

## War-trauma and the Failure of Franklin Hata's Self-masking in *A Gesture Life*\*

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Park, Geum Hee. "War-trauma and the Failure of Franklin Hata's Self-masking in *A Gesture Life*." *Studies in English Language & Literature* 45.4 (2019): 17-38. This article examines the argument that the protagonist Franklin Hata's choices in crisis, as a Korean Japanese American, cannot be recognized only as "passing" or becoming a model minority for his welfare. For this purpose, we presume that Hata's war-trauma involving the Korean comfort woman Kkutaeh's gang-rape and brutal death at the hands of Japanese soldiers in the Pacific War has caused him to suffer from PTSDs, such as hypochondria, amnesia, and haunting vision of his beloved Kkutaeh. Hata's abnormal psychology will be closely examined from a Freudian viewpoint. The findings can be summed up as follows: First, Hata's war-trauma cannot be easily overcome due to its severity. Second, this trauma causes Hata to fail in both parenthood and love, as revealed through the failure of Hata's gestural life as a model minority; all his efforts to hide painful memories are useless. In the Freudian perspective, Hata's painful memories wounded his psychic organ and repeatedly reinjure him whenever he faces reminders of the traumatic events. Here, one of the reminders is his adopted daughter Sunny. That is, his obsession with success and masquerade as a good man cannot be considered as passing, model minority complex, or gestural life, as other critics have suggested; his efforts to become a model minority or live a gestural life happen after he already experienced as an imperial citizen and model minority in Japan. (Chosun University)

**Key Words:** Sigmund Freud, PTSD, *A Gesture Life*, war-trauma, self-masking

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## I. Franklin Hata: A Victimizer or Victim?

As a typical transnational Asian American novel, Chang-rae Lee's *A Gesture Life* has caused plenty of disputes since its publication in 1999 due to his ambivalent characterization. In Korea in particular, critics are inclined to discuss the Korean Japanese American protagonist, Franklin "Doc" Hata, from a nationalist or psychological perspective. As HwiJae Lee mentions, the Korean critics can be divided into two groups. The first considers the novel a portrayal of Hata's failure to belong to two diasporas, Japan and America; the other sees it as focusing on a lack of subjectivity originating in the traumatic past (109). Even though Hata can be seen as a failure due to his maladjustment, the argument that Hata lacks subjectivity is not logical; it is made on the basis of the revealed story about Hata. In other words, HwiJae Lee hastily concludes that Hata's maladjustment is merely the result of his irresolution. Seonju Lee argues that although he was a Korean adoptee, in order to pass himself off as Japanese,<sup>1</sup> Hata handed Kkutaeh, a Korean comfort woman, to Lieutenant Shiboru and his sentries, which led to her dying appallingly after she was gang raped (238).

If he wanted to live as a respected Japanese American, why did Hata insist on adopting a mixed-blood Korean girl? Is Hata's choice due to his guilt as well? When it comes to his adopted daughter, should the interracial adoption have been a main agenda in this text, as in Mark C. Jerng's article emphasizing the inevitability of the conflict between Hata and Sunny; Hata was not prepared to adopt a girl: "Hata, in anticipating his adoption of Sunny, describes himself as a 'hopeful father of like-enough race and sufficient means'" (41). Belinda Kong points out two problems: "purely psychologizing responsibility for war crimes, specially that of the

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<sup>1</sup> Lee introduces the term "passing" to explain why Hata abandoned Kkutaeh (238). The sociological term "passing is the ability of a person to be regarded as a member of an identity group or category different from their own, which may include racial identity, ethnicity, caste, social class, sexual orientation, gender, religion, age and/or disability status." Passing may be used in order to get "privileges, rewards, or an increase in social acceptance", or in "coping with stigma." Refer to Wikipedia.

comfort women's sexual enslavement" and "continually polarizing Asia and America in a way that existentially privileges the latter," discussing Chang-rae Lee's "insights into the psychology of criminal repression" (*Journal of Transnational American Studies*; 2011).

Meanwhile, Joan Chiung Huei Chang argues that Hata's efforts to be a good neighbor result from his "'model minority complex' as a mental state aroused out of repressed anxiety over racial discrimination and cultural alienation." For example, "he admits that he keenly seeks for approval and consensus from the community in which he chooses to settle after entering America" (136, 139). Focusing on Hata's "camouflages" as "a Japanese national, a doctor, a father, and, finally, an unremarkable, decent US citizen," Anne Anlin Cheng contends that in *Gesture*, "'passing' appears not only as a social gesture but also as psychic process that infuses daily life, raising ethical questions on many different levels, from notions of basic decency to codes of conduct in times of extreme crisis" (558).

