism

of a transclave. After all, for Peter Carruthers, "a module can just be something like: a dissociable functional component," yet its complexity may lie in the assumption that "independence amongst modules is by no means total. The different parts need to be connected up with one another in the right way" (2006: 2).

In the case of an architect, like David Wallace, it has been a "long-held dream of housing made in factories remains unrealized", especially with the existence of the housing crisis, which makes modularity in terms of housing paradigm a way to mass-produce homes, reducing the cost of housing infrastructure by virtue of the process called, "prefabrication," and at the same time, responding to massive growth of global middle class (2021: xiv & 14-15). Coming from Ryan Smith, modularity may be also understood through the idea of prefabrication that signifies a "transitive verb" where "parts that have been produced and then are assembled onsite" (2010: xi-xii), leading one to build a home from its off-site production up to the assembling process on-site. As a result, we cannot go on looking at one's habitation without taking into account the inhabitants' imagination through its parts, components, and prefabrication. By recognizing the parts of a home, our habitations may never be complete to begin with. Homes that also found nations may be perpetually disaggregated. However, in also finding a way to conceive connections, one's national belonging may have components from elsewhere, traveling across the world, and finding a place where one can construct a modular structure.

It becomes crucial to recognize that the very process of fabrication congeals the inherent fictive and inventive process of home-building, which can be very analogous to the signifying nature of nation or nationalism. Thus, nations also reveal the depths of the nature of their modularity. Anderson's imagined community, in other words, is modular, and by bearing this insight, Korea Town dawns to us a fictive and inventive process in a world contiguous with what Kim continues to see in the transclave of the United States of America. It is an invention in another nation that also continuously imagines its communities, which could hardly achieve horizontal comradeship, especially with the nature of transnational mobility, making everyone hardly in one place. However, despite the

limitations of one's habitation, the modular imagined community of Korea Town invites us to seize the practice of imagination while also recognizing the parts of a community as fabricated, being built in other sites, nations, and territories. Subsequently, in approaching a migrant subject like Park, he must be also viewed in other ways, apart from his biographical history, but also through the ways in which a street reconstructs, constitutes, and disassembles parts of his racial identity. His Korean distinction now becomes an ascription with the city capital of Manila, making it the Korea Town.

Ⅲ. Historical Entanglements of Malate, Manila, and Koreatown as the City's Past-Future

At this point, however, we should not dodge the bullet and confront important questions: what is the importance of knowing that Korea Town in Manila is a modular imagined community? What does this paradigm promise as a form of an understanding of the very nature of urban formations in the Philippines? Do urban formations naturally rise by being modular? In answering the questions, it is important to recognize that cities inherently, as seen by urban scholars, specifically Richard Le Gates, are aspirations of utopia, a place in which modernity aims to be perfected (2016: 27-28). At the same time, such aspirations may be deemed as the desire where one contends with the historical terminal points, which, for Michel Foucault—through the discursive interventions of Martina Tazzioli, Sophie Fuggle, and Yari Lanci—can be characterized by what he calls, "history of the present" (2015: 2). Despite the jarring combination of history and present, Foucault defamiliarizes the present as a temporal period that recognizes, on the one hand, "the creation of ourselves in our autonomy" (2015: 2) On the other hand, such a paradigm of history reveals to be "a diagnostic" that makes us seize its "transformative politics," and such outcome takes place because the idea of a present is acknowledged through the "genealogical account of its emergence" (2015: 2-3). Taking off from such a perspective on history, communities grow, shape, and gain recognition, not entirely from their historical past. Communities are constituted from the history of the present. In fact, whenever we talk

about a community, one's narratological structure can be propelled and compelled by being historical. As history comes alive by looking at the present, historical perspectives become nuanced, particularized, and complicated because any discussion of the present would resort to a diagnostic language. Thus, when we speak of a modular imagined community through Koreatown in Manila, we end up also diagnosing the process, construction, and current existence of urbanism in Metro Manila. Unfortunately, without the modular imagined community, it would be a challenge to recognize differently the present. By introducing such a diagnostic name, this leads us to view urban developments beyond the qualities of presentism, but also with the beneficence of historical perspectives.

Thus, to effectively understand the present Manila Korea Town, we are poised to look at the historicity of such a place. History would locate Korea Town as a place that emerges as a tourist enclave of Manila, sedimented by histories of being the place, during the Spanish colonial period, for the wealthy Spanish families, a culinary haven for European dining experience, and a place proximate to some important universities in the Philippines. For a long time, Korea Town has been known by its street name, Malate, and such a street figures on the map as framed by other popular streets, such as Bocobo Street, Nakpil Street, Taft Road, Remedios Circle, Padre Faura, Ermita, and others (Collins 2016: xix). Looking at these street names that surround and intersect with Malate Street, these places have been witnesses to the historical developments in the Philippines, from the rise and fall of the Spanish colonial period, the arrival of the American imperialist occupation to the most destructive war with the Japanese, leaving Manila second to Warsaw as the most destroyed city in the world. Eventually, with the liberation period under the Americans, the Philippines is handed to its citizens to build its so-called independent republic (Constantino 1975). James Scott describes Manila's history, during World War II, as a period on a "rampage" (2018: Introduction). Perhaps, while Korea Town simply marks a recent placemaking in metropolitan Manila, it may also shed light on the inherent changes, destruction, and reconstruction of the city at large.

Before the rise of Koreatowns, specifically the 90s queer

ethnographic imagination of Malate Manila, the popular spaces or districts in Manila were Binondo of Chinatown and even from a distant, Malabon, Manila (De Los Reyes 2010: 517-549). These are spaces known for a lot of migrant workers and merchants across the Philippines, and at the same time, across Asia. Binondo is known as the first Chinatown in the world, which has been a home for a lot of Chinese merchants, a diaspora of Chinese migrants from East Asia. Eventually, the settlers here became immersed in the Philippine social life, and eventually, weaved into the socio-cultural fabric, transcending a very racist and marginalized distinction during the Spanish colonial period, leading them now to emerge as "Tsinoy" or Chinese Filipinos. Richard Chu even describes Binondo as, at one point, a targeted place for conversion, and "[b]y the nineteenth century, [it has become] the most prominent and important district outside Intramuros" (2010: 12 & 59). While in Malabon, it has been known as the working-class enclave whose settlers migrate from the provinces in the Philippines, which eventually also bleed and weave into the Chinese diaspora in Binondo for a lot of the earliest Chinese settlers have been part of the working-class migrants in the Philippines (De Los Reyes 2010: 535).

