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The Search For South-South Solidarities Between Contemporary (South) Korea and Mexico

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Abstract

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My thesis explores the interconnections between South Korea and Mexico as it appears in three cultural materials with the purpose of examining possible instances of South-South solidarities in the context of shifting asymmetrical political and economic relationships. This context is characterized, on one part, by having into account the long Mexican history of Anti-Asian sentiment demonstrated by the Porfirian exploitation of Asian migrants and post-Revolution racial project and the other by the rise of South Korea as a cultural and economic power. I analyzed the South Korean novel *Black Flower* (2003) by Young-ha Kim and the YouTube videos of two South Korean influencers based in Mexico: Chingu Amiga and Coreano Vlogs. The common thread of this project revolves around forms of exchange (language and translation), labor, and economic production (agriculture, industrial, and attention) to examine the cacophonies and contradictions that appear in the process of establishing trans-pacific solidarities between different populations. For example, in chapter one, I analyze how the author portrays an “unsettling” relationship between Mayan and Korean indentured workers in the context of Mexican henequen plantations. In a similar manner, in chapter two, I examine the relationship of solidarities that South Korean YouTubers attempt to construct with their Mexican audiences and the simultaneous (lack of) relationships with the existing populations of Mexicans of Korean descent. I examine these dynamics within the logic of “clickbait” that characterizes the era of attention economy. I utilize Juyoung Verónica Kim’s idea of “Asia-Latin America as method” as well as draw from Quynh Nhu Le’s term “unsettled solidarity” to emphasize instances of “struggle and dissensus” that surge from the process of studying regions and cultures that normally are not associated with each other and are overdetermined by the mediation of the West.

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Historical Introduction

In 1905, a group of about a thousand Koreans left from the Jemulpo port in Incheon. One of the documents cited in Wayne Patterson's "The Early Years of Korean Immigration to Mexico: A View from Japanese and Korean Sources" came from advertisements that the Continental Colonization Company made. In one of these advertisements, Mexico is described in the following terms:

a highly civilized and wealthy country, comparing favorably with the United States and famous for its mild climate, like an earthly paradise, without any disease. There are many rich people, but few poor people....If Koreans emigrate, they too can surely gain much profit in safety. Although Korea and Mexico have not made any treaty yet, Korea has been granted 'Most-Favorites Nations' status, and Koreans can keep all the profits they earn. If people desire to emigrate with their families, there are no obstructions at all, and they are favorably accepted (Patterson 88).

Comparing the portrayal of Mexico in a contemporary sense, the Continental Colonization Company idealizes Mexico as a prosperous and warm place where Koreans will be able to make plenty of money. However, this was not the case. Moreover, Patterson references another document—collected from U.S. and Tokyo legations—describing the Korean Foreign Minister's efforts to prohibit Koreans from emigrating because they realized that the company did not seek approval from the Korean-Japanese government and had tricked Koreans into traveling to an "undesirable" location (93). As Patterson references in the legations between US to Tokyo, the Korean Foreign Minister wanted to prevent more Koreans from leaving the country to go to Mexico by a company that had not been legitimately recognized by the Japanese or American diplomats.

In Hahkyung Kim's "Korean Immigrants' Place in the Discourse of Mestizaje: A History of Race-Class Dynamics and Asian Immigration in Yucatan, Mexico," she discusses the history of the Korean migration in consideration to the political story of Mexico. Kim introduces John G. Meyers as an "immigration broker hired by henequen plantation owners of Yucatán" who collaborated with Oda Kanichi of the Continental Colonization—or Migration—Company (248) to make contracts with Koreans with the prospects of money, and "ignored the royal edict by King Kojong that prohibited Korean emigration unless approved by David W. Deshler, an American entrepreneur" (H. Kim 250). Because Meyers and Kanichi did not seek approval with the designated American "official," the Koreans were not able to have their passports issued by the Korean government (H. Kim 250), thus leaving them without a way of getting back to the Korean Peninsula.

However, when the Koreans arrive in Yucatán, they were not the only Asian population there. Hahkyung Kim mentions that there was a population of both Chinese and Japanese workers in Yucatán who arrived prior to the Koreans. She describes how most Chinese immigrants in Yucatán worked on the railroad construction sites and henequen plantations, but once their contracts ended, they became self-employed by starting their own businesses (H. Kim 241). Yet, once they reached a higher financial status, Mexican politicians and media claimed that Chinese people were eventually going to take over the country, and this incited the xenophobia called the "peligro amarillo" ["yellow peril"] (Kim 241-42). In contrast, the Japanese immigrants were not portrayed in the same light. Japanese immigrants were considered by the Porfirian government to be from "one of the 'military powers which maintain international equilibrium' [who] adopted western civilization" (Kim 243). When the Koreans arrive in Mexico, the case of racialization and discrimination is different. Hahkyung Kim writes:

Asians as a whole were racialized as the other, represented as either a tool of positive use for Mexico ('motores de sangre,' 'herramientas,' and 'bracero') or a socioeconomic threat to Mexicans ('peligro amarillo') (이자경 2006). Nonetheless, Korean immigrants were yet to be defined or even recognized as the others in Yucatán and Mexico at large during their first four years...[T]hey were not threatening to the host society in any significant way. Koreans may have inadvertently been categorized as Chinese due to the two ethnicities' physical likeness, but the "peligro amarillo" does not actively nor directly point to Koreans as subject to racialization (258-59).

Although Koreans had a distinct racialization from that of the Japanese and Chinese, Koreans were still affected by anti-Asian sentiment. Furthermore, the discrimination against the Chinese compared to the official positive view of Japan prior to and after the arrival of the Koreans is important to conceptualize with the emergence of the post-Revolution Mexican race project.

As Jason Oliver Chang highlights in his book *Chino: Anti-Chinese Racism in Mexico, 1880-1940*, the Mexican government implemented the instrumental role of "antichinismo" (or anti-Chinese) rhetoric in the process of consolidation of State power. Chang writes, "antichinismo became instrumental to agrarian reform because it helped convert disinterested and 'unruly' Indians into patriotic, disciplined settlers of their own land" (17). One paradigmatic example of anti-Chinese sentiment was the massacre of Torreon where 303 Chinese people were brutally killed in 1911 in order for Mexican revolutionists to take hold of a Porfirian center of power (Chang 12). It is important to highlight the violent history of Mexican society on the Chinese because the same discrimination still lingers today. Through the implementation of "antichinismo" in relation to the "Mexican mestizo race," the Mexican government promulgated

a strong narrative of anti-Asian sentiment where people that look phenotypically Chinese, like Koreans, also experience that anti-Asian sentiment.

