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Modernity, Colonialism, Identity: Park Taewon's Kubo and James Joyce's Little Chandler*

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I

Man is a self-conscious being, and he continuously evaluates his existential condition. If one determines to be a writer in a colonized nation, would he not start to examine his own condition of living, regulated and restricted by the imperial institutions? James Joyce was particularly keen on the issue of establishing an Irish national identity under the British government. In order to express Irishness as well as invent modern Irish literature, he explored the relationship between modernity, colonialism and Irish identity (Kiberd 117-18). Both Joyce and Yeats, in their poetic formation of national consciousness, paid equal attention to the importance of the individual. Joyce, however, took a different route from W. B. Yeats, who "steps forward into modernity out of the mists of the Celtic twilight and the Irish Literary Revival, while Joyce tried to become an "urban realist, European

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modernist, and stylistic revolutionary" (Corcoran viii). Joyce disdained those Irish artists who, exploiting the romantic myths and culture of the Celtic past, strove to meet English literary expectations. Rather, he wanted to awaken the Irish "batlike soul" (*P* 198) to national consciousness by providing them with "a nicely-polished looking-glass" (*L* II 134). Writing *Dubliners*, a moral history of Ireland, Joyce suggests the Irish should take "one good look at themselves" in the mirror to regain their national identity, and start anew as free, independent citizens. Also, he explores the snares that prevented his Irish contemporaries from being awakened. "Nationality, language and religion" are nets which hold back the waking souls. Joyce "shall try to fly" (*P* 220) on his own.

Park Taewon, a Korean writer during the colonial period (1905-1945), struggles with the same issue in "A Day in the Life of Kubo the Novelist." Kubo, a would-be artist, keeps asking if he and other colonized Koreans are happy. His preoccupation with the issue betrays that the protagonist and his contemporaries in "Keizo" (Seoul as renamed by the Japanese colonizers), are discontented. All day long, Kubo wanders around downtown because he has no solid job to get by. Interweaving the whole narrative are his thoughts, feelings, and reflections on himself and passers-by on the streets. Following Kubo's day-long promenade, the narrator depicts his *monologue intérieur* as the main character meanders the urban colonial space. History tells that Keizo in the 1920's and 1930's, though the capital of colonial Korea, has already become a modern, capitalist city with the influx of imperial money from Japan. Noting those places where Kubo incidentally pops up, we easily recognize Keizo emerging as a modern urban centre: for instance, Whashin Store (the first department store in Keizo), Chosun Bank, tea-rooms, pubs and restaurants, Keizo Station and streetcars coming and going. Were Koreans, then, real citizens of the urban space, participating in as well as enjoying its modern conveniences and commercial commodities? Why does Kubo keep asking if he is happy? How can he be happy? Can he call himself a Korean citizen? Is he Japanese? Can he pursue his dream of becoming a writer in such a demoralizing milieu? Comparing the two colonial intellectuals, Park's Kubo in the 1930's and Joyce's Little Chandler in

Dubliners in the 1900's, this paper analyzes their plight. It also questions if the colonial ideology, which has brought modernization to each country, affects or restricts the formation of either character's identity (Kim JW 137). This paper also ponders any critical subjectivity worth mentioning by comparing similarities and differences among their endless thoughts and observations, which are frequently punctuated by short-lived hopes and desires as well as lingering frustration and exhaustion.

II

What is the real problem of Little Chandler, the protagonist in "A Little Cloud"? Does the short story portray "an artist-would-be's pathetic failure to transcend a narrow existence of his own creation" (Ruoff 108)? Does Little Chandler "[regress] to adolescent self-pity" (Benstock 137)? Or is he "shamed [but] not ashamed," as Jackson and McGinley suggest, ignoring Joyce's use of "remorse" at the narrative's very end (74-75)? I don't think any of them correctly analyzes Chandler's real issue: the colonial constraints on his entire identity. Without placing existential state in its political context, Chandler seeks answers to his problem in his own dispositional shortcomings. Unlike Corley and Lenehan, two jobless gallants in *Dubliners*, he has a job, is married, and belongs to the middle-class. Bored with his routine, he always looks beyond. He seeks consolation in reading Byron and imagines himself becoming a famous poet. Chandler's day-dreaming is such that he is excited about an appointment with Gallaher, a journalistic success in London. He even desires to publish his poems in London, possibly with Gallaher's help. The main part of the narrative depicts the psychological trajectory of Little Chandler's excessive elation and bottomless deflation, before and after the meeting at Corless's, a fancy restaurant in Dublin. We'll note his dashed hopes, questioning whether the *soirée* leads to any self-awareness.