We have to recognize that Manila is not a culturally and economically homogenous place as early as the late 19th century. It has pockets of migrant workers whose distinct local communities vary not only in terms of economic class, but also ethnicity, national, and racial belonging, including participation in the dominant mode of economic production in the country. At present, Binondo is the place where people can buy some of the cheapest Chinese cultural commodities, ranging from charms, stones, and totemic objects, but also food, and other household items. In the case of Malabon, even in the work of Isabelo de Los Reyes, a scholar of the 19th century Philippines, it has been the backwater of the aristocratic and wealthy enclaves of Manila despite how such a location would not be so distant from the heart of the city capital (2010: 517-549). It is a place where workers can find cheaper housing rent, locations of warehouses for stores and market supplies, and at the same time, the production sites of some

factories, which have never emerged in the form of a highly industrialized zone (2010: 517-549). By this time, across Malabon, Binondo, and Malate, with a number of heritage buildings and infrastructures, we can also recognize the failed industrialization of the country. The cities within Metropolitan Manila continue to possess some its rundown buildings that some engineers have declared as condemned and mostly hazardous to people's safety (Collins 2016; Sembrano 2014).

Yet with the rise of Malate, it can be described as a "contact zone" (Pratt 1992). It serves as the hospitality frontier of the city capital, especially since it is located near the sea, the ports of Manila, and at the same time, the spaces of cosmopolitan thinking such as the universities. Before the rise of a mall in Padre Faura Street, educational institutions, such as the Assumption Convent of Manila and Ateneo de Manila University, stood there, educating the children of the most powerful and wealthiest families in the nation's capital. The alumni of these schools belong to the kinship networks of politicians, presidents, corporate executives, and even to a certain extent, national heroes. Surrounding these educational institutions, some of the infrastructures occupy vast territories of huge mansions designed with courtyards in the middle, similar to apartment complexes that can be found in Western Europe (Acosta 2020).

However, by the turn of the 90s up to the millennium, Malate transforms and unfolds into a sexual tourist spot. Manila, by this period, begins to lose its appeal that even, at some point, the city's vibrant life diminishes into a scandal after a Hollywood celebrity named, Claire Danes, describes it as a place that "smelled of cockroaches, with rats all over, and that there is no sewage system, and the people do not have anything—no arms, no legs, no eyes" (Associated Press 1998). Coming from a white woman, such a statement registers with severity that brings the governance of the city of Manila in the international arena in a humiliating position, and consequently, the city council retaliates by declaring Danes as "persona non-grata" (Associated Press 1998). The scandal smeared by Danes against the city government forces them to be on the defensive side, and in turn, they decide to ban her films from being shown in the theaters of the city. Perhaps, such a destructive

description of Manila has also forced the city to eventually change the circulating negative perceptions about the nation's capital. The city government, as a consequence, has decided to popularize the local lifeworld as a strategy. They use popular media by having their own television series titled, *Mahal Kong Maynila*, or in English, *Manila, My Love,* featuring the quotidian lives of the Manila folks.

Perhaps, it is sharp to say that the birthplace of Koreatown is a place of destruction and reconstruction. Apart from Danes's critique, before the deadly campaign of former President Rodrigo Roa Duterte on drugs, Manila stages a prelude to a war on drugs under the late Mayor Alfredo Lim. He publicly humiliates drug suspects in the form of residential identification (Porcalla 2000). In launching a campaign against drug addicts who have been "infesting" his territorial jurisdiction, the spray paint functions as their weapon as they identify and mark their homes with the case number of their drug case. However, such policing measure eventually needs to be halted for some of the fundamental principles of Human Rights Law and the Philippine Constitution have shown to be violated. Sadly, even without the court decisions and sentences on their cases, some innocent folks in Manila have been convicted as criminals and guilty as the markings on their homes make their crimes visible in the public eye (Porcalla 2000). Yet with such a nature of governance in Manila, getting rid of criminality, cleaning up the "pests" of the city, and turning the urban as safe, at one point, have been the wager of the city across different political administrations and leaders. As we notice the pattern of concerns from different administrations, Manila may also signify a city stereotype of criminality and disorder.

Despite the drab sociological imagination of the city, at the heart of it lies Malate's sexual frontier by the 90s. With this distinction of Malate, Dana Collins shows the uneven character of the street and describes such placemaking through "the rise and fall of an urban sexual community" in Malate, Manila (2016). The contradiction between rise and fall is rooted in precisely the collision with different travelers, migrants, locals, and transnational forces. Collins has seen such flux, on the one hand, as part of an "unraveling of a gay-led gentrification," and unfortunately, on the

other hand, how Malate also "loses out to the neoliberal forces of city government and global capital" (2016: 5). The tragic collapse of one's supposed queer enclave has endured the insufferable effect of what Marco Garrido calls, "the patchwork" of metropolitan Manila (2019). The differences in class and the struggle with power continue to be up in arms, yet are also seduced and intimated to be in bed together, like seeing foreigners in the streets who desperately court the favor of women. Thus, upon seeing the foreigners attempt to have a tryst with the sexworkers on the streets of Malate, the sociality of local women with the foreigners achieve life and dynamism through a prevailing market activity that Neferti Tadiar calls, "sexual economy" (2004 38-39).