After the labor contracts of the Korean workers ended, they were left without support in both Korea and Mexico. Hahkyung Kim mentions:

Several Koreans—mostly ex-soldiers of the Korean Empire—who paid a ransom of 80 to 100 pesos were released from the contract almost a year earlier in July 1908 and went on to found a Korean community that was soon to become the Asociación Coreana de Mérida (Korean Association of Merida). Officially registered as the first and only Korean organization of Mexico in May 1909, the Korean Association became the center of the post-contract settlement, religious and cultural activities, and the Korean Independence movement in Mexico in collaboration with other Korean Associations in California.... [T]he fact that the Yucatecan government registered the Asociación Coreana as an official organization representative of the Korean immigrants may suggest the government's acknowledgement of Korean presence in Mexico. However,...[t]he absence of the Korean communities in Mexico's official records and the media again indicate the Mexican and Yucatecan governments' lukewarm response towards a Korean identity (260).

As the excerpt states, following the end of the labor contracts, Koreans established a center of contact for themselves, but there is a lack of recognition from both the Yucatán state and Mexican federal government in recognizing the diaspora. Moreover, Kim recognizes that the first generation of Korean immigrants were able to hold onto Korea as their homeland, and they supported the Korean independence movement from the other side of the world (261). However, this ethnic tie begins to shift in the second, third, and following generations. Hahkyung Kim

recognizes that some Koreans of the second generation had supported the Korean independence movement, but following the Independence Movement, the Korean War started and split the nation “which by then was an imagined homeland for the second and third generations [and] was no longer Korea as the first immigrants had known and been part of” (262). Hahkyung Kim concludes her work by emphasizing the lack of acknowledgement of the Korean diaspora from both the Mexican and South Korean government. Kim writes, “the Korean immigrants have been, in a sense, abandoned by not only Korea but also Mexico” (264). As time went on, there were several periods of Korean migrants to Mexico that the scholar Sergio Gallardo García mentions in “Trayectividad de la migración coreana en la Ciudad de México: entre nacionalismos, iglesias y asociaciones étnicas.” Gallardo García mentions a small migration during the decade of the 1960s that consisted of diplomatic officials during the establishment of the Republic of Korea (103). However, the migration of South Koreans during the decade of the 1990s was different as companies like Hyundai, Posco, and Samsung started to establish themselves in Mexico. Gallardo García states, “Esta migración sería muy diferente a la que había llegado en 1905, pues ahora se trataba de migrantes altamente calificados, con potencial económico y financiero equivalente al de las clases medias o altas de nuestro país” [“This migration would be very different from the one that arrived in 1905, in which now, it was about highly qualified migrants, with economic and financial potential equivalent to the middle and upper classes of our country”] (103). As Gallardo García mentions, there begins to be a shift between the types of migrants that come to Mexico, which also indicates the relations of South Korea and Mexico shifting. Furthermore, the structure of the Korean Association—which has extended to Mexico City—also begins to shift in purpose. Gallardo García writes:

Ésta podría considerarse una filial de la Embajada Coreana o de su consulado, ya que opera con fondos otorgados por esos cuerpos diplomáticos y se encarga de atender las dudas, preocupaciones, problemas y situaciones de riesgo que puedan sufrir los ciudadanos surcoreanos afincados en la Ciudad de México....Esta asociación no tiene carácter comercial sino ciudadano, es decir, favorece a todos los surcoreanos. Sin embargo, no todos apelan a ella. Por ejemplo, los descendientes son considerados mexicanos y no pueden disfrutar de los servicios que otorga la asociación, únicamente de sus instalaciones, donde hay oficinas destinadas a sus actividades.

[This could be considered a subsidiary of the Korean Embassy or its consulate, since it operates with funds granted by those diplomatic corps and is responsible for addressing doubts, concerns, problems and situations of risk that South Koreans may suffer living in Mexico City....This association is not commercial but civic, that is, it favors all South Koreans. However, not everyone appeals to it. For example, the descendants are considered Mexican and cannot enjoy the services provided by the association, only its facilities, where there are official offices designated for their activities] (111-12).

As Gallardo García states, the institution of the Korean Association does not cater to the Mexicans of Korean descent, but to those who come after the establishment of the Republic of Korea. Reflecting on the history of the first Koreans to Mexico, they went through so much trouble to get to a country that had no diplomatic relations with their homeland. Moreover, they had no way of advocating for themselves due to the weak state of the Korean Empire at the time. However, it is important to emphasize that there are three Koreas that continue to exist: the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Republic of Korea, and the communities of Korean descendants scattered throughout the world, especially in Mexico.

With consideration of the history of the Korean immigration to Mexico, my thesis explores the interconnections between South Korea and Mexico as it appears in three cultural materials with the purpose of examining possible instances of South-South solidarities in the context of shifting asymmetrical political and economic relationships. This context is characterized, on one part, by having into account the long Mexican history of Anti-Asian sentiment demonstrated by the Porfirian exploitation of Asian migrants and post-Revolution racial project and the other by the rise of South Korea as a cultural and economic power. I analyzed the South Korean novel *Black Flower* (2003) by Young-ha Kim and the YouTube videos of two South Korean influencers based in Mexico: Chingu Amiga and Coreano Vlogs. The common thread of this project revolves around forms of exchange (language and translation), labor, and economic production (agriculture, industrial, and attention) to examine the cacophonies and contradictions that appear in the process of establishing trans-pacific solidarities between different populations. For example, in chapter one, I analyze how the author portrays an “unsettling” relationship between Mayan and Korean indentured workers in the context of Mexican henequen plantations. In a similar manner, in chapter two, I examine the relationship of solidarities that South Korean YouTubers attempt to construct with their Mexican audiences and the simultaneous (lack of) relationships with the existing populations of Mexicans of Korean descent. I examine these dynamics within the logic of “clickbait” that characterizes the era of attention economy.

Methodology and Cultural Materials

In my thesis, I utilize Junyoung Verónica Kim’s idea of “Asia-Latin America as method” with Quynh Nhu Le’s term “unsettled solidarity” to emphasize instances of “struggle and dissensus” that surge from the process of studying regions and cultures that normally are not

associated with each other and are overdetermined by the mediation of the West. In “Asia-Latin America as method” Kim observes that “[t]he acceleration of cultural, political, and economic encounters between various regions and localities brings different forms of power-knowledge into contract, often contradicting each other even as they interact dynamically” (101). This means that “[t]he West is not a cartographic entity but, more importantly, a culturalist imaginary that can be transplanted onto other social entities and localities. In other words, Asia, as well as Latin America, can take on the role of the West” (Kim 101). Also, using Quynh Nhu Le’s term “settler racial hegemonies,” I employ the term “unsettled solidarities” to be defined as a series of “fraught relationships between the political mobilization of racialized non-Indigenous and Indigenous communities” (Le 2) and their “cross community entanglements” (Le 3) with Asian (Latin) Americans. With the combination of these terms, the term “south-south solidarity” is used to describe how two or more countries from the Global South interact with each other with the assumption that they both are seen as “developing” countries by the Global North.