Kubo, in his late twenties, is a jobless would-be writer, scraping a living by

publishing a few articles in the dailies (159). On a summer morning, he leaves his mother's house with no specific destination. The narrator traces Kubo's monotonous, disoriented stroll downtown lasting until two a. m. the next day. The whole narrative *per se*, concentrates on the protagonist's thoughts and feelings about himself and people he encounters *en route*. Why is the narrative preoccupied with Kubo's inner landscape, rather than his concrete actions and motivations? A couple of explanations seem evident. First, let us deconstruct the whole history of the Peninsula's modernization imposed side-by-side with colonialization by Japan. Keizo appears to be a modern, capitalist city teeming with commodities and western-style conveniencies. Koreans who cannot afford these comforts, however, become themselves part of the urban backdrop or landscape. They are alienated in their own native land. Kubo keenly felt this inner exile, doubting his own identity.

Second, Kubo is a highly cultured literati of his day. His self-conscious multi-cultural world-view and sophistication have been molded by his education in Japan. Despite his outstanding pedagogical background, however, he finds himself marginalized, professionally, financially, socially and even nationally. Subjects of colonial rule may endure with subdued obedience to imperial ideology (Lee 359). An intellectual, alienated from life's main-stream, Kubo feels conflict and resistance to this subjugation. He remains numb to his nation's hapless state, observing and recording events passively. His perceptions, I would argue, is both fragmented and internalized. An aspiring writer, he continuously takes notes on Keizo denizens he bumps into, regardless of age, gender, or class. He does not simply chronicle what he sees and hears as he trudges along. He seems absorbed by his own would-be writer reactions. He "textualizes and reconstructs in his consciousness the colonial reality of his day" (Lee 359). Kubo thus copes with his day-to-day irrelevance as a colonial intellectual. We may interpret Kubo's subjective discourse as inchoate resistance to Japanese rule.

Third, Kubo has known the joy of being a consumer in Keizo, already a metropolis. We occasionally see him calculating human happiness in terms of money (173). Comparing Kubo with Leopold Bloom in *Ulysses*, Kim Sang Wook

labels them together as sharing a similar, fetishistic mass-consumption attitude prevalent on a global scale (43), but Dublin in 1904 and Keizo in 1934, I argue, show different stages of social progress, and should not be treated the same. I doubt Kubo is seriously beholden to western commodities nor does he covet modern trinkets. A novelist on the social margins, Kubo simply yearns to scrape by (173). For instance, passing a young couple having lunch at Whasin Store, he momentarily envies, then blesses them. An alienated consumer, his unemployment frustrates him. Five silver coins in his pocket are all he can allot for the day (166).

Like other characters in *Dubliners* who subsist in colonial Ireland around the 1910's, Little Chandler also dreams of escaping from his dreary transcribing job. But he takes no changes nor even consciously questions the colonial reality of Ireland. Chandler is employed, married and housed. He is, I would say, more successful than most of his generation. He never seriously considers leaving Dublin. Eveline is much more adventurous. She, at least, plans to elope to Argentina with Frank. Hesitation stymies her first step but she is not just daydreaming. An appointment with Gallaher, however, causes Chandler to reexamine his mundane life. Gallaher's appearance, accordingly, shows what might have been, had Chandler fled; the former has the elements of success: fame, status, sex and money. On his way to Corless's, therefore, Chandler's ego is momentarily inflated then burst, leaving him mortified back at home when "tears of remorse started to his eyes" (81). The whole narrative of Chandler is cyclical, matching his mood. Chandler's story is an ongoing process of his self-discovery. He has occasions to reflect on himself, his secret desires and shortcomings. To connect with his truer self, however, Chandler should have focused on his plight as a colonial subject of the British Empire.