As these critics point out, although Hata sticks to becoming a model minority and disguises himself as someone else whom others accept, his efforts need to be evaluated from the point of "a melancholic mechanism facilitating the erasure and loss of repressed Asian American histories and identities" (Eng & Han 348). Also, if through the text, a reader continually "brings into awareness the specificity of individual trauma that is often connected to larger social factors and cultural ideologies," the protagonist Hata's camouflage as a model minority outside his house may be discussed with his war-trauma (*The Nature of Trauma in American Novels* 17). As a result, it is necessary that Hata's model minority complex and passing should be examined from a Freudian viewpoint.

Although Hata's failure is due only to his personality problem, can his abnormality be marked by a lack of subjectivity or egoism, leading him to abandon his lover and daughter for his welfare or good reputation? Defending his action of leaving Kkutaeh to die, he was too young; when he participated in World War II as a medic and lieutenant, he was a twenty-year-old youth, and the adversities he

experienced at that time were too much for a young man. Hata recalls when Kkutaeh persuaded him to kill her as follows: “I couldn’t say what would have occurred. I still couldn’t imagine myself challenging him [Ono], or being insubordinate in any way, and yet the thought of accepting whatever punishment he deemed deserving for me, and especially for her, seemed equally impossible” (255). And he was not at the site of the gang-rape and slaughter because he was giving a morphine injection to his seniors officer. Hata’s actions are understandable for only what an ordinary young man of around twenty years old.

If Hata is portrayed as a common youth, what does Chang-rae Lee want to say through his wartime experiences and traumatic life after that time? In short, *Gesture* shows that what Hata went through during World War II has been torturing him later in his life. In an interview with Young-Oak Lee, Lee premises that the shocking wartime experiences, including his beloved Kkutaeh being appallingly gang-raped and murdered by mad Japanese soldiers, might have severely damaged a young adult’s psyche, and the wartime trauma could have controlled his whole life:

I’m trying to focus on someone who was desperate to belong to the powerful factions in the society, to belong to the Japanese and to belong to the military and to belong – so that that, in turn, causes certain things for him not to do, which is not to stand up for people, not to stand up for what was right, not to protect people. You know, his failures. So for me it’s not a book about one sin and how his whole life was changed. *It’s really more about his whole life and how this one sin reflects that. It’s a cause-effect thing for me.* (221-2; my emphasis)

That is, the novel is not just about Hata’s sense of belonging to two diasporas, and accordingly not about his cowardly passing in order to adjust within them. Lee’s argument is that war-trauma caused Hata to live a masked life, a gestural life, while trying not to recall it, even though he is an unpunished war criminal; it has been painful. The guilt he felt for not protecting his sweetheart led him to adopt a Korean girl as his daughter, which he may have thought of as a way of redemption for

Kkutaeh's death.

Hence, prior to criticizing Hata, it must be considered how war-trauma interferes with victimizers as well as victims. Taking into account that he belonged to the lowest stratum of the Japanese society as a son of Korean tanners and was treated with extreme discrimination in Japan, it is not strange that young Hata, adopted into an emerging middle class Japanese family, also hoped to live as a Japanese. Simply put, he had already been traumatized in his early days: "I had certainly despised others before, particularly the boys in the school I attended after being adopted by the Kurohatas, boys who treated me with disdain most of the time and at worst like a stray dog" (262). He may have thought that success in life was the only way he could overcome his traumatic childhood events.

Also, Hata's rejection of Kkutaeh's request that he kill her cannot be compared with that of Corporal Endo, who killed her elder sister and died a tragic death: it was doubtful that "lurking beneath his quick mind was a mental instability, a defect of character that I was certain that would lead him to a troubling circumstance" as "the youngest boy of a fairly prominent family" (156-7). Even if Endo was well-equipped with a sense of justice or a spirit of chivalry, the important thing is that he seems to have been mentally ill. Normally, unlike Endo, many young people do not easily decide to kill someone and die with him or her despite their righteousness.

For this reason, our discussion will be focused on what kind of psychological problems Hata has experienced, leading him to live a gestural life. Especially, the fact that his problems started from Kkutaeh's horrid death tells us much about what his emotional world has been like. How painful Kkutaeh's death was to Hata and how seriously it would influence him in later life is implied in his following retrospective about when he collected her dead body: "I could not sense that other, tiny, elfin form I eventually discovered, miraculously whole, I could not see the figured legs and feet, the utter, blessed digitation of the hands. Nor could I see the face, the perfected cheek and brow. Its pristine sleep still unbroken, undisturbed"

(305). This implies that her tragic death deeply will continuously affect Hata's life. In "Introductory Comments on *A Gesture Life*" with the medical students of New York University, when he was asked if Kkutaeh was pregnant before she was murdered, Chang-rae Lee answered: "I think in his mind there was something there, *that he had found something that would obviously haunt him always and, from the scene I just read, would affect him as well.*" Regardless of whether he found something there, as long as he believes Kkutaeh could be pregnant, Hata's collecting her body would have left an indelible mark on his psyche.