As previously mentioned, the cultural materials that I engage with are the South Korean novel *Black Flower* written by Young-ha Kim (2003), YouTube videos from the influencer Chingu Amiga, and YouTube videos from the influencer Coreano Vlogs. The novel *Black Flower* came up as a suggestion when I started brainstorming my thesis. I chose this novel because there isn’t another accessible fictional work that specifically discusses the historical migration of the Koreans to Mexico. The videos from Chingu Amiga and Coreano Vlogs that I engage with mostly range from the years 2020 to 2024 with the exception of one video from Coreano Vlogs uploaded in 2015. It was difficult to choose a small sample of videos considering that both Chingu Amiga and Coreano Vlogs each had more than a thousand videos uploaded, so I mostly chose the videos randomly by looking at the title. However, in my analysis of Chingu

Amiga, three of the videos I used were ones that I had watched with my mom. In total, I watched five videos from Chingu Amiga and four videos from Coreano Vlogs and analyzed them under four common themes: language, exchange, labor, and food.

Notes on Terminology

The term “Korea” and “Korean” in most of our colloquial speech is used to describe the Republic of Korea, or South Korea. However, during the first migration of Koreans to Mexico, this was a group of migrants—from what is now North and South Korea—that were leaving the Korean peninsula. However, when I discuss the YouTubers, there are instances where “Korean” is used to refer to South Koreans. This is done in reference to the sources that I draw from which do not make that distinction. I believe that it is important to distinguish South Korea from North Korea because the term “Korea” implies a unification of both countries where this is not the case. Moreover, there are variations in the spelling of the port where the Koreans left in 1905. I tend to use the spelling Jemulpo because that is how the English translation of the novel spelled it, while other sources spell it as Chemulpo. Finally, I want to clarify that I will use the words “YouTuber” and “influencer” interchangeably to describe the South Korean expats in Mexico who create content intended for a Mexican audience.

Chapter 1: *Black Flower* : An Analysis Of History, Translation, and Labor

When I first arrived at the idea of writing an Honors Thesis based on my observances of the South Korean migration occurring in Mexico, I discovered a book that was based on a small migration of Koreans that has practically disappeared from mainstream history. *Black Flower* was written by Young-ha Kim—a South Korean native—who first learned about this migration through a conversation he had with someone on a flight. This person explained to Kim that there was a migration of Koreans towards the beginning of the Japanese occupation period at the turn of the 20th century. Most of this Korean migration settled in Yucatán, specifically around Mérida. While this migration was hoping for a better place to live in the meantime, they would soon come to realize that they had been extremely misled into signing themselves to a contract of indentured servitude. Although the overall narrative of *Black Flower* is fictional, the novel is based on the slim extractions of primary sources and historical events that occurred during the time.

The Translation of *Black Flower*

Black Flower was first published in Korean in 2003, and the English translation was not published until 2012. Moreover, a Spanish translation of the novel was not published until 2021, eighteen years after the original novel had been published. In an article by *The Korea Times* titled “‘Black Flower,’ Novel About Early Korean Plantation Workers, Published in Mexico,” it mentions that Hyesun Ko and her husband, Francisco J. Carranza Romero, were the ones who translated the novel from Korean into Spanish at a Mexican publishing house. The Spanish translation has been the latest translation of the book. The language order in which the book has been translated is French, German, English, Portuguese, Chinese, Polish, Chinese (Taiwan), and finally Spanish, according to the Library of Korean Literature. Despite the novel being about a

Korean migration into Mexico, the descendants of this migration would not have been able to read it until the Spanish translation came out (unless they knew Korean, English, or another foreign language). However, the author has been receptive towards the translation of the novel, and it was said that the novel would be dispersed to the Korean descendants. In “‘Black Flower,’ Novel About Early Korean Plantation Workers, Published in Mexico,” the author writes:

During an online presentation, Thursday—joined by the director of the Korean Cultural Center in Mexico City, the publisher’s representative, translators and a local researcher of Korean immigration history—Kim expressed appreciation for the book’s Spanish translation and publication in Mexico in a video message. ‘Out of all of the books that I have written so far, ‘Black Flower’ is the one I hold dearest to my heart,’ he said. ‘Since the narrative is primarily set in Mexico, for a long time, I’ve wished for the novel to be published there and am happy to see that this has been finally done.’ He added that its story of diaspora remains relevant today, as people continue to undergo many trials and tribulations to fit into a certain cultural identity different from that of their native land....The Korean Cultural Center in Mexico City announced that it plans to distribute ‘Flor Negra’ in the near future to major universities, as well as to the Association of Korean Descendants in Mexico (Park).

As the excerpt explains, there has been an intent to distribute this novel throughout the country to schools and to the communities of the Korean descendants. In Yucatán, where the original migration arrived, a descendant from the Korean immigrants describes his surprise when he noticed his name in the dedication of the Spanish translation of the novel. In an article by *Diario de Yucatán*, it states:

[Javier] Corona Baeza, siempre orgullos de sus raíces coreanas, se llevó una sorpresa a leer la versión en español de la novela, pues en la primera página encontró su nombre como referencia a la historia de la esquina del Chemulpo, que escribió, y en la que cuenta cómo un parroquiano siempre brindaba en el bar por Chemulpo, el puerto del que los migrantes coreanos partieron para venir a México, como un recuerdo nostálgico de su país. Para él fue muy emocionante ver su nombre en el libro.

[[Javier] Corona Baeza, very proud of his Korean roots, was surprised to read the Spanish version of the novel, in which, upon the first page, found his name as a reference to the history from the corner of Chemulpo, who wrote from the account of a parishioner who always cheered in the bar for Chemulpo, the port in which the Korean migrants parted from in order to come to Mexico, as a nostalgic memory of their country. For him, it was very exciting to see his name in the book] (“Lo sorprende novela coreana”).