Regarding Little Chandler's limited awareness of himself, I would mention three factors. First, does the protagonist refer to Ireland's colonial status? Has he objectively placed his elusive identity in this larger context? Unfortunately we find no such evidence of either in the narrative. Unlike Kubo who continuously notices the marginal subsistence of passers-by in Keizo, Chandler shows no interest in, yet

"feels himself superior to," others (68). For instance, the children in the park sadden him like whenever he thinks of life (66). At this point, a responsible subject should have taken the further step of asking why the whole nation feels constrained by imperial reign. This is a critical moment for Chandler to face the stark colonial reality of Ireland, and sympathize with the "horde of grimy children" (66). Instead, he avoids reflecting on the general *malaise*: "Little Chandler gave no thought" (66). Worse still, he acts like a pathetic loser, saying "how useless it was to struggle against fortune" (66). If he resists seeing himself in the Joycean mirror held up to Irish paralysis, can we expect him to awaken to moral consciousness, and regain his independent selfhood? Joyce fought British imperialism indirectly with resigned fatalism shown in Chandler's case.

Second, Little Chandler experiences a poetic moment on his way to Corless's, rekindling his desire to become a poet. But his poetic impulse remains totally unfulfilled. Instead of practicing verse under his new pen-name, "T. Malone Chandler" (69), he never writes a single line. Instead, he toys with "reviewer's jargon" (Kenner 9) about the mood of his unwritten lyrics. He even imagines the London critics' applause: "Melancholy was the dominant note of his temperament . . . tempered by recurrences of faith and resignation and simple joy" (68). His reference to the "Celtic note" (69) of his poem certainly reminds us of the romantic mood of the Irish Literary Movement Joyce so scorned. He admires Lord Byron and his juvenilia ("Hushed are the winds") which is full of melancholic *clichés*, as Mosher Jr. points out (382). Chandler's false consciousness cannot see how deplorable it is for a colonial intellectual to strive to meet the colonizer's standard. He simply displaces the current Irish suffering with her glorious past. Ironically, Chandler associates himself with England, supplanting Ireland in his mind. Chandler's complacency to British subjugation is betrayed when he imagines his steps to Corless's bringing "him nearer to London" (68), the *locus* of imperial power. To wish to be famous in London as a poet of the Irish Revival precludes his true self-awakening.

Little Chandler hopes to publish his poem yet never writes a line. But Kubo

takes a concrete step to realize his dream to be a writer, even in colonial Korea. A writer, he recognizes, accumulates experience: “A novelist requires all kinds of knowledge” (175). That explains his thick notebook for jotting down not only observations of the townspeople but recollections of his such encounters stirred. Recording the outer world and inner consciousness he calls “modernology” (176), and the narrative consists mainly of his memories, feelings, thoughts and judgement. Kubo’s “modernology” develops into a fiction about a colonial writer seeking his authenticity.

Another issue to mention regarding Kubo’s commitment to his writing is, he is an avid reader, freely quoting from varied writers and composers, making his narrative rich in intertextual connections. He makes reference to Confucius (孔子), Andrè Gide, Stendhal, Erich Maria Remarque, James Joyce, Akutagawa Ryunosuke (芥川龍之介), Ishikawa Takeboku (石川啄木), Yoshiya Nobuko (吉屋信子), Sato Haruo (佐藤春夫), and so forth. He also mentions an aria from Verdi’s *Falstaff* performed by Tito Schipa (1888-1965), an Italian tenor, as well as Tchaikovsky’s *Valse Sentimentale* played by Misha Elman (1891-1967), a Russian violinist. An imperial citizen, Kubo went to college in Tokyo. His literary taste was cultivated by, and filtered through, Japanese culture and language. His ethical sensibility is challenged by the discrepancy between his aspirations and limited horizons he is forced to subsist in. Kubo’s self-awareness closely relates to his awakening to the poverty and oppression of his nation. Observing and analyzing the desire, frustration, and suffering of the gloomy and jobless in Keizo, Kubo gradually sympathizes with them. He too experiences the swelling of his ego. He realizes the drawbacks of Korea’s westernization by imperial Japan: i. e., the more rapidly feudal Korea is westernized, the more easily she is exploited. When a colonial writer awakens to national consciousness, he must decide whether to express himself in his mother tongue or the colonizer’s language. Kubo writes in colloquial Korean, certainly to resist colonial horns. Such an attitude contrasts Chandler’s voluntary Anglophile tendency in his literary project. Unlike Chandler who pays no mind to the impoverished urchins in the street, Kubo is concerned with the welfare