The sexual economy that Tadiar conceptually constructs for us captures a paradigmatic imagination of a nation-state that has been limited within empiricist terms. She exposes how the nation has functioned as a sexual organ that has been penetrated back and forth, situating us globally as "hyperfeminized" (2004: 49). Tadiar's incisive deconstruction of the sexuality of capitalist imperial relations of the Philippines disparagingly shatters us with the truth about our ontology and the vitality of the economic and cultural life in the Philippines. She has revealed how our ontology and vitality can be flattened and reduced by the dominance of relations of sexual, economic, and political utility (2004: 38-39). Such harrowing and poignant description of Tadiar regarding the urban alterity paved the way for Collins to foray into the deeper world of this part of the city. In Collins's immersive life within a decade-long of fieldwork experience, the sexual economy ironically has also opened up pockets of living. Behind the pains and violence of such sexual economic relations, Collins also bears witness to a life beyond the overdetermination of Metropolitan Manila, such as the queer people who yearn to discover themselves, to develop their sense of personhood, and for some, to find love whether with the locals or "AFAMS," a colloquial category for foreigners, which means, "a foreigner assigned in the Philippines" (2016: 7-20). The obverse side of finding love and sex in Malate may be a means for one to open a doorway out of, perhaps, Manila, and for others, the economy of sex serves as a mechanism in the pursuit of the locals to find love,

happiness, and their souls.

The romance and search for oneself have been both crucial in the narrative of Malate by the turn of the millennium. A novel entitled, *Orosa-Nakpil, Malate*, by Louie Mar Gangcuangco finally culminates and appears in 2006 that narrates the story of a young medical student who explores the dark yet exciting queer spaces, such as the gay bars, in Malate, Manila, and through the main character's journey, the novel confronts the disease called, HIV. Apart from learning about the stories of the lives of queer characters in Manila, the novel also educates the public regarding the virus and hopefully casts away the stigma inhered by this commonly associated queer disease (Gangcuangco 2006). Unfortunately, by this time, Malate can be observed as a place to have lost gradually some of its iconic gay bars. These gay bars have played as the epicenters of gay urban life in Manila that have been remodeled eventually and apportioned into new ways of celebrating one's sexuality. Gay bars have now figured in a multitude of options that can range across spas, 24-hour gyms, and sauna bath houses. For the more adventurous, queer folks have explored the riskier and much outlawed public spaces, such as parks, sidewalks, dark alleys, fire exits, nooks and crannies, cars, and recently, the vast digital space. Perhaps, while gay bars have served as the paradise for the sexuality of the LGBTIQ, the dimming queer lights of Malate may also come with the dispersal of queer habitations but also displacements. Thus, when Collins returns in 2013, Malate has converted itself into "a developer's dreamscape," and at the same time an "entertainment enclave" (2016: 216 & 236). The "magic" of Malate that Collins relishes unfortunately gets eclipsed by its commercialization which ushers them into a failed "urban renewal" (2016: 224-225).

Despite the changes that have taken place in Malate, it must be emphasized that entertainment eventually played a crucial role, especially by the time the pandemic hit the world. In turn, since most of us cannot visit entertainment enclaves, Metropolitan Manila has deepened its subservience to digital social media. We can notice in the public sphere the mass consumption of the internet and social media in the Philippines, ranging across wifi connectivity in public spaces, tourist spots perfect for Instagram photography, and

the rise of the new breed of middle-class social media celebrities or influencers. With the change in the character of the behavior of our consumer population, the cityscapes have also followed, transforming itself according to the needs and desires of social media as well. Part of the development of the power of social media is the impact as well of the Korean wave as it has become viral on different social media platforms, and to a certain extent, they have conquered and colonized the mediascapes. This situation has catapulted Louie Sanchez to declare the state of Philippine popular culture, specifically through Philippine television, shifting to a "Korean turn" (2014: 66). Such development in television for Sanchez "signifies the continuing internalization of the Korean aesthetic by local productions" (2014 : 66), which has now gone beyond television. Instead, it has covered almost all the public social spaces, Pinoy popular music, culinary consumption, and even to a certain extent, the Hispanic spaces or enclave of Malate, Manila.

Malate has been part of the metamorphosis of Manila. By the time Korea Town rose, it was also reconstructed when former Mayor Isko Moreno started to radically transform the city by introducing massive but also scandalous clearing-up operations (Madarang 2019). Under the clearing-up operations, the mayor has decided to wipe out all illegal vendors, infrastructures, and other impediments to people's mobility, whether on the sidewalks, thoroughfares, or highways. In the case of Malate, a lot of urban settlers on the sidewalks have been cleared, and displaced. Apart from clearing up the low-income vendors and the beggars on the streets, he has also launched beautification projects that hopefully may change the image of the city, such as rehabilitating old infrastructures like the infamous Jones Bridge, the historic sites of Rizal Park and Fort Santiago, including building important public infrastructures like Hospital ng Maynila and the expansion of the Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng Maynila (Madarang 2019). Seizing the opportunistic time for investments and developments, the city government of Manila has decided to push the Korea Town during the time of the pandemic to officially recognize the partnership between South Korea and the city government of Manila (Manila Public Information Office 2021).

Certainly, there has been a presence of Koreans for a long time in Manila, and such presence has been defined by the transnational migration of a lot of East Asians, beginning with the Chinese and then followed by the Japanese. In fact, Korea Town is shared with few Japanese and Hispanic entrepreneurs. However, the birth of Koreatown, apart from the effort of the City Government of Manila, is also enabled by the historical entanglements of Manila with the worldmaking of empires and powerful nation-states. In other parts of Manila, one can also see enclaves of Japanese and Indians. The arrival of Koreatown has simply solidified the ongoing relations of coloniality brokered by the transnational economic relations in which the Philippines participates with other nation-states, making the naming of such space not only a distinction of direction but a formalization of political and economic relationships. Korea Town is also name for the very recognition of such spaces in Manila from the lens of the history of globalization where the world is informed by identifying and plotting possible itineraries and destinations to achieve global mobility, and at the same time, prospective places for further capital investments, and support. Thus, Korea town iterates Manila's effort to locate itself in the worldmaking in which East Asia is making some waves in media, food production, and the digital economy. We cannot deny the coloniality of Koreatown in Manila, and, indeed, this is not new for it is the city's past-future.