This quote is significant because it highlights the importance of the novel’s translation into Spanish. There are generations of Mexicans with Korean ancestry that have settled in Mexico and the Yucatán area that want to know more about their families’ migrations, so the translation of the novel into Spanish allows for those of Korean-Mexican ancestry—such as Corona Baeza—to connect to their roots in a way, especially since they have not grown up with the Korean language. Even though a Spanish translation was made, it is startling that the translation did not come to fruition until eighteen years after the original was published, despite knowing about the descendants in Mexico that would want to learn about their families. Although it might appear that the lack of a Spanish translation could be interpreted as an inconsideration to the Korean-Mexican diaspora that emerged from the original Korean migration to Mexico, there is a systemic issue with the translation market in which there is a lack of Korean texts being

translated to other languages—besides English, German or French—especially into Spanish. Mark Bellos, a translation theorist, describes the difficulties of the translation process. In the chapter “Global Flows: Center and Periphery in the Translation of Books,” Bellos emphasizes that literature written in global languages with less speakers have a harder time getting translated. Bellos writes, “If you do write in a minor language—and all languages, even French, are minor ones now—getting translated into English is the summit of your ambition....But getting translated into Spanish or Swedish is unlikely to get your work out into the wider world. Whatever language you write in, the translation that counts is the English one” (215). In this case, *Black Flower* would not have likely been translated to Spanish without the recognition an English translation of the novel first.

Although there is a systemic issue in the process of translation, there is discourse on whether Asian-Latin American literature is directed towards audiences in Latin America—specifically for Asian Latin American audiences—or if the literature is meant for more Anglophone audiences. In the article “Asia-Latin America as Method: The Global South Project and the Dislocation of the West” by Junyoung Verónica Kim, she describes how the relationship between Asia and Latin America is mediated by West. One metaphor that Kim utilizes is the lack of flights between Latin America and Asia. Kim writes, “the fact that there are hardly any nonstop direct flights from Latin America to Asia, and vice versa, attests to the ways in which the transpacific relation between Asia and Latin America must often make a detour through the West” (“Asia-Latin America as Method” 105). Using the lack of direct flights as a metaphor for the translations of Young-Ha Kim’s *Black Flower*, this metaphor is relevant to the Spanish translation because it was not published until after English and other Global North language translations. The thought of a Spanish translation did not come until after the novel had already

been read in the Global North. In the article “Worlding and Decolonizing the Literary World-System: Asian-Latin American Literature as an Alternative Type of Weltliteratur” by Ignacio López-Calvo, he discusses how Asian-Latin American literature sometimes appeals to a more global audience rather than to the diasporas in Latin America. Moreover, López-Calvo describes how Asian-Latin American literature is not typically written for the people of Asian-descent in Latin America, but rather a more global market. He writes, “Asian-Latin American literature tends to share this same non-Eurocentric coverage of vast regions of the planet in their settings and is often unbound by single identities, negotiating not only several national, transnational, and cultural identities, but also strategically entering and leaving them according to the sociopolitical and economic circumstances” (López-Calvo 18). This relates to the publishing of *Black Flower* as a narrative for Koreans that left their homeland and their future generations. The novel comes to fruition due to an anecdote that a Mexican of Korean descent shared with the author, and then the author goes to Mexico to research more about the history. However, the duration of the novel’s translation into Spanish for the descendants of the Korean emigrants to Mexico implies otherwise. This idea, then, raises the question of whether the novel could be written to honor the Korean-Mexican descendants or for a Korean audience to commiserate for a group of Koreans that lost their “Korean-ness,” and does Young-ha Kim distance the Korean-Mexicans from the Korean nation.

Prior Analysis of *Black Flower*

In an earlier analysis of the novel *Black Flower*, Rachel Lim, argues in her article—“Ephemeral Nations: Between History and Diaspora in Kim Young-ha’s *Black Flower*”—that the novel “illustrates how the desire to find an autonomous, sovereign essence of the Korean people—whether it is located in the homeland or in the diaspora, in ‘culture’ or in blood—

ultimately reinscripts the form of the nation and reduces diasporic histories to an extension of the nation-state” (198). Lim analyzes the novel through a lens of nationhood, which seems to support my idea that the novel was not written with the intention of distribution to the Mexican descendants of these first Korean emigrants. Lim describes how this diaspora is not tied to or recognized in South Korea, specifically due to the loss of the Korean language. She writes:

Kim posits Koreans in Mexico as an extinguished node of Korea diaspora that can only be recuperated through the cosmopolitan literary imagination, eliding the existence of the contemporary community of Korean descendants in Mexico....Ironically, Kim finds it easier to commune with the long-deceased migrants than their currently living descendants, and he dedicates his novel to the past, not the present. An authentic performance of ‘Korean culture’ is a requisite for inclusion even in Kim’s alternate history (“Ephemeral Nations” 216).

This analysis of the novel shows how there is more of an acknowledgement of the lost diaspora, rather than acknowledging that there is a current diaspora that still has those roots. However, as Lim describes in her article, there is a strong disconnect because the language has been lost. The Republic of Korea acknowledges the Korean diaspora through its cultural identity, specifically through language. Hence, the purpose of the novel does not seem to acknowledge the Korean diaspora, but rather, it laments a group of people that lost their “true” Korean heritage.

Conceptualizing Contemporary Relations with *Black Flower*

At the beginning of the 20th century, there hasn’t been much interaction between the Korean peninsula and Mexico. During this period, Korea did not have a large presence in the global market since it was mostly closed off to the western world. Mexico, on the other hand, had been trying its best to get a place in the global economy. At the beginning of the 20th

century, Porfirio Diaz had favored large American and European investments into the country, which helped keep him in power for thirty-five years. During this time, large landowners, called hacendados, had a large influence in the government. Hacendados typically had Mayans as labors on the fields, but eventually, the Mayans supposedly caused too much trouble. This is where the Koreans come in. “The owners of the Yucatán’s henequen haciendas, which suffered from a severe labor shortage, paid a relatively dear price for the Korean immigrants, who could not speak Spanish and thus were no risk of flight, and who did not have a diplomat stationed [t]here who would interfere in the landowner’s affairs. Henequen, the raw material for shipping rope, had become a precious commodity as shipping tonnage increased with imperial competition for colonies and the rapid development of Western capitalism” (Y. Kim 87). Moreover, one of the hacendados in the novel—Carlos Menem—wanted to look for a new source of labor because a Mayan worker had killed his father. Therefore, he found it easier to kick them out. Young-ha Kim writes “Instead of searching for Giorgio’s murderer, Menem drove off almost all of the Mayan Indios. In their place, he hired the Koreans, who had just arrived in Mérida. The contract was for four years, and they came at a much cheaper price than the Indios. They also had no ill will toward him, so he wouldn’t have to worry about uprisings or revolts” (116). This is due to the Caste War prior to the arrival of the Korean immigrants. In the novel, Young-ha Kim includes the history of the Caste War to describe the purpose of the hacendados’ needs for external labor. As the narrator of the novel states:

As many as thirty-three additional uprisings broke out between 1858 and 1864, and at one point the main Mayan force captured the central Yucatán city of Mérida. The Yucatán Mayans, who bought weapons from the English pirate in Belize, attacked white-controlled areas using guerrilla tactics, on occasion winning major victories. Yet...they

failed to secure a decisive victory. Such were the limitations of the peasantry....At the end of the long and arduous war, the Mayan population had been drastically reduced, but the demand for henequen fibers exploded. The hacendados had no choice but to import labors from abroad. Four years later, the Koreans arrived (Y. Kim 89).