of his Korean contemporaries. Such a commitment would propel him toward integration of his divided identity as a colonial writer, isolated in his own land.

Interestingly, Kubo stalks Keizo for eighteen hours full of melancholy, like Stephen and Bloom on June 16, 1904 in *Ulysses* which Kubo mentions, and even criticizes in the narrative. Does Park, with Kubo's "modernology," emulate Joyce's narrative technique who jammed into *Ulysses* encyclopedic information about Dublin, modern western culture and civilization? Following Joyce who depicted *homme moyen sensuel* in Bloom, Park, through Kubo's walk in Keizo, signifies the modern writer in a colonial urban space. Kubo knows what he is up to when he departs his home in the morning: "I should go somewhere . . . for the sake of my writing" (175). Kubo's summer day spent as a pedestrian proves fruitful because his observations and note-making eventually materialize in his fiction.

Chandler reevaluates his life as he talks with Gallaher. His self-fabricated vision of a publishing poet slowly fades when Gallaher challenges the former's sober, monogamous marital status: "Must get a bit stale, I should think, he said" (77). At first, Chandler is strongly infatuated with Gallaher's endless amorous adventures in the *Moulin Rouge* and Bohemian cafés of Paris. He envies his friend who "had seen the world" (72). Possibly Gallaher's reference to those rich German Jewesses with "dark Oriental eyes" (78) aroused Chandler. Gallaher's verdict on Continental corruption and immorality, however, intimidates Chandler's piety, and he gets confused. Gallaher's vagrant, hedonistic stories finally "upset the equipoise of [Chandler's] sensitive nature" (75). Chandler blushes repeatedly, as Faherty interprets (383-84). Why is Chandler's equilibrium broken? Several threats occur. First, Chandler regrets remaining: "You could do nothing in Dublin" (68). We might ask if moving would have made any difference. Why deem those who left Ireland as successes, and those who remain as failures? The historical context of the Irish situation would bring clarity. Joyce expects Chandler to ask first. The author likened the Irish people to a peasant woman who calls "the stranger to her bed" (*P* 198).

Second, Chandler esteems success far above Gallaher's, "if he only got the

chance" (75-76). Given the chance to leave Ireland, was Chandler venturesome enough to seize it? Pointing out Chandler's timidity, indecision, shyness, conformity, and lack of masculinity, Greenwood considers his misfortune to be due to "his failure to resist various pressures . . . by institutions" in Ireland: i. e. national, ecclesiastical, patriarchal, and colonial (16). Greenwood mentions the wrong choices he made when younger, which he must own, instead of blaming some "outside force" (16). Chandler's personal failing is partly to blame but again, he should recognize the real cause of the Irish people's general discontent. Chandler's attribution of his misfortune and negative personal traits costs him the chance of self-discovery. Inability to locate the sources of his frustration stirs "resentment against his life" (79) again and again.

Third, Chandler is not only a British colonial subject but a consumer in a capitalist society in the 1910's. He truly enjoys consumption-oriented life in Dublin: "He took greatest care of his silken hair and moustache, and used perfume discreetly on his handkerchief" (65). He makes an appointment with Gallaher at Corless's, a fancy bar where *garçon* serves different kinds of liqueurs. One Saturday, he presents Annie, his wife, "ladies' blouse" at a fancy price (78). He forgets to bring home coffee from Bewley's, a famous tea-house chain. At 8:45 pm, Annie goes to buy tea and sugar. He has to pay for the furniture he purchased on credit. He even calculates the advance he would earn if he publishes a book. Chandler, accustomed to the urban style of modern society, feels he cannot escape his little house. Doubly-trapped in his colonized, consumer existence, Chandler realizes he is "a prisoner for life" (80).