Through the swimming pool scenes in his mansion, Hata being haunted by Kkutaeh is repeatedly emphasized as follows: "The water in [my pool] appears nearly lightless, whether in bright sun or dusk, and the feeling sometimes is that you are not swimming in water at all . . . but rather pulling yourself blindly through a mysterious resistance whose properties are slowly revealing themselves beneath you, in flame-like roils and tendrils, the black fires of the past" (151-2). Although he has sought to forget the nightmare in the past and wash away a sense of guilt for Kkutaeh by becoming a successful model minority in the United States, Hata's mental wound is not something he can overcome. In fact, admitting Hata's guilt is fundamentally a result of his traumatic experiences and it is one of the symptoms of PTSD (Post-traumatic Stress Disorder), the narrative of *Gesture* must be analyzed from a Freudian perspective.

## II. Freudianism and Trauma

To expand upon the term "trauma" as a basis of Franklin Hata's gestural life resulting from his extreme experiences as a medic who treated young Korean comfort women during World War II, our psychoanalytic approach to *A Gesture Life* proposes three specific ideas: a violent shock, a wound, and consequences influencing the whole organism. In "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," Sigmund Freud

considers the mind an organism that is safeguarded by a “protective shield,” which consists of “the higher strata of the mental apparatus to bind the instinctual excitation reaching the primary process” (31, 34-5). When this shield fails to protect the organism, or “living vesicle,” trauma occurs:

Let us picture a living organism in its most simplified possible form as an undifferentiated vesicle of a substance that is susceptible to stimulation. Then the surface turned towards the external world will from its very situation be differentiated and will serve as an organ for receiving stimuli. Indeed embryology, in its capacity as a recapitulation of developmental history, actually shows us that the central nervous system originates from the ectoderm. . . It would be easy to suppose, then, that as a result of the ceaseless impact of external stimuli on the surface of the vesicle, its substance to a certain depth may have been permanently modified, so that excitatory processes run a different course in it from what they run in the deeper layers. (“Pleasure” 26)

As observed in the above quotation, Freud thinks of trauma as a scar on a living vesicle. And he believes that due to the modification of its substance in the surface, the vesicle's responses to external stimuli are changed.<sup>2</sup>

Freud's biological interpretation of trauma is connected to a metapsychological approach. He says: “The feelings of pleasure and unpleasure” in relation to trauma belong to “the most obscure and inaccessible region of the mind,” and the pleasure principle primarily operates “on the part of the mental apparatus,” but if the organism is in danger, the pleasure principle “is replaced by the reality principle under the influence of the ego's instincts of self-preservation” (“Pleasure” 7, 10). Here, “most of the unpleasure that we experience is perceptual unpleasure,” that “perception of pressure by unsatisfied instincts” (11). Freud argues: “A failure to effect this binding would provoke a disturbance analogous to a traumatic neurosis;

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<sup>2</sup> This reminds us of “the Greek trauma, or ‘wound,’ originally referring to an injury inflicted on a body” (Caruth 3).

and only after the binding has been accomplished would it be possible for the dominance of the pleasure principle (and of its modification, the reality principle) to proceed unhindered” (35). Putting these statements together, the feeling of the unpleasure from painful experiences happens when the reality principle fails to bind and control these experiences, which causes traumatic neurosis.

Freud defines “traumatic neurosis” as “a condition” that “occurs after severe mechanical concussions, railway disasters and other accidents involving a risk to life,” including “the terrible war”<sup>3</sup> (“Pleasure” 12). In “On the History of the Psychoanalytic Movement,” differentiating himself from his mentor, the physiologist Josef Breuer,<sup>4</sup> Freud contends that “the symptoms of hysterical patients are founded upon scenes in their past lives which have made a great impression on them but have been forgotten (traumas),” and that the primary purpose of therapy consists “in causing them [the patients] to remember and reproduce these experiences in a state of hypnosis (catharsis)” (18). On the basis of this interpretation, it is possible that an extreme event gives a shock to an individual, and the shock hurts his or her mind.