Although Kim does not state that this history is about the Caste War, we can infer that he is referring to the events of the Caste War because the dates align with what historians have argued as the timeline of these events. Had Kim excluded this important Mayan history, Kim would have been uncentering the Mayan history that is so important in Yucatán, with a migrant epic genre that erased indigenous histories.

The scholar Tao Leigh Goffe discusses, in another context, the relationship between African slaves and Asian indentured servants in the Caribbean in relation to the sugar cane plantations. In her article “Sugarwork: The Gastropoetics of Afro-Asia After the Plantation,” she writes, “The spectre of enslaved insurrection and emancipation threatened the sugar industry, and so indentured Asian labour became a critical strategy to bolster the crumbling agricultural economy of the British, Spanish, French, Dutch, and Danish West Indies during the nineteenth-century” (Goffe 35). Although Goffe analyzes a different region of Latin America with different groups, the essence of this quote can be related to the Korean indentured workers and the indigenous Mayans. In this case, the Mayans were the ones upset by the hacienda system to the point where they led an uprising against the Mexican government. Despite the Mayans efforts, however, hacendados found other people to fill the gaps of labor; this is the moment that Koreans were brought to Mexico. Similarly, in Quynh Nhu Le’s *Unsettled Solidarities: Asian and Indigenous Cross-Representations in the Américas*, she focuses on the indigenous and Asian relations where Asians and indigenous peoples are facing a larger settler power. Le writes,

“Within these histories, Asian and Indigenous peoples have been asymmetrically (that is, differently) impacted by settler and imperial actions...that seek to consolidate territories for the settler colonial state and the (white) liberal subject....The settler state has relied, unevenly, on Asian and Indigenous labor in the process of settler and imperial consolidation and violence” (3). Le’s point could be used to analyze the Mayan-Korean relations where Mayans and Koreans were utilized by an imperial and settler power: the Mexican White Liberal State. The novel illustrates these tensions in which Koreans signed a contract of indentured servitude and faced harsh treatment at the haciendas, while men like Menem wanted to find the cheapest labor possible because Mayan labor was troubling them.

In the novel, Young-ha Kim utilizes archival research, and he describes a historical witness who saw the treatment of Koreans and later, shared it to a newspaper. Then, this newspaper reached Korean exchange students in the U.S., who then shared it amongst a Korean press. This story is shared in the novel in a series of historical chapters that give context to the treatment of the Korean migrants and how the diplomatic relations between the remnants of the Joseon (Korean) Empire and Mexico functioned. The narrator of the novel states:

Ho Hui, a Chinese living in Mérida, met a group of Korean immigrants not far from the city’s downtown. He wrote an article about how shocked he was upon seeing them and sent it to the *Wenshing Daily*, a Chinese newspaper published in San Francisco:...They are all dressed in tattered clothing and wear straw sandals that are falling apart.... Two Korean exchange students living in the United States, Jo Yeongsun and Sin Jeonghwan, read the article and hurriedly sent a letter to the Young Men’s Christian Association in Seoul....and on July 29, 1905, the article was published, with the title ‘Our People Have Become Slaves, So How Shall We Rescue Them?’ In this roundabout way, the truth

about the bond slaves in the Yucatán was made known to the Korean Empire....Emperor Gojong issued an imperial mandate the very next day...But Mexico was too far away, and the two countries had no diplomatic relations. Yet Yi Haeong, the Korean foreign minister, sent a telegram to the Mexican government: ‘Although we have never established friendly relations with your honored nation, we request that you protect our citizens until we dispatch an official.’ The Mexican government sent this reply: ‘Stories of people being treated like slaves have been falsely reported. The Asian workers are in the Yucatán, but they are being treated very well, and an article on this was published in the *Beijing Times*, so please refer to this’ (121-22).

Through this excerpt, the narrative of the Korean migrants is quite interesting because Young-ha Kim utilizes pieces of history within a fictional work. Analyzing the excerpt, it is also interesting to see that the report of the Koreans in Mexico came from a Chinese person first. Then, the story reaches Koreans in the U.S. who later write to Seoul, and then the Korean Empire responds to the Mexican government. However, because the Korean Empire has no connection with Mexico, it is harder for diplomacy to be reached. Moreover, this excerpt shows a time where Mexico had a greater power than South Korea.

Comparing the early 20th century relations to now, there is a shift in who has more power. For example, in Junyoung Veronica Kim’s article, “Disrupting the ‘White Myth:’ Korean Immigration to Buenos Aires and National Imaginaries,” she discusses how the South Korean nation acknowledges its diaspora, but she notices how South Korea does not equally recognize the diaspora outside of the one in the US. Kim writes in relation to scholar Kyo Bum Lee’s work on Korean diaspora in Argentina:

Consequently, Lee underlines the South Korean government's uninterest in the Korean diaspora, as evidenced by the lack of studies and institutions of knowledge-production that examine Korean immigration in ovations elsewhere than the United States. As he points out, this is a direct outcome of the South Korean auto-formulation of itself as a modern upcoming global power. South Korea seems to attempt, in this way, to substitute or 'overcome' its own colonial history as a country that was colonized, dominated, poor, and 'backward,' in order to demarcate a rupture between its past and its present. However, the actual bodies of Korean immigrants appear as living proof of a Korean history with present fissures that remind us of the conflictual nature of its past ("Disrupting the 'White Myth'" 51).