City as past-future is a temporality of repetition, which Zizek describes: "first as tragedy and then as farce" (2008). This reveals the transformation of Malate into Korea Town historically inscribed in the past as a colonial space, and at the same time, a victim of such a world system, from being converted into a Spanish wealthy enclave, a space for a neoliberal intimacy, an ideal gentrified urban city, and recently, a hospitable space for Korean food culture. The tragedy of colonial wars has become now a farce for, on the one hand, the shift from a sexual economy to a gastronomic and entertainment economy has been facilitated by the process of clearing up the city, the local infrastructures, and the people. By dismantling its local lifeworld, what unravels in the Korean turn is also the reach of such expansion into the nature of our food

consumption, which is not only informed by food taste but also simultaneously the spectacle of Korean popular entertainment. This development reconfigures what Jinwon Kim calls, "transclave," into, apart from being a space for Korean transnational entrepreneurs, a global circuit of urban diasporic emergence, transformation, and reconstruction. The wide network in which the signifier, Korea, has spread itself with a tentacular breadth would not be enabled only by the homeland nation-state. The mobility and reach of Korea can be structurally reinforced by the history also of nations linked to political and cultural logics of coloniality, whether from the vantage point of the local, foreign, transnational, or diasporic (2020: 80).

The Korea Town in Malate may have a semblance with the conditions of what Ann Stoler calls, a "colony," which may be "rendered unhomely for those on whom it is imposed, as well as for those to whom it is offered as a stolen gift," consequently catapulting everyone into a condition where people are "only settled waiting for something else, for release from those unfulfilled promises and that anxious unfulfilled labor" (2018: 56). With the status of Manila caught in the crossroads between past and future, this city remains as a frontier colony that oscillates between past and future through the present developments whether in food culture, popular entertainment, or urban gentrification, yet also vulnerable to the history's potentiality. This means that Korea Town in Malate has been open to conditions of invasion, violence, war, and renewed gentrification repetitively. Thus, the past may be previously tragic, but now, it is also in a state of farcical becoming.

Ⅳ. The Farce as an Interlude to a Global Korea

The farce certainly, for Zizek, critiques our globally shared poor understanding of Karl Marx's purview of historical materialism (2008: 3). Marx has understood capitalism as history in its long duree, which cites the periods as phases of capitalist development, the depravity of its interior worlds, and in the long run, the fin de siècle for socialism to be bound, hoping to radically transform such prevailing political economy (2008: 3). Unfortunately, as Zizek has

seen, history seems to never stop us from having a throwback to our catastrophic pasts, even if such part of our history has been a traumatizing tragedy, with all the deaths and casualties. Despite all the chances to rectify such calamity, we unbelievably repeat such tragedy that ironically we are reduced to laughter because we end up unraveling ourselves as farcical in our inability to learn and finally correct things. In such an interlude, between past and present, what becomes farcical is how a South Korean nation is also sandwiched between forces of capitalism and socialism, revitalizing these two and turning itself into an exporter of its history, method, and version, not as a socialist society, but as an emblem of neoliberal urban development. After all, Hyun Ok Park hits the nail on the head: "Marx's observation that history repeats itself the first time as tragedy and the next time as farce is apropos of the Korean context" (2015 : 8).

The expanse of Korea's reach reveals its globality that simultaneously experiences frictions and contradictions between capitalism and socialism. Korea's global latitude can be traced back to the history of the Cold War. Gregg Brazinsky believes South Korea has been "forcefully incorporated into the U.S. led economic order by an authoritarian government determined to achieve rapid economic growth" and at the same time, the so-called "Cold War international system" has provided "opportunities" for them "to transform its economy and achieve prosperity" (2019 : 2). The American presence in South Korea precisely ensures to contain the possible spread of socialism in the region. Yet from the side of South Korea, apart from the alliance with the American empire, they have also marshaled what Darcie Draudt calls "Global Korea" (2019: 158). The Korea's expansion into the global scale paradoxically, for Draudt, orients on a "form of nation-bounded globalization" but it has also unveiled itself as a "new vision for Koreanness," originating from "the foundation of national growth from the era of rapid development," and an offshoot of the "national project for renewed and revised international competitiveness" (2019: 158). In other words, Korea takes the drive seat and operates its machinery towards a capitalist direction, which does not only happen in South Korea, but also for Park, it is also a force that shapes the very

existence of North Korea globally (2019: 1-8). Capitalism has become, indeed, for Park, a shared "political unconscious" (2015: 4). Yet out of such consciousness, what unravels through the years is the idea of global South Korea in which its expansion is, for Draudt, while it might be a form of "privileg[ing] national economic development over attention to political development," it is also at large a "multicultural" reconstruction of its socio-cultural fabric, making its society's membership diverse and inclusive to advance citizenship with robust labor force (2019: 158 & 168). Global Korea, in other words, may be viewed as a South Korean neoliberal capitalist production by shaping, sculpting, and disciplining a body of enterprising citizens whose labor presence can perform and stage the vitality needed for economic prosperity but also ensure its ideological borderland intact from the persuasions flagged by also the ideological socialist frontiers of North Korea.

The borderland also within the context of South Korea can be signified through its idea of a village or what they called, the "Global Saemaul," which has now morphed into what Se Hoon Park and others have viewed as the "'Korean model'" of urban development (2021: 61-62). Such South Korea's invention in the arena of urban development "under the banner of 'city export'" must be also recognized as also shaped by what Mike Douglass describes as "outcomes of the changing relations of power among the state, civil society and corporate economic interests within and beyond the country" (2021: 71). From such characterization of urban development, Douglass exposes how the small units of social formations such as Saemaeul have reconstituted a different narrative in which the boundaries between the city and countryside, the rural and the urban, both establish an interlude. The idea of interlude takes form in what Park, Hyun Bang Shin, and Hyun Soo Kang have noticed where these models of urban and economic development narrow the complexity of the differences of such spatial developments into a "set of technical issues of resource allocation" and the ability of governments to "cultivate the spirit of development" (2021: 34). The globality of Korea somehow may also be interpreted as a global allocation of resources that cements the rise of the Koreatown in Manila, and in its discursive recognition, the allocated resources

reach the speech community in the form of performing a civic-mindedness, enabling South Korea to expand and attain its global stature. Yet ironically, South Korea targets other nations, communities, and places by virtue of creating a scalar formation of a village or a town.