In the mechanism of trauma, Freud metaphorically suggests the otherness in trauma, quoting Italian epicist Torquato Tasso’s *Gerusalemme Liberata*. In this parable, after the hero, Tancred, kills his beloved, Clorinda, because he mistakes her for “an enemy knight.” He repeatedly stabs her, and Clorinda cries out again and again (“Pleasure” 22). Here, we can read two important things in understanding trauma; one is that an individual who hurts another repeatedly wounds him or her, and the other is that a traumatized person can recognize painful memories of the past through a voice. As Cathy Caruth points out, “it is possible, of course, to understand that other voice, the voice of Clorinda . . . to represent the other within the self that retains the memory of ‘unwitting’ traumatic events of one’s past” (8). In Freud’s words, Tancred’s sword is a kind of stimulus evoking Clorinda’s painful

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<sup>3</sup> Freud distinguishes “war neuroses” from “the traumatic neuroses of peace” (Pleasure 12).

<sup>4</sup> Also, Freud admits Breuer’s hypnotherapy influenced his psychoanalysis, saying that his “work had been done at a time when I was still a student engaged in passing my examination (1880-2)” (*Psycho-Analytic* 8).



memories, whereas her voice can be the voice of Tancred's conscience incessantly evoking a sense of guilt.

In studying prevalent war neuroses in the wake of World War I, Freud finds that dreams in traumatic neurosis are not wish-fulfillments: "Dreams occurring in traumatic neuroses have the characteristic of repeatedly bringing the patient back into the situation of his accident, a situation from which he wakes up in another fright" ("Pleasure" 13). His explanation is that war neuroses are psychic disorders that cannot be alleviated through nightmares. On the repetitive war-traumatic neurosis, Caruth explains as follows: "Unlike the symptoms of a normal neurosis, whose painful manifestations can be understood ultimately in terms of the attempted avoidance of unpleasurable conflict, the painful repetition of the flashback can only be understood as the absolute inability of the mind to avoid an unpleasurable event that had not been given psychic meaning in any way" (59). In short, the war trauma is incessantly repeated; a person cannot easily overcome it and escape its stimuli as long as he or she lives.

If so, what evokes painful memories from within the self again and again? What continuously causes a traumatized person to recall his or her painful memories? Some Freudians indicate that a certain place can remind the wounded individual of extreme experiences in the past. As very often found in trauma novels, the place "becomes central to representations of trauma in the novel because the physical place of suffering and remembrance of loss becomes an identifiable source for the author to explicate the multiple meanings of the event" ("Trends in Literary Trauma Theory" 161). That is, the place is a stimulus for recalling painful events as well as the loss resulting from them. As Michelle Balaeve points out, "writers often centralize the natural world when the protagonist confronts a traumatic memory in order to demonstrate the internal struggle of the self and the various workings of the mind as the individual attempts to understand, incorporate, and explain the traumatic event" ("Trauma Theory" 161). If that is the case, it is also true that other characters often make the protagonist "confront a traumatic memory" in a novel. A

character can play as important a role as a place in reminding the protagonist of his or her traumatic memory.

As we have observed, in Freud's psychology, trauma is defined as a scar on the surface of a vesicle in the mind caused by external stimuli. In this case, the substance of the vesicle is changed, which causes the vesicle's different responses to stimuli when unshielded by the protective barrier. A focused stimulus is a place, something that continues to jab the wound in the mind like Tancred's sword. In this light, as a triggering stimulus, the place can include those who were involved in letting someone experience trauma. Traumatic neuroses occurs when the reality principle of the ego cannot control the feeling of the unpleasure originating in past painful experiences. Especially, victims of war-traumatic neurosis repeatedly return to the scenes of the battlefield since their experiences are so painful that they are seemingly impossible to overcome. Like ordinary trauma victims, war-trauma victims can also have a guilty conscience, so they may hear the voices of those they hurt or killed.

### **III. Freudian Interpretation of Hata's War-trauma as Another Victim**

As a theoretical framework, the above Freudian interpretation of trauma will help our understanding of why Franklin Hata has lived a gestural life without revealing his traumatized self, despite considering that he has been forced to live as a model minority in the United States. In the first chapter of *A Gesture Life*, even though he placidly lives among gentle white neighbors in Bedley Run, located on the outskirts of New York, the narrator Hata implies that he keeps a secret which has led him to be a model minority ever since.

I think one person can hardly understand why another has conducted his life in such a way, how he came to commit certain actions and not others, whether he looks upon

the past with mostly pleasure or equanimity or regret. It seems difficult enough to consider one's own triumphs and failures with perfect verity, for it's no secret that the past proves a most unstable mirror, typically too severe and flattering all at once, and never as truth-reflecting as people would like to believe. (5)

The above excerpt makes it clear that Hata has his critical motive, an unspeakable past, that leads him to strive for a good reputation in his neighborhood. In fact, this statement may even cause readers to conjecture that he was involved in something unlawful in the past. In *Gesture*, his unconsciousness is represented through swimming scenes. So Hata enjoys swimming "entering a significant period in life" as a secret swimmer who, if he could choose, might always go silent and unseen" (23-4). That is, while swimming, Hata pauses his masquerade and faces his painful memories from the past.