Although Junyoung Verónica Kim's article focuses on the Korean diaspora in Argentina, this same sentiment relates to the Korean diaspora and its descendants in Mexico as well. This excerpt is relevant in discussing today's power dynamics between South Korea and Mexico. The reason why Koreans left for Mexico in the first place was to seek economic advantages and avoid the Japanese power that started to appear in 1905. The Koreans started to feel the presence of Japanese power and longed for economic opportunities, but then, they came to a place where they experienced abuse and maltreatment. However, South Korea has converted itself into one of the highest economies in the world. South Korea becomes an export power, and the novel *Black Flower* is a product of that cultural export. However, it's not an immediate cultural export for the people of Mexico. The roles are reversed; the Korean descendants are not considered "Korean" enough because they don't speak the language anymore. Additionally, in López-Calvo's article, he mentions "Paradoxically, Asian-Latin American literature claims both cultural difference and a place in the national projects of their respective countries, all the while attempting (in vain so

far) to find their place in world literature (as traditionally understood) and access to global markets” (21). Compared to Junyoung Verónica Kim’s argument about a lack of understanding of the Korean diaspora, the same thing can be seen with literature. Young-ha Kim’s novel is a source of export for the global market and a part of the nation’s cultural power, rather than for the descendants of the Korean diaspora. As Junyoung Verónica Kim writes, “The West is not essentially a cartographic entity but, more importantly, a culturalist imaginary that can be transplanted onto other social entities and localities. In other words, Asia, as well as Latin America, can take on the role of the West” (“Asia-Latin America as Method” 101). During the period when the first Korean migration arrived in Mexico, they arrived in a country that considered itself as part of the West, both geographically and culturally. However, the novel, *Black Flower*, was written in the 21st century, almost a century after the immigration occurred. The novel brings awareness to the history, but the Korean diaspora continues to be lost to the Korean peninsula. In relation to Junyoung Verónica Kim’s quote, *Black Flower* is written during a time where South Korea has a successfully growing economy and begins to export Korean culture, which scholars describe as the Korean Wave.

Narrative Analysis

The novel—*Black Flower*—is arranged into three parts with seventy-seven chapters and an epilogue. In these seventy-seven chapters, the focal character for each chapter changes occasionally. These characters come from different social classes, genders, and origins, and there is some historical context imbedded in through newspaper clippings, diplomats, or just contextual history. The novel is also written in an extradiegetic fashion, in which the narrator is omniscient. Additionally, the novel is written with a direct style dialogue because the narrator can access the internal perspective of the characters even if the narrator is in third person.

Moreover, the novel is set in a circular fashion. The first chapter of the novel starts with Ijeong—the main protagonist and an orphan drawn by the opportunity to make money in Mexico—getting pushed into the water and suddenly recalling things that happened in his life. Kim begins the novel with:

With his head thrust into the swamp filled with swaying weeds, many things swarmed before Ijeong's eyes. All were pieces of the scenery in Jemulpo that he had thought that he had long forgotten. Nothing had disappeared: the flute-playing eunuch, the fugitive priest, the spirit-possessed shaman with the turned-in teeth, the girl who smelled of roe deer blood, the poor members of the royal family, the starving discharged soldiers, even the revolutionary's barber...A booted foot pushed on the nape of his neck, shoving his head deep into the bottom of the swamp (3).

Instead of starting off the novel with the boarding of the migrants in Jemulpo, Kim initiates the narrative by using a prolepsis (flashforward) since the reader unknowingly learns about the end of the protagonist before the novel is even finished. At the end of the novel, Ijeong had joined Mayans in Guatemala to fight against the Guatemalan government, and he had settled in the jungle with several other Koreans to create New Korea. One day, Guatemalan troops decided to head into the jungles to shut down the revolutionaries. I believe that the author uses this form to build Ijeong's sense of nationhood. In the article "Ephemeral Nations: Between History and Diaspora in Kim Young-ha's *Black Flower*" by Rachel Lim, she discusses her main argument by explaining how the main protagonist of the novel—Ijeong—has characteristics of a bildungsroman. Lim argues:

Ijeong's story therefore plays with the familiar conventions of bildungsroman—it positions the individual's growth and development within a clearly defined social order,

taking the protagonist on a journey away from the familiarity of home to embark on the arduous process of psychological and social maturity in search of a recognizable place in one's own society...the protagonist of the *Bildungsheld* can end his journey to adulthood only when he finds his 'civic sixth sense...in the abstraction of the nation-state and citizenship'...But Ijeong, a *Bildungsheld* without a nation-state and therefore without capacity to become a citizen, is constantly denied both national belonging and individual maturation (204-05).

Lim's interpretation of Ijeong as a bildungsroman helps with understanding the organization of the novel. With the prolepsis at the beginning of the novel, the reader has a glimpse of Ijeong's trajectory to Mexico, and how his sense of nationhood is also altered. Ijeong had the intention of going to Mexico to make money and then return to Korea to buy land and have a rice paddy. However, this plan was never achieved. Instead of going back to Korea, he attempted to go to the United States but was dragged into Pancho Villa's troops in Northern Mexico. After the Mexican Revolution ended, Ijeong was tasked to help with in Guatemala during their civil war. During this period of his life, he and several other Koreans decided to settle in the jungle between Mexico and Guatemala. They decided to build their own nation called "New Korea" in the Tikal Mayan ruins, but Ijeong meets his end when Guatemalan troops are sent to the jungles to kill off the guerrilla revolutionaries. In the end, Ijeong dies without an established nationality. Before Ijeong dies, he begins to recall his journey from the beginning, where he experienced his first loss of nationality. Therefore, the use of the prolepsis emphasizes Ijeong's role as a bildungsroman in which Ijeong experiences a cyclical loss of nationhood as a Korean emigrant and as an original member of the nation of New Korea.

In addition to building Ijeong's sense of nationhood, the interactions between the Mayans and Ijeong and the other Koreans that settle in the jungles of Guatemala have an important role in understanding colonial settling. After the labor contracts of the Korean immigrants had ended, the migrants followed different paths, from continuing to work on the plantations, going back to Korea, or joining Pancho Villa, as in the case of Ijeong. Ijeong's inclusion in the Mexican Revolution is startling given the history of anti-Asian sentiment during this time. When "Villista" Ijeong crosses paths with Yoshida,—a Japanese chef that helped Ijeong on the boat to México—Yoshida tells Ijeong "Did you know that Villa killed some two hundred Chinese in Torreón for no reason at all?" (Y. Kim 240). Ijeong responded "Sometimes he just goes out of his head. There is no reason for him to dislike the Chinese. He is just hotheaded, and that's what is so attractive about him" (Y. Kim 240). Looking at this interaction, Ijeong can be seen as someone who was not considered Chinese based on his employment in the Villa revolutionary group, yet his idealization of Villa shows that the anti-Asian sentiment in Mexico often goes unnoticed. Ijeong's efforts in the Mexican Revolution would not go unnoticed because Ijeong was recruited by Mayan guerrilla groups who found out that he had fought alongside Pancho Villa. In this case, Koreans and Mayans unite to fight against the settler power, the Guatemalan government.