Fourth, Chandler does not see through Gallaher. The latter's journalistic fame in London is never verified in the narrative but Chandler, ironically, ponders using him as a stepping stone to publish his "Celtic" poem. Gallaher's vulgar accent and expressions undermine the authenticity of his bragging. Probably, he fabricates the tales of debauchery out of similar rumors and hearsay collected in Europe all along. If Chandler seeks a role-model in such a buffoon, genuine self-awareness, still less national consciousness, drifts farther away.

Just as Gallaher's uninhibited sexual discourse subverts Chandler's "chaste" view of marriage (Yun 26), the issue of marriage also preoccupies Kubo. His mother brings up the matter. All day long the frustrated bachelor grapples with the question, mixing amorous recollections with unfulfilled desires. Kubo recalls his strong crush on a friend's sister who married another man. Enviously imagining the domestic bliss of a new-wed at Whashin Store, Kubo happens to see in the tram the same lady he met at a tryst, and he starts spinning his own tale of what might have been, analyzing his and her feelings toward each other. Kubo's emotional fancies finally remind him of his strong fascination with a girl in Tokyo. The love-sick undergraduate, however, finds she is already engaged to his friend. The writer-to-be Kubo freely scribbles about his own premature love-affair long ago. Calling it tragic, he fabricates pulp fiction out of puppy love. It is fiction within fiction, yet he longs for her desperately: "Ah, I miss her. I want to know where she is" (198). The narrator interprets that "this may be a real emotion of his" (198). It is touching when readers peer into Kubo's heart which has been harrowed by despair, alienation, and destitution all day. After seven-hours of walking, Kubo starts for home very late, feeling exhausted. *En route*, he passes by the side-streets' nighttown of tawdry mirth. In the capitalist urban space, Korean women, young and old, sell themselves as cheap sexual commodities. At the narrative's very end, the colonial intellectual vows to start his novel (214), and considers marriage to please his aging mother.

Mind and body do not merely work together but affect each other in human metabolism. If one is exposed continuously to unjust repression, physical and mental symptoms of anomaly appear. As many characters in *Dubliners* show, illness can be a telling metaphor. If colonial citizens suffer enough, their moral, mental, psychological and physical beings deteriorate. This is a chronic sign of revolt and destruction of the colonials themselves. Obsequious as well as subservient, Chandler shows varied aspects of abnormalities. He frequently feels melancholy, fear, and resentment. His delicate, effeminate disposition, indecision and defeatism partly result from his conformism. Reading the following, we

recognize Chandler's inner isolation and pathological terror of the Other.

> Sometimes, however, he courted the causes of his fear. He chose the darkest and narrowest streets and, as he walked boldly forward, the silence that was spread about his footstep troubled him, the wandering silent figures troubled him; and at times a sound of low fugitive laughter made him tremble like a leaf. (67)

Emasculate, groundless fears strike from nowhere. He takes his anger out on his wailing infant at the end: "Stop!" (80).

A jobless intellectual, Kubo feels anxious about his uncertain identity, as well as alienated from his native land. That he is a marginal being in colonized Korea bores and exhausts him, causing chronic neurosis. Acute headache on the street and "worries about his left ear" (163) make Kubo feel all the more neurotic. His nerve is so shaken he diagnoses himself as "hypochondriac." How does he cope?

> Earlier on, he cherished his loneliness. No, that's not quite how he felt. Maybe he never have sought loneliness. Rather, he may have feared it more than anything. Adrift at the mercy of loneliness, he may have pretended that he loved loneliness. (288)

Certainly, he feels alienated from the societal, historical context of his time and space. But he struggles to hide his split self, even from himself. Such defensiveness lets Kubo forget his financial instability and imperial violence temporarily (Lee 365-67).