Hata's painful past includes his memories from when he was adopted to the Kurohatas as their only son, which is revealed in the following recollecting scene: "For isn't this what I've attempted for most all of my life, from entering the regular school with my Japanese parents when I was a boy, to enlisting myself in what should have been a glorious war, and then settling in this country and a most respectable town, isn't this my long folly, my continuous failure?" (205) Before the war, Hata seems to have already experienced hypochondria and melancholia<sup>5</sup>, at least in his obsession to live as a model Japanese, considering that he didn't want to have photography of naked girls lest they should be harmful to his reputation as an adoptee if he died in the war: "I feared it would be especially shaming to [my parents] for as adoptive parents they might shoulder the burden of my vices even more heavily than if I had been born to them, blood of their blood, as there would

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<sup>5</sup> Freud says that "the distinguishing mental features of melancholia are a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment" ("Mourning and Melancholia" 244). Furthermore, when it lasts for a long time, melancholia can cause the patient to erase or hide himself or herself within an object of envy.

be no excuse but their raising of me” (155). This abnormal state of mind, like hypochondria, would have influenced Hata’s decision-making later, rejecting Kkutaeh’s request that he give her fatal dose of sleeping pills.

The extreme experiences in the Pacific War, where he volunteered to become a medic, could have aggravated Hata’s mental anguish. He may have dreamed of adjusting perfectly to Japanese society and erasing his inferior hierarchical status as a Korean tanner in Imperial Japan. He was already troubled by the discriminative treatment by classmates even after living as a member of a Japanese family. Captain Ono’s sadistic demonstration “with a live Burmese cobbler’s heart” (76), the explosion of a shell that claimed his peer Enchi (127), the appalling death of Kkutaeh’s elder sister and Corporal Endo, as well as Kkutaeh’s cruel death after being gang-raped collectively push Hata beyond his mental capacity. They cannot be treated with the reality principle in Freudian terms. Hata remembers Endo’s gruesome execution for his mercy killing of Kkutaeh’s sister as follows: “The officer-in-charge announced that Endo had been charged not with murder, but with treasonous action against the corps. . . . By custom he was then offered a blade, but he dropped it before he could pierce his belly, retching instead. The swordsman did not hesitate and struck him cleanly, and his headless body pitched forward lightly, his delicate hands oddly outstretched, as if to break his fall” (189).

That Hata did not die with his beloved Kkutaeh probably is no wonder; he was too young and was mentally damaged due to his racial and social discrimination as well as the brutal deaths he witnessed. After she knew that Ono let her live to exclusively use her as a sexual slave and breeder, Kkutaeh stabbed his heart with a scalpel from the cabinet, but Hata pretended that Ono killed himself by giving him his own gun after shooting a shot into the air. As Lieutenant Shiburo came with his men to oversee the murder case and soldiers, and tried to sexually abuse her, once more Kkutaeh attacked him with the same scalpel, slicing him “from the corner of his eye down to his mouth” (303). Shiburo was the same man who slaughtered Kkutaeh’s sister and beheaded Endo in public a few days ago. Though there can be

a controversy in that the incident happened after Hata was sent to Colonel Ishii to inject him with drugs, what is important is that Kkutaeh's attack on Shiburo was in the absence of Hata. That is, Hata could not have prevented it. When he returned, Kkutaeh had already been burnt in a waste incinerator like her sister and Endo. Regarding Japanese soldiers' sexual assault before Kkutaeh's execution, Hata witnesses as follows: "Some were half-dressed, shirtless, trouserless, half-hopping to pull on boots. . . They were flecked with blood, and muddy dirt. . . They could have been returning from a volleyball match, thoroughly enervated, sobered by near glory" (304-5). This testimony strikingly shows that the Japanese madness of war went too far, and implies that their war violence, done in groups, was not an individual's choice.

In the aftermath of the Pacific War, Hata struggles to overcome the Japanese collective madness as well as the pain and tragedy of the war. Watching the ill-famed physician Larry Weil, a graduate of the Yale Medical School, Hata's following reflection suggests that his nationalist self-concept at that time was influenced from the Japanese imperialist collectivism.

Though not a true physician, I had been fully trained in field and emergency medicine in order to aid and sustain my comrades, to save them whenever possible, fulfilling my duty for Nation and Emperor. And while I was grateful for being part of what we all considered the greater destiny and the mandate of our people, I had hoped, too, that my preparation and training would be tested and confirmed by live experiences, however difficult and horrible; and more specifically, that my truest mettle would show itself in the crucible of my kin and reveal the essential, inner spirit that is within us all. (120)

As implied here, what bothered Hata after the war was the imperialist Japaneseness he sought to internalize. After going through the maddening war, Hata realized his efforts to become a true Japanese were meaningless. Hata admits that such a nationalist life was a sham, meditating as follows: "Yet still I have always wondered

if training or rearing tells more than the simple earth and ash and blood from which we come, or whether these social inurements eventually fall away, like the moldering garments of the dead, to reveal the underlying bones” (120).