Another narrative device that Kim utilizes is completive ellipsis. This refers to the omission of an event that occurs and the reader does not find out what happens until later in the novel; this literary element helps speed up the plot. In *Black Flower*, one instance of ellipsis is the scene where Yi Yeonsu confronts Gwon Yongjun after Ijeong was taken away to another henequen plantation. At the end of part one of the novel, Yeonsu discovers that she is pregnant with Ijeong's child. However, if people found out about it, she would face strong social

repercussions. She contemplates, “When it becomes known that I am pregnant, Mother may end her own life out of shame. Before that happens, Father and my brother will give me a knife and urge me to commit suicide. ‘End it cleanly. Aside from this, there is no other way to wash away the dishonor’” (Kim 193). Therefore, Yeonsu visits Gwon Yongjun and begs him “‘If you help me, I will not forget your kindness’” (Kim 194), and then part 2 of the novel begins with “It was May again, three years that month since they had first set foot in Mexico” (197). Part two of the novel begins by establishing what has happened to the Koreans after their contracts have ended. The reader also begins to learn what happened to Yeonsu after she asked Yongjun for help. After a couple of years, Yeonsu has her child, and she gets labeled as Yongjun’s concubine. Moreover, another ellipsis occurs shortly after. Once Yongjun decides to go back to Korea, he asks Yeonsu to join him, but she hesitates because she doesn’t want to leave her son. However, she decides to leave her son with Maria, the Mayan woman Yongjun had. The last thing the reader learns is that Maria is left with Yeonsu’s son, and it isn’t until later that Yeonsu comes back for him once she had gotten away from a Chinese ‘pimp.’ Once Yeonsu goes looking for her son, she realizes that the boy is not able to speak to her and doesn’t recognize her. Kim writes, “A handsome boy who looked just like Ijeong was walking with a Mayan woman toward the storehouse....He spoke neither Spanish nor Korean, but Mayan....Then Yeonsu asked if she could take the child with her....‘[Maria] says that the child is her child.’” (262-63). Young-ha Kim intentionally creates this tale where a child of Korean blood “loses” his “Korean-ness” by assimilating to his caretaker’s culture. The author tends to use more ellipsis and complete analepsis when writing about Yeonsu. The significance of utilizing more ellipsis in Yeonsu’s storyline is interesting because of her role as the protagonist’s love interest, but it is also interesting how it can apply to her son as well. The effect of the ellipsis portrays the author’s sense of contempt towards

someone of Korean ancestry losing their “Korean-ness” and becoming “Mayan.” Moreover, Yeonsu’s relationship with Ijeong relies on her waiting for him to come back. The use of ellipsis demonstrates a tension for the reader to hope that things will work out for the high-class woman and the low-class man, but the prolepsis at the beginning of the novel indicates that this will not happen.

Since the novel is centered around a historical migration that arrived in Mexico to work, one of the predominant themes of the novel can be traced to labor. The Korean emigrants came from different class statuses, yet they were all seen as the same by the plantation owners: a Korean that will cultivate henequen. There are aristocrats, soldiers, poor laborers, a Catholic priest, a shaman, a thief, and an orphan that arrive to Mexico, but these social distinctions do not matter for long. They are sent straight to work as soon as they get sorted into a hacienda. Kim illustrates:

Their bodies covered with wounds and sweating profusely, the Koreans cut the henequen leaves like the Mayans, and time did not pass quickly....Sweat poured down and soaked their filthy clothes and seeped into their wounds, doubling their pain. There was no shade in the field. In that regard, it was far crueler than the sugar cane plantations of Hawaii or the orange orchards in California....The whips flew toward their sweat-drenched backs....Most of the workers were baptized by the whip that day. To the Koreans, who had no culture of whipping, this was a surprise before it was a disgrace (94-95).

Not only were the Korean migrants not familiar with the land, but they were also unfamiliar to the concept of being hit with a whip, especially those of high status. Every aspect of their journey to the Yucatán was foreign to them. They had been promised a place where they could work and then come back to their own homelands, but they were tricked by the Continental

Colonization Company. “[The Koreans] had been thoroughly deceived by John Meyers...The promise that they would be able to work freely, earn lots of money, and go back home wealthy was just candy coating. This was the reality that all the weak people of Mexico faced; the hacienda system had been making serfs of the natives for hundreds of years. The Koreans were stuck here, cut off from communication or traffic” (Kim 97). These immigrants had no way to advocate for themselves and faced labor abuse. The Koreans began to face the same abuse that the Mayans face, but it was still a different violence compared to the pain the Mayans had felt because of their exploitation and colonization of their land. Young-ha Kim inadvertently emphasizes the struggles of the Koreans to those of the indigenous, which creates a sense of “unsettling solidarity” between the struggles of the subjugated peoples in which both Koreans and Mayans were forced into working for the settler power. However, there is an imbalance between this fraught relationship as the Korean migrants have suffered for less time than the indigenous Mayans who had fought the settler power and lost again. Additionally, it is important to note that Young-ha Kim depicts a direct violence done towards the Korean migrants. However, looking at Hahkyung Kim’s article, she mentions how “‘Koreans were not whipped if they didn’t complete the minimum amount [of work],’ but the indigenous were corporally punished for the same occasion” (254). Comparing the historical evidence with the novel, it is clear that Young-ha Kim attempts to equate the Korean migrants as a victim to the “White settler” like the Mayans, but this was not the case according Hahkyung Kim. Moreover, the Confucian morals that the Koreans valued became broken. “Once they learned that women could earn money too, there was no reason for them to stay at home. Even the more traditional men had no choice. If the women didn’t work, there was no way they could earn enough money to escape the hacienda....When the women returned from the fields, they had to cook food, look after the

children. And mend the tattered clothes” (Kim 104-05). As a result of the new place, women had become able to work outside of the home, but they still had to be responsible for the housework.

Although the large majority of the Koreans were forced into working on the henequen plantations, there was one of them that did not face these conditions: Gwon Yongjun. Yongjun had been learning English, so he was put in charge of serving as the translator between the Koreans and the Mexican patrones. Because Yongjun was in this place of power, he later felt better than the rest of his people. When the Koreans on Menem’s farm were protesting the raising of the food prices, Yongjun was called to translate. Gwon Yongjun then tells the Mexican guards:

‘Do you know what the problem with Koreans is? They are lazy and unskilled, yet all they do is complain. Look....The surroundings here are much better than at the other haciendas, aren’t they? The walls are brick and the roads are clean and orderly. So what is the problem?’ The ignorant fools, trusting in their own strength and running riot. He was ashamed that he belongs to the same race as them. They were all dressed in filthy clothes and their heads swarmed with lice. There were even a few fellows who hadn’t cut off their topknots” (Kim 111-12).