III

So far, we have compared the two colonial intellectuals, Kubo and Chandler, trying to re-examine their identities, seeking alternatives. Each protagonist's search

for authenticity and meaning is complicated not simply by his colonized status but also by his membership in a modern, capitalist society. Their expectations of social status rise but they, as colonial subjects, are set apart from the actual tides of modern, consumption-oriented life. Both feel deeply alienated from their own native lands, despairing at the yawning gap between the ideal and the real. Their reactions to, and coping with, their *malaise*, show wide differences, regardless of their national and temperamental backgrounds. First of all, each one's approach to, and attitude of, self-examination is dissimilar. Kubo bravely faces his disappointment, exhaustion and loneliness, and strives to objectively analyze his pending situation as a jobless intellectual. Busily making notes of his street trek, he instantly connects outside goings-on to past memories. He defines and redefines himself. Chandler's chance of self-evaluation, however, comes from the outside, for instance, a meeting with Gallaher at Corless's. His self-discovery is executed through comparing his "sober inartistic life" (68) with Gallaher's success in London. Instead of assessing clearly those choices made in the past, Chandler blames his misfortunes against which he did not struggle, and senses anger, frustration and disillusionment. Instead of regretting lost chances to be another Gallaher, he could blame himself for having conformed. He should also examine his defeatism and indecision.

Compare Kubo's and Chandler's feelings toward fellow citizens. Are they sympathetic or detached? Arguably, Chandler is detached, condescending or even, despising. Enraptured with his secret desire to be a poet in London, he "feels superior to the people he passed" (68). Unaware and placid toward the colonial subjugation of Ireland, he simply seeks a private exit for himself. That is Joyce's criticism of Chandler: i.e. his subservience to the *status quo* and deep-rooted fatalism about the Irish question. Chandler's exclusive self-examination, ignoring the large reality, leads to nowhere. An unproductive poet and failing husband, he feels ashamed and sheds "tears of remorse" (80) at the end. But Kubo's trajectory strays. His ongoing struggle with his problematic identity opens his eyes to Korea's stark situation in the process of modernization by Japan. Instead of a direct action against the imperialists, he keeps recording the devastating routine of urban

colonials encountered one summer day. He feels no aloofness, but deep sympathy: "Kubo's thought drifts to his country, so poor, and his mind clouds over" (206). Such self-identification among the colonials expands Kubo's ego: "A poor novelist, and a poor poet" (206). Returning home at 2 a. m., his boring, disoriented 18-hour walk turns out to be a successful journey towards self-discovery. Kubo's ambivalence toward the colonial city gradually changes to "authentic empathy toward others," as Walsh suggests (57). He feels rejuvenated, accepting his identity as a novelist, firmly resolving to "write a truly good novel" (214). Park Taewon must have shared his main character's commitment, and completed "A Day in the Life of Kubo the Novelist" with the same sympathetic imagination Kubo showed toward his suffering people in the colonized, occupied Peninsula.

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Abstract

Modernity, Colonialism, Identity: Park Taewon's Kubo and James Joyce's Little Chandler

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This paper researches the two colonial intellectuals' reevaluation of their identities and search for alternative modes of life, comparing Park Taewon's Kubo in "A Day in the Life of Kubo the Novelist" and James Joyce's Little Chandler in "A Little Cloud." Trapped in colonized yet modern, capitalist societies, both are alienated from their own native lands but their responses to their depressing situations are radically different. Kubo bravely faces his frustration as an aspiring writer, and analyzes his pending existential condition. Making notes of his observations on the street, he comes to identify with the suffering colonials of Keizo (Seoul's Japanese name). Such an identification expands Kubo's ego, and rejuvenates him. He firmly resolves to write a good novel. Chandler's self-evaluation, however, consists of comparing his monotony in Dublin with Gallaher's success in London. Without any clear assessment of the Irish situation and no empathy toward fellow colonial Dubliners, he simply blames his misfortune, and feels anger, frustration and disillusionment. While Chandler's solipsistic self-examination leads to nowhere but idle tears, Kubo's 18-hour walk proves to be a resourceful journey toward his self-discovery as a genuine writer.

■ Key words : Little Chandler, modernity, colonialism, identity, capitalism, alienation
(구보, 리틀 챈들러, 모더니티, 식민주의, 아이덴티티, 자본주의, 소외)

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