During the pandemic, Korea Town in Manila has, in fact, executed a lot of civic projects and resource allocation. Similar to what had gone viral in the Philippines, the community pantry sprouts at the center of the rotunda where they share vegetables and other kinds of food with the people around the area. Such sharing has not only happened during the pandemic, but they have also provided culinary lessons to those who are interested in learning Korean cuisine. More so, they have even donated air purifiers, granted students scholarships, and staged cultural performances in the community. Thus, with the activities that may also be perceived as allocated resources, these events somehow shape the meaning of the place, especially as they also try to frame and claim the space by leaving Korean traces through identifying the location by its own logo, earning the distinction of Manila Korea Town. The logo, as a result, has not only marked the place but has also served as the marker and name even of the police station. Yet while these things are being shared, the working class folks in this area, such as the masseuse in a Korean spa, the simple parking attendant, and other waiters would share how they travel far to this place for work. They describe how most of them live far off the Manila Korea Town for the rent in the area has been unaffordable to people like them.

Looking at the vicinity of the area as well, the rotunda at the center has served as the playground of the urban residents who live in some urban poor communities cramped in a very limited space. Children could be seen playing games at the center of the empty rotunda which, at times, functions as an activity center in the community. The central rotunda functions as a makeshift playground, park, and at the same time, plaza. Surrounding the rotunda, the spaces circling around such road infrastructure would serve as the parking spaces for the consumers or diners of the restaurants in the area. There are options, apart from the dominant presence of Korean restaurants, such as the longstanding institution of

Filipino-Spanish cuisine of famous Adriatico Café. While a few blocks from it, one can also see the important culinary institution of Spanish food right next to the university grounds of the University of the Philippines Manila, Casa Armas, and of course, some Japanese restaurants at the interstices of the spread of Korean business ventures. While such is the landscape, the perceptions of some of the people I had the privilege to talk to regarding the presence and membership of the Koreans in this part of Manila can be uncertain. On the one hand, they felt that the place has been, at one point, especially with the China pivot of the Duterte administration, populated by the people who have come from China. Yet at the tail-end of the pandemic, most of the Chinese have left and there seems to be a noticeable return of the South Koreans. Danny Park also explains that most of them have chosen to live in Quezon City, Ortigas in Pasig, or Makati. For him, he speculates that a lot of them already left due to poor control of extortion led by some government officers in the past, targeting Korean citizens.

With the despair of some Koreans in the hands of some government agents, a police officer also describes this area as prone to theft, along with the sporadic presence of public disruption due to alcohol intoxication, and in some instances, the presence of conflicts within the Korean community. Among all the conflicts that normally occur in the city, the police officer I interviewed describes the situation of theft as expected in tourist areas like Manila Korea Town. Certainly, the volume of theft in this area can be explained by acknowledging the presumption we normally have regarding the highly dense commercial areas. Places like these have a livelier market activity, whether through restaurants, services, or the foot traffic of local and foreign tourists. However, what needs to be emphasized in this analysis of the nature of the rate of crime in a tourist area should go beyond looking at it as a cultural normativity of a place. If we follow this kind of argument, we might purport a logic that tourism simply becomes also a condition and market opportunity for petty crime-making. Instead, we also need to acknowledge tourism, through Manila Korea Town, as a local practice of global thinking and relations. With the clear presence of

different nationalities, business transactions come from different countries of origin, and in between the exchange, people share a semblance of a multicultural food experience. Yet the obverse side of such a global sphere booming in this area also makes it glaring the disparity of the global migrant population such as Koreans with the locals in terms of possession of capital. The class differential relations become attractive to theft, thus, leading the folks in the community to subsequently identify themselves as criminals, despite being of a small scale.

Apart from the presence of wealth brought by Koreans in Manila Korea Town, the perception of them also comes from a global understanding of this nation's wealth and development. Hyung Gu Lynn draws in the sand how most of the people in the world, which includes the Philippines, look at this nation: "South Korea … appears to be developmentalist dream brought to life, a capitalist success story polished to a poster-like sheen" (2007: 1). While Lynn's point, on the one hand, prevails up to this point, and perhaps, it has even been exacerbated by the soft power brought by Korean pop, Park, on the other hand, also illuminates what is usually eclipsed by the way globally we appreciate the sovereignty of South Korea. As Park brings to fore South Korea's regional tension with North Korea's socialism because of its migrant refugees, the seeming triumph of this nation from its impoverished past gradually has evolved into a "hegemonic spread of neoliberal capitalism" especially through the border-crossing experiences of different Korean ethnicities as they are all attracted to the "market utopia" of South Korea, while also turning their nation into "transnational Korea… constituted by asynchronous constellations of old and new socioeconomic and emancipatory projects within each community" (2015: 3-4). With the spread of the seeming promise of South Korea, the Manila Korea Town does not appear off-kilter or out of sync. With our experience of such a Korean turn, it has precisely made Gayatri Spivak's argument on capital much more cogent. Spivak argues that capital turns into a "… mere [form of] socialism [that] means turning the use of capital from capitalist to socialist uses" (2012: 131).

Unfortunately, Spivak's insight points out the inversion of

socialism into the form of capitalism. This development forces Park to intercept the historical tragedy of the contradiction between socialism and capitalism in the Korean peninsula, and undeniably, it has eventually evolved into a form of farce. The farcical has turned into an aspect of such an approach in the form of the present exportation of Korean development that also aims to help developing nations of the global South like the Philippines. Yet these recipient nations of the Globality of Korea most of the time serve as an extension of the market circulation of their goods. Yet it is also within the links with the Global South where Korea recognizes itself in the world, and such links are also struggling villages of economic potential. From such historical and economic development of South Korea, the farce is how South Korea, borrowing from Park, unconsciously socializes capitalism through the rise of Manila Koreatown. With such a strategy, it has brought consequences to itself in the past as they find difficulty in handling their migrants, especially as the "[t]ransnational Korea does not involve a convergence of Korean communities on the modular form of neoliberal capitalism despite the hegemonic role of capital…" (2015: 3).