Yongjun was privileged enough to get a job as a translator, and he begins to see himself as better than the other Koreans. He views them as lazy and quick to complain. In a way, Yongjun views them as unprogressive; they are stuck whining about the past and don’t attempt to adjust to their new lives. In relation to this, Yeonsu’s younger brother looks up to Yongjun’s position as a translator, and he begins to learn Spanish from him. However, his father responds ““There is no shame in pulling a plow to cultivate a field. But why must you cling to this interpreter official and learn the speech of the barbarians?”” (Kim 103). In this case, Yongjun’s ability to speak

Spanish is seen as something uncivilized. Yongjun's position as the interpreter is complex because he is in a higher position than the other Koreans, but he is not at the same level as the Mexican patrones. This discourse is similar to what another scholar had written about Malitzin, the interpreter during the Spanish conquest. In *Tres Veces Tres. En Clave Malintzin: Nueve aproximaciones a su figura*, Mixe linguist Yásnaya Aguilar Gil describes the translator's burden by analyzing Malitzin's story. Aguilar-Gil writes, "Interpretar consiste entonces en trasladar sistemas de sentidos completos de una lengua a otra, la tarea es más complicada porque lo que dice una de las personas en la interlocución impactará en el tipo de respuesta que dé la otra persona" ["Interpreting, then, involves transferring whole sense systems from one language to another, the task is more complicated because what one of the people in the conversation says will impact the type of response that the other person gives"] (37). Although Yongjun's role as the translator is significant to both the Mexican patrones and Koreans, Yongjun takes advantage of his role of translator to hurt his own community. Although the characterization of Yongjun is not a positive one, Yongjun can—in some ways—be seen as the future Korean generations that settled in Yucatan; they have Korean ancestry, but they are seen as foreigners in Mexico because of their appearance and in Korea because they don't speak Korean.

In the novel, after the contracts had been finished, the Koreans follow different paths. Most of them decide to settle in Yucatán. In Le's book, she utilizes the term "settler racial" to develop her argument, and she states, "the term 'settler racial' also emphasizes the connection between the two terms, since racialized communities can and do reproduce and benefit from settler colonialism" (11). This, in turn, continues to create instabilities between Asians and indigenous populations. Not only does the Korean population settle in areas that used to belong to Mayan populations, but there is also a sense of sexual subjugation. Gwon Yongjun had a

Mayan woman to “please him.” Although there were other Korean nationals had taken Mayan women for wives, there wasn’t this sense of sexual subjugation over Mayan women.

As Long Thanh Bui writes in “Glorientalization: Specters of Asia and Feminized Cyborg Workers in the US-Mexico Borderlands,” “Insofar as the ‘East,’ historically, for Euro-Americans is Asia, for Asian nations, ‘the East’ is literally the Americas” (140). When discussing the Korean and Mayan relations, these interactions can be seen as a “South-South” solidarity, but the production of the novel itself does not create a “South-South” solidarity. Because the novel *Black Flower* has been written at a point where South Korea has risen in ranking, there is a sense of superiority where the Korean diaspora does not seem to fit in with the Korean peninsula. But does this Korean diaspora continue to be hidden, or does it continue to get erased as we move further into the twenty-first century?

Chapter 2: South Korean YouTubers in Mexico?

After the Korean War, the South Korean government invested its time into export-based industrialization in order to develop its economy after the war devastations. Once South Korea's economy had stabilized, they looked towards developing countries to produce manufactured goods; in the 1980s, it was automobiles while the 1990s were characterized by electronics and chemical engineering goods ("Export-led Industrialization of South Korea"). In the following decade, South Korea's economy had risen to one of the strongest global economies. To show its massive growth, the country begins to export parts of the manufacturing industry to other places where they could utilize cheap labor. One of these countries was Mexico. In 1994, Mexico signed a free-trade agreement with the United States and Canada, most notably known as NAFTA. Although this agreement is supposed to be beneficial to all parties, Mexico was the most affected party from this agreement. As Long Than Bui writes in "Glorientalization: Specters of Asia and Feminized Cyborg Workers in the US-Mexico Borderlands," "The United States benefited most from this continental pact, and NAFTA contributed to the decimation of Mexico's agricultural business, despite the country's GDP doubling within twenty years, forcing it to rely more on foreign investors and exports-commodities markets" (136). Due to tax exemptions, many countries, such as Japan and South Korea, began to build manufacturing plants on the Mexican border and took advantage of Mexicans displaced by the agricultural crises. The people most affected by this were women, especially single mothers. The documentary *Maquilapolis* by Ricky Funari and Sergio de la Torre illustrates the impact of the maquila industry on the people living and working on the border, especially the women. This documentary was one of the first cultural products to have discussed the maquila industry, and it was filmed in collaboration with the female workers of the maquilas. Moreover, the documentary

draws attention to the presence of the South Korean and Japanese maquilas. In the documentary, the women perform choreographies that are inspired by the day-to-day movements of the assemblage process in the maquilas. For Long Thanh Bui, these movements are inspired by cyborg aesthetics. In his article, Bui argues that the performance of the Mexican female workers in the documentary can be interpreted as a performance of what I consider an “unsettled solidarity” with the female workers of maquilas in Asia in which both Mexican and (Southeast) Asian female workers in the maquilas are faced with a “settler power” that subjects them to deplorable working conditions and then leaves them stranded. Bui states, “What conjoins maquila workers in Mexico to Asian women overseas is their utility as interchangeable labor pools to be used and abused by capitalism at will....Carmen takes the global positionality of the maquila worker as interlaced with that of the Asian woman worker under Asian capitalism, two sides of the same coin of exploited virtualized labor, circulating as an ‘essential corporeality or accessible subjectivity’ that fixes the third-world woman in distance/difference to multinational desires” (144). In this case, South Korea has placed itself as the Western power who has utilized feminine Southeast Asian and Mexican labor to produce manufactured goods.

Shifting to the Twenty-first Century

If the relationship between South Korea and Mexico at the end of the twentieth century is characterized by the maquila economy, then my research emphasizes that there is cultural relation that has not been as explored in relation to what we could call the “attention economy.” Attention economy refers to “the range of economic activities based on people’s attention being treated as a scarce and highly desirable resource to be captured and maintained” (Dictionary.com). In an article by The New Yorker titled “How YouTube Created the Attention Economy,” YouTube is described as the platform that allowed for people to make money by

making videos, ranging from recipes to “how-to” videos to kids’ “unboxing” videos. Through YouTube’s power over the attention economy, South Korean YouTubers have built platforms surrounding their Korean experiences to a large Spanish-