Considering this confession, Hata’s emigration to the United States seems to have been an inevitable choice. Chang-rae Lee’s following statement suggests that Hata after traveling “from the war in the Pacific (World War II) to a Westchester suburb” has tried to erase his past: “In this little town in Westchester County where no one knows anything about him, no one will ever know anything about him, he’s safe. He doesn’t need to be unmasked. So that was a location that was quite perfect for unmasking him, when no one wanted to unmask him, when everyone had finally accepted him, in this view” (“Introductory Comments” 13). According to Lee’s comment, Hata wanted to mask himself and moved to a new place, America, in order to forget or hide his past. That is, his emigration from Japan to the United States was an inevitable choice. Hata’s deep war-trauma was not solved only with suppression or camouflage after the war. He moved from a place of trauma to one of healing, or at least oblivion. He also thought that living as a faithful model minority was a way to prevent anyone from questioning his past. About his immigration, Hata unconcernedly says that because “in the course of events one naturally accepted the wartime culture of shared sacrifice and military codes of conduct,” he “eventually relinquished those ties for the relative freedoms of everyday, civilian life, and then finally decided to leave Japan altogether, for the relative—though very different—liberties of America” (68).

In fact, after the war, Hata’s mental wounds appear to have distressed him, judging from his departure from Japan as a war criminal. He clearly suffered from extreme war-trauma. Applying Freud’s perspective to Hata, it can be said that the terrible Pacific War “gave rise to a great number of illnesses of this kind [traumatic neuroses]” including “hypochondria or melancholia,” “hysteria” and “a far more comprehensive general enfeeblement and disturbance of the mental capacities” (“Pleasure” 12). After the war, many soldiers seem to have suffered from these

symptoms in Japan as well. Just like many war veterans in Freud's clinic, Hata seems to have had nightmares or day dreams about the horrendous deaths of his fellow soldier, Endo and Korean comfort women as well as his beloved Kkutaeh. Freud also said that "hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences" (13). After the war, Hata appears to have suffered from various PTSDs like melancholia because he escaped recalling his extreme war memories.

On the basis of Freud's theory, David L. Eng and Shinhee Han argue that "when faced with unresolved grief, the melancholic preserves the lost object or ideal by incorporating it into the ego and establishing an ambivalent identification with it" and "is able to preserve it but only as a type of haunted, ghostly identification in identifying the lost object" (346). The pool scenes in *Bedley Run*, in which Hata is very often haunted by the ghost of Kkutaeh, imply that Hata has been afflicted with melancholia, which "seems to provide the most direct link between the psyche and external violence and to be the most destructive psychic disorder" (Caruth 58). Although it is unclear that he really fell into hysteria, surely the Japanese "wartime culture" annoyed or stabbed Hata like Tancred's sword when he lived in Japan. Because he believed that it was impossible for him to live in Japan, "the locus of referentiality" of his trauma, Hata decided to discard the nationality he had once desperately sought, hoping to forget his torturous memories, Kkutaeh's tragic death in particular (Caruth 6).

In "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," Freud differentiates between war neuroses and common neuroses, "neuroses of peace" in Freud's terminology, writing that "in the case of the war neuroses," "the same symptoms sometimes came about without the intervention of any gross mechanical force" and "the traumatic experience is constantly forcing itself upon the patient" (12, 13). In other words, due to the deep internal injury in the mental vesicle, the power of self-control, or an ego-instinct, cannot decrease the patient's nightmares or terrible daydreams. So Freud regards war neuroses as "something that seems more primitive, more elementary, more instinctual than the pleasure principle which it over-rides" ("Pleasure" 23). Freud's argument is

really revealed in the fact that Hata's PTSDs in *Gesture* cannot be controlled even by escaping Japan and by trying unceasingly to become a great model minority. Hata's case shows that by all accounts, the impact of war trauma can occur without special stimuli reminding the patient of the brutal war experiences.

What makes Hata helpless, with his strong self-control, is his agonizing memory of his beloved Korean comfort girl Kkutaeh, who was cruelly gang-raped and killed by his fellow Japanese soldiers. He can never hide or erase this memory however hard he tries by becoming a model minority. The following scene where Hata is haunted by the ghost of Kkutaeh clearly shows that his traumatic neuroses fundamentally starts from her death.