Since Marco Garrido describes Metro Manila as a "patchwork city," a "classed spaces, particularly slums and upper- and middle-class enclaves… [in their] subsequent proximity … [of] intensified class relations," the "fragmentation" drawn on the ground would naturally situate the Manila Korea Town within the ambit of the politics of Global Korea (2019: 5). Thus, drawing from Park, the meaning of Korea, caught by the politics of reunification between North and South, unravels "simultaneous experiences of socioeconomic crisis and crisis resolution by means of privatization, deregulation, and border-crossing labor migration" (2015: 4). The modular imagined community allows us to seize the character of globalization as a socialization of the crisis, and contradictions of nation-states, which nations also hope to resolve, but in fact, deepen the depths of different conditions of inequity. Yet, viewing from the perspective of farce, the modular imagined community also captures the fact that moments of solidarity, resource distribution, multi-cultural interaction, and transnational dialogue can also be circulated around the world along with the global spread of a

nation's crisis. With the duality of a modular imagined community, we must harness it as a potential site for imagining and constructing a better global community.

Ⅴ. The Potential Friendship from a Shared Table

The globality of Korea, at this point, unfolds, as what has been observed by Se Hoon Park, Hyun Bang Shin, and Hyun Soo Kang, an expansion across the world but returns to a form of "self-referencing" (2021: 30). Yet this self that this process refers to also gets sustained and nourished by what the self consumes, eats, and distinguishes as food. The self, as it unfolds, echoes Brillat-Savarin's famous maxim, "we are what we eat" (Belasco 2008: 1). The idea of self for Warren Belasco figures a broader and a more encompassing category, which collocates it as "identity" (2008: 7). In situating identity as an important category in food studies, Belasco signifies this category by opening it to a range of interpretation, such as class, and at large, the invisible figures in food preparation, such as women, making it also highly gendered (2008: 3). However, Belasco avoids the entrapment of identity politics by also locating identity within a triangulation with responsibility and convenience (2008: 3 & 7). The self that Belasco identifies makes us recognize that our enjoyment of food, an attempt to nourish the self, may be brought by the sense of convenience, especially in terms of access, privilege, class, gender, and even race, but it also needs to be balanced by our sense of responsibility (2008: 7). Yet the ethical demand of Belasco to our self that Korea privileges would never be in a harmonious relationship.

Doreen Fernandez, a recognized fountainhead of Philippine food studies, acknowledges the role of food as a form of "digging deep into human experience because tasting, eating and savoring are very intimate ventures. They are not external activities… they are—literally and metaphorically—gut experiences" (1994: xi). Fernandez's argument shines a light on the aspect of a self that Korea refers to as also an experience, not only with economic development, but also with food, which cracks open to the idea that

the globality of Korea lies not only in its investments, infrastructures, and international relations. It is also found in the process of consuming the food as the self recognizes the value of such development and one's responsibility. The self also needs to experience pleasure, whether in the form of convenience, a recognition of one's identity, and certainly, a chance of being responsible for the life of the other. The farcical nature of such globality of Korea unveils the reality that, as much as investments in high infrastructures may rake in big capital, food continues to flesh out such development, the very language in which one touches what Fernandez describes, "human experience" (1994: xi). By limiting ourselves to heavy urban infrastructure developments, we might be leading ourselves to a farcical tragedy, which makes food, perhaps, our salvation.

It becomes a breath of fresh air when Robert Valgenti brings into conversation philosophy and food studies. He has shown that, for the longest time, we have avoided food as an integral part of our ways of studying human consciousness for such a subject in philosophy "fails to reflect the values of rationality, universality and purity" (2019: 234). However, Valgenti repels this rationalist viewpoint by showing how food foregrounds the potency of our senses or "gustatory experiences" (2019: 241). He expands the meaning of our food consumption into a condition of possibility to be probed into the depths of the questions regarding the nature of a "good life," which allows one to comprehend the value of the "complexity and fluidity of relations that require continual maintenance, care, and conversation" (Valgenti 2019: 243). Through such an opportunity to build a network of relations, such a situation may lead us to prepare "[a]n open table … that welcomes the stranger" (2019: 246).

On the other hand, the farcical aspect of having a stranger has been also a source of tension and conflict between South Korea and other nations, like Japan, for it becomes a politics, according to Sonia Ryang, of those who try to steal and co-opt their local dishes, especially when "governments have even been known to claim national ownership of a particular variety of cuisine by way of artificially standardizing it" (2015: 1). Thus, from the rationalist

preference for the hierarchy of mind over the body, rational thought over the subjectivist experience of taste (Valgenti 2019: 234-236), and then from the nation over the regional and the local experiences with food, such contradictions of food make this important cultural studies subject, not only to point out the agricultural economy of a nation. Instead, it is also a subject from which we understand, explore, and theorize on the cultural politics of the contemporary period. With this larger possible concerns on food, the modular imagined community leads us to think of food, drawing from Valgenti, as an opportunity to create a community through sharing such earth's bounty on the table with strangers, no matter the race, ethnicity, class, and gender, especially as food could be easily retooled by the nation to efface its internal or local hierarchies.

Valgenti's intervention, thus, brings to the table the role of the quality of life as an important aspect of our study of society, human reason, philosophical quest, and certainly, culture. His presence and intellectual contributions make us realize the potential of food in enabling us to imagine the possibilities of creating a better society through a table where food can be shared with everyone including a stranger. However, the process of sharing food contended also with the rise of South Korea's soft power such as Korean popular entertainment, while being lubricated by the presence of the circulation of food, which were mostly products that had a history with Japanese colonialism, and at the same time, flattened by the pervasive role of the neoliberal free market. Ryang, in fact, draws from Sidney Mintz who argues that "the entire notion of 'national cuisine' is a problematic one, as cuisines are by definition regional, not national," and much so, from the end of the South Korean government, it has "been driven by a desire to delineate boundaries of the nation's culinary property on the global stage" (2015: 1 & 3). With the observations on the use and circulation of Korean food, it becomes an important technology in our contemporary processes of sociality, entertainment, and consumption, but also a mechanism in political international relations. Thus, through food, the relations of South Korea, Japan, the USA, and of course, the Philippines may be uneven with one another, but it becomes also softened, integrated with one another, and turned such important geopolitical relations

into what may be deemed by Jacques Derrida as a moment of the "politics of friendship" (2005).