When I reach the house and close the front door it's then I think K has finally come back for me. It is the moment I think I feel at home. I am sure I was regarding her last night, her figure naked and pale, loosely enrobed in a black silken flag. The sight of her shook me. I saw her more clearly than I ever had before, as I was not dreaming or conjuring but simply reacquainting myself with her, as I might any friend of my youth. And so she visited me. Last night she lightly pattered up and down the hallway in her bare feet, pausing outside my bedroom door. I knew it was she. I sat up and told her to come in and she stepped to the foot of my lone twin bed. Though she sat down I couldn't feel any press of her weight, and once again, for a moment, I was almost sure she was a spectral body or ghost. But I am not a magical man, and never have been. I am unversed in the metaphysical, have long become estranged from it, and if this can be so, I believe the metaphysical is as much unversed in me. *We have a historical pact*. And as deeply as I wished she were some wondrous, ethereal presence, that I was being duly haunted, I knew that she was absolute, unquestionably real, a once-personhood come wholly into being. (286; my emphasis)

From the Freudian viewpoint, Kkutaeh's cruel death may have remained a deep injury in young Hata's psychic organ, and whenever his ego-instinct does not properly operate, his painful memories repeatedly revive. Also, Hata's traumatic neuroses can never be cured as long as there are stimuli reminding him of the



painful memories from the war. That is why he emigrated from Japan, where there were more triggering stimuli shortly after the war and has tried to become a model minority, a "number one citizen," even living his "whole life out of gestures and politeness," but he cannot be free from his past; a gestural life can never be a way to escape his troubled past (95). So Hata's abnormal psychology cannot be fully explained only with contextual factors such as the "model minority complex" Joan Chiung Huei Chang applies to Hata's narrative analysis (136).

As observed in Hata's case, the repetition of trauma, especially war-trauma, can be thought to be due to its own nature. Freud answers his own question as follows: "May not dreams which, with a view to the psychical binding of traumatic impressions, obey the compulsion to repeat—may not such dreams occur outside analysis as well? And the reply can only be a decided affirmative," based on two premises. Firstly, "mechanical agitation must be recognized as one of the sources of sexual excitation," and secondly, "painful and feverish illnesses exercises a powerful effect" ("Pleasure" 33). In *Gesture*, Hata's war-trauma is closely connected to sexuality, and his PTSDs, such as hypochondria, melancholia, terrible daydreams, and even amnesia, are very severe even though they are thoroughly hidden in his gestural life: "I forget what it is I do, the regular activity of my walk and my swim and my taking of tea, the minor trappings and doings of my days, what I've made up to be the token flags of my life. I forget why it is I do such things, why they give me interest or solace or pleasure" (285). On the other hand, he confesses that Kkutaeh's death resulted from his monopolistic desire, "for I must have wanted her unto death, and I could not bear anyone else having her, and I allowed events to occur because of that feeling, even if it meant I would lose her forever" (296). This desire made Hata blind at the moment that Ono hugged Kkutaeh: "on sighting him, the humane sorrow one has when one witnesses the briefest moment of another's abandon and self-loss, which is a levity, and a phantom death, and enviable enough" (297).

Sunny, Hata's adopted daughter, plays an important role as a locus of

referentiality of war-trauma. In short, Sunny is someone who reminds Hata of Kkutaeh. Ironically, although it essentially results from his gestural life, it is Sunny's delinquency that leads Hata to stop his model minority charade. Sunny, making love with two black men and using drugs in James Gizzi's house, caused Hata to think about his terrible and tragic memories with Kkutaeh in the Japanese military brothel in Burma during World War II, which causes him extreme anger and horror: "I was simply shocked and outraged by what she had implied, but even more, if I'm to reflect fully, I felt the drug of fear course through me, and with the revisitation of a long-stored memory of another young woman" (150). In this sense, Sunny is someone who makes Hata repeatedly recall his traumatic experiences with Kkutaeh, and as a result, the harder he tries to escape or conceal his war-trauma under his number-one-citizen mask, the more serious his symptoms of PTSD will become.

Hata is a man who can never have a good relationship with either Sunny or Mary Burns, his ex-lover; He has "a historical pact" with Kkutaeh, mentioned in the above excerpt. His failures in his parenthood and love have been forewarned. For example, about his first meeting with Sunny, Hata's following self-conscious comment articulates that he cannot fully accept Sunny: "When I saw her for the first time I realized there could be no such conceit for us, no easy persuasion . . . It was right from that moment, the very start, that the young girl sensed my hesitance, the blighted hope in my eyes" (204). Hata is ostensibly discontented that Sunny is the product of "a night's wanton encounter between a GI and a local bar girl" (204). However, Hata is intuitively aware that he will distance himself from Sunny because she will remind him of the imperialist intervention in sexuality with Korean comfort women and military prostitutes. Hata's abortion of Sunny's unborn baby at "around twenty-eight weeks" with Dr. Anastasia's help is connected to his PTSDs, like the melancholia he has suffered from after witnessing the Japanese imperialist sexual abuse of young Korean comfort women like Kkutaeh (342). In "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud says that the reproaches against one's self are replaced reproaches against the loved objects that "have been shifted away from it on to the

patient's own ego" (248). In fact, it can be said that his aggressive involvement in the abortion results from Hata's self-approach.

Hata's ex-lover Burns's following comment about the daughter-father relationship suggests that it is impossible for Hata to attain a normal relationship with Sunny: "You act almost guilty, as if she's someone you hurt once, or betrayed, and now you're obliged to do whatever she wishes, which is never good for anyone, much less a child" (61). Mary Burns, a late cardiologist's wife, also reproaches Hata, who does not recognize he has a model minority complex as "a foreigner" and "a Japanese" (43). She does not know the origin of Hata's camouflage or masquerade as a model minority: "I think it's more that you have the movements and gestures of one. I haven't been spying on you, but I have noticed that you work like someone assured, confident, even as you put in your ground cover. You have that doctor's way, beyond any further questioning" (46). In other word, the failure of love between Burns and Hata is the result of their misunderstanding about each other.

#### IV. Beyond War-trauma

In *A Gesture Life*, the protagonist Franklin Hata is portrayed as a man who carries with him the pain and scars from his past. He was born to Korean tanners in Japan. After being adopted by a well-off Japanese apothecary family, he did his best to be a model minority Japanese to the extent that he volunteered to become a medic in the Pacific War in an attempt to overcome his inferiority complex as a lower-class Korean. Hata, who witnessed atrocious deaths in the war, decided to emigrate from Japan to America, thinking that he could not endure the postwar Japanese culture, and seems to have lived a productive and respected life in his new country. However, the masquerade of his gestural life is exposed, resulting in conflict with his adopted daughter, a Korean African girl. As observed above, Hata

must stick to success and respect as a model minority in both Japan and America because his past experiences, in the Pacific War in particular, were so severe that he had no choice but to hide them. That is, he needed a mask. In this regard, Hata's gestural life his daughter Sunny criticizes and the model minority complex the critic Joan Chiung Huei Chang argues for may be connected to his life as a masquerade.

Paradoxically, Hata's self-masking is closely related to his efforts to forget his painful past. He wanted to overcome his war-trauma and assimilation to both Japan and America and became a hyphenated person. But Hata merely realizes that he can never forget the extreme experiences. In a sense, the novel *Gesture* describes the process of Hata taking off his mask as a model minority and a good neighbor. The process can be more clearly interpreted by looking into his inner world from the Freudian viewpoint. This unmasking is triggered by conflict with his adolescent adopted daughter Sunny and her delinquency with drug-addicted boys. In fact, the unmasking reveals that Hata has suffered from serious PTSDs like hypochondria, melancholia, amnesia, and dreaming terrible daydreams in which he is haunted by his beloved, the Korean comfort girl Kkutaeh. And he was traumatized by atrocities from the war like her cruel death, as well as the racial discrimination he experienced because of his hyphenated life as a Japanese and an American. Young Sunny's sexual promiscuity and addiction to drugs causes Hata to recall painful memories with Kkutaeh, who died after resisting Japanese soldiers' sexual violence and gang-rape in the imperialist military camp. In this regard, Sunny is a stimulus, reminding her adoptive father of painful experiences from the war. Here, Sunny, whom Hata adopted to assuage his guilt over Kkutaeh, is an important role as a reminder of his trauma. Finally, she leads Hata to actually stop his self-masking behavior as a good model minority. This story proves that war-trauma, like Hata, is what makes all one's efforts to free from his past useless during his lifetime.

The narrative about this unmasking in *Gesture* can greatly contribute to the conversion of recognition about trauma in that it enables readers to look into the protagonist Hata's hidden world and recognize how trauma, war-trauma in particular,

destroys one's mentality and keeps the patient from living a normal life later. This trauma cannot easily be overcome with efforts like becoming a model minority. From Freud's perspective, the surmountability of the trauma originates in the depth of the wound on the mentality, in the psychic organ, or vesicle in the Freudian terminology, which cannot easily be controlled by ego-instincts beyond the reality principle. As a result, through his own psychological approach to his protagonist Hata's painful past, the author Chang-rae Lee criticizes the Japanese imperialist war and the sacrifice of Korean comfort women in the modern history of Korea, emphasizing that war-trauma causes people to live a morbid backward-looking life.

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