Undeniably the appeal of the Korean turn can be sparked by the spectacle that its popular culture in mass media makes—the flash of neon colors, the sparkle of glitz and glamor. Yet this has been the only idea most have as if South Korea is exempted from its colonial and imperial histories. Some popular Korean novellas on television have, at one point, discussed the colonial histories of South Korea (Robinson 2007). However, what unravels and prevails beyond the attempts to discuss Korean history is the presence of the industry and entertainment. The spectacle that the Korean wave has brought to the world even enjoins the critical view of Guy Debord as spectacles inculcate an "automation" from the experience of the reception of the audience (2006: 45). Thus, as a spectacle, the Korean turn, through the entertainment, reveals the broader practice in which we contend with the coloniality of nation-states at the crossroads between territorial hospitality and the assertion of nationalism. These two motivate the kinds of political and social behavior we commit ourselves to as the world opens its borders to the transnational mobility of capital, goods, and resources. The automation that Debord critiques has mutated the relation of passivity by also integrating it with the subjectivity of the Filipino audience in which an interlude to the vitality of spectacle becomes possible. The spectacle turns into a coloniality of our relationship with South Korea, which also reveals the farcical nature of the broader politics of the Philippines with Asia. In this manner, farce has made our feelings ordinary as we see food, resources, environmental ecology, people, infrastructures, cities, and towns brokered and facilitated by other nations, specifically South Korea.

Going back to Korea Town in Malate, the bright lights of the disco houses and bars eventually recede into Korean restaurants. From such development in the restaurant scene of Malate, the gay bars, and other liquor stores dwindle in terms of presence and business to give way to Korean restaurants, leading Korea Town to eventually morph into a place for Korean barbeque served in a buffet-style or through the grilling tables. Korean barbeque certainly is not unfamiliar with Filipino culinary tradition. Roasting pork has

been integral in the carnivorous consumption and diet in the Philippines. Pork is notable in Philippine cuisine in the form of the festive lechon, a roasted pig on a bamboo pole. The entire pig is turned over a bed of charcoal and fire until it is evenly roasted. Lechon can be quite expensive, and thus, those who are salivating over roasted pork may opt for skewered pork barbeque, which can also be substituted by chicken or pork. For those who are either up for a culinary adventure or on a limited budget, they roast the innards of a pig, and the feet of a chicken, grilling what usually gets to be thrown away whenever we prepare either a pork or chicken dish. Roasting as part of the carnivorous practice reveals the cooking method's ability to accommodate class economic interests and privilege. Precisely, with the multitude of possibilities for barbeque or roasting, the openness has also welcomed Korean barbeque or Samgyupsal.

Interesting in the Korean Barbeque is how the samgyupsal has been translated into a restaurant's name called, "Samgyupsalamat" (Cortes 2021). The Korean barbeque evolves from a distinct Korean style of grilling food into a dining experience that enables and attracts at the same time the cultural stereotype of the Filipino, the warm hospitality. The name of the restaurant, Samgyupsalamat, is certainly a restaurant brand but it is also an index of an emergent sociality. In fact, the Filipino word, "salamat," means, "thank you," in English. Yet by fusing samgyupsal with salamat, the Korean barbeque morphs and welcomes the diners into a thanksgiving experience through the buffet style of grilling pork, beef, and chicken. Apart from meat and poultry, such dishes are spiced up with side dishes such as the staple kimchi, toasted peanuts, spicy cucumber salad, spinach, etc. The samgyupsal is an affordable spread that not only satisfies the consumer with the meat and poultry but also makes it more filling because of other surprising additions whenever one orders. By receiving such plenitude from the restaurant as the server lays down the food, one can only express "salamat," a kind of gesture that expresses gratitude to the restaurant for providing enough for one to enjoy an afternoon of grilling and eating pork or beef. Through this gesture, the act of giving thanks also extends by inviting people to share such a feast,

which makes samgyupsal a problematic eating experience for an individual. To eat samgyupsal alone may be interpreted as a social image of an emotional meltdown, and at the same time, a presence that reveals a bizarre disposition in life that one could not attract company or friends. In years of eating samgyupsal, I have not witnessed eating such a buffet alone. Thereby, it is a consumer practice at large of hospitality and politics of friendship, which certainly characterizes an emergent sociality, making samgyupsal as a collective thanksgiving, a buffet celebration, a group scale gathering, and recently, an affordable option whenever one eats out with a group.

Hospitality and friendship are not estranged from one another. Instead, these two can be intimately connected, but serve different purposes. Jacques Derrida confronts these two by looking at hospitality in relation to Europe and migration experience, while friendship takes off from Aristotle's famous quote: "O my friends, there is no friend" (2005: 1). The contiguous relationship between hospitality and friendship, for Derrida, makes us recognize also the figure of a "foreigner" or a "stranger" (2000: 3-11). Through these two characters, in one way or another, as they are invited into our fold, our differential relations with them can lead us to a potential relationship as friends, yet the friendship demands something else, such as ontological relations between two people (2000: 3-7). Derrida recognizes that friendship demands, apart from a good feeling with one another, a relationship in which one expresses an "incommensurable hope" by the time we reach "beyond life," yet from the one "who loves [even] before being loved" (2005: 4& 9) However, precisely, Derrida recognizes the dissymmetry in friendship, which can be, at large, present in politics, but such a relationship with a friend reveals a deeper effort of idealization and singularization of someone (2005: 10). In the case of hospitality, crucial in Derrida's interpretation of this concept is a foreigner who is a guest and an invited one, but also has the ability to enable a feeling of strangeness, and difference, which he believes could incite us to question the "chief," providing a condition of possibility for a parricide (2000: 5). This situation, however, provides a possibility where the foreigner denies and refuses to identify with the people

around, making hospitality as a relation with a foreigner. Despite the presence of differences, a foreigner can become a potential friend in the future. Unfortunately, despite all the possibilities and optimism we can muster, both also provide conditions of possibilities for violence, pain, hostility, and disagreement. Hospitality between a foreigner and a friend must come to terms with the idealization as well of the potential violence these people may enforce, and despite the dissymmetry between the two, the foreigner and the friend continue to insist on a sharing of an affective sense of belonging.

The deconstructive unraveling that Derrida reveals between friendship and hospitality highlights that, precisely, the Korean turn possesses a political import of coloniality, which also reveals a larger process of historic idealization of the country's relationship with the foreign world. Such idealization does not only capture the Korean nation-state but also the people that we meet and idealize through the process of sharing food and expressing thanks as we receive. In other words, the samgyupsal fused with the Filipino word, "salamat," becomes a new platform to perform such politics of friendship, and in turn, it gets to be effectively enunciated in a language of idealization as the process is enabled through the slow burn of the grilling process, the sizzling sound of the meat, the smoke permeating from the room, and even drinking exchange of soju cups for some. The rituals of eating samgyupsal with such restaurant's brand name facilitate the formation of friendships that also get to be supported and sedimented below by the rise of the Filipino middle class who are mostly part of the BPO industry, which relies on communicative networks, whether as call center agents, networking business agents, bankers, financial analysts etc. Such food cultures may have played an important role in the middle-class upward mobility, and some logics of organizational management supported by neoliberal capitalism in the Philippines.

The hospitality, at this point, is also at once foreign and strange, not specifically through eating pork, but through the plenitude, excess, and feast people share with one another. Certainly, the consumption of samgyupsal, especially on regular occasions, can be dangerous to one's health. The Department of Health in the Philippines has always repeatedly recorded that one of

the highest causes of death for people is a heart problem, which is mostly caused by what people eat, such as pork (DOH 2022). Yet, despite all these warnings, samgyupsal does not signify a peculiar and exotic cooking practice of the Koreans. Instead, while it is foreign, it becomes now ours, a source of excitement in different social gatherings, and even at some point, a cheaper way of eating out. What gets to be revealed with the opportunity and cost-benefit impact of Samgyup is how it has been foreign to the state's idea of good health. It is a kind of eating practice that threatens order and balance viewed by the medical science, while an excess for those who could not afford especially in a country with a huge percentage of victims of hunger. The foreign nature of samgyupsal becomes an attempt to disrupt the lawful order of the state in terms of its attempt to regulate people in their health. Much so, it is also a way to suspend one from contending with poverty and hunger. The samgyupsal affords us to cross the boundaries across state, health, and moral laws.

The modularity of Koreatown, in this case, through the samgyupsal reveals that it is also crossed over, effaced, and deconstructed, not only by Korea but also by the consumer society of the Philippines. The crossing over the of sign, South Korea, by the Filipinos is a revelation of the desire as well, not only to be entertained, but just like the dancers of Korean popular culture, to move, to enter in a rhythm of mobility, and to perform with the same theatrical frame. The restaurant's name, Samgyupsalamat, becomes an index of an expression of our hospitality to the South Korean guests, and the kind of friendship we commit with them. It is also an attempt to circumnavigate the world that they have revealed to us as possible, which, in turn, makes ourselves at times a performer of a spectacle—the one proving the farce. However, in the same problems, we also have our hands in the very process where the idea of our nation-state as a modular formation is substantiated, filled in, and at the same time, found its territorial, political, and even economic integrity. Perhaps, Koreatown and the wave of Korean popular culture become the neoliberal experience of freedom of the Filipinos in different forms. Through such experience with samgyupsal, it can also lead us to build the society that we

want by virtue of sharing food on the table. The table, in the long run, must also be welcoming to people, especially with food, as rallied by Valgenti. Food can be the means by which we can imagine, articulate, and philosophize on the idea of a good life.

In this sense, good food is the material proof of a good life. The sharing of good food makes the communities as a dwelling place of people. We need to imagine and even use such kind of opportunity as the very expression and character of a modular imagined community. The concept of a modular imagined community, after all, is an attempt to go beyond the control and tyranny of rational thinking, whether of the mind, the body, the nation, or the state. At the heart of such a concept, it allows the gut experiences to be taken care of, making it full, whether in terms of deliciousness, the value of nutrition, and certainly, the experience of a good life. The modular imagined community through the samgyupsal ushers us to a condition in which we are pushed to imagine a community where the modular parts will initiate a condition that good food will be distributed, apart from the mere dependence on fat and cholesterol. Through the delicious food, we also subsequently wish to transcend from the interminable presence of hierarchies, especially in a time when, as Park describes, a "market utopia" prevails and grows from "the modular form of neoliberal capitalism," which may be "asynchronous constellations of old and new socioeconomic and emancipatory projects within each community" in an ever-expanding transnational scope of South Korea (2015: 3).

VI. Conclusion

A modular imagined community unravels in Manila Korea Town as a potential site in which we can seize the imagination of our communities despite the fact the nation-state can always prevail and dictate the state of our things. After all, in the first part of the four-part arguments of this essay, the nationalism and nation sought by Anderson and Chatterjee do not signify the political ends, and instead, they can function as rubrics in which we can invent,

imagine, and build better worlds especially with the modular character of nations. The inventive capacity of nationalism and nation has not only proven itself to be so in the contemporary period, but instead, it has historically been integral to even the development of a city that may be deemed as its past-future. The historical nature of the Manila Korea Town in Malate, Manila should also be imagined as not an isolated case. Instead, it has been part of the very rise of South Korea within the scale of globality, which inherits its own problems within the region of East Asia, yet also showing somehow inroads that can be redemptive from the idea of nationalism. Through the openings in such developments, we can also seize the very potential of building an alternative community. Thus, food serves as an important cultural practice in which we can further advance politics that will allow us to reinvent our social world, and perhaps, the table could be a beginning, especially with the kind of sociality encouraged by the popular Korean samgyupsal. From this angle, we have to imagine and perhaps invent a different world, and through the modular imagined community, we create an open table through the samgyupsal found in Manila Korea Town. In the end, the modular imagined community unfolds and prevails as a perspective that one can draw from to explore, analyze, read, and theorize on the transnational formations. The modular imagined community now begins to unfold, connect, and frame the world in the 21st century, especially with the Philippines as an emerging player in this current era of globality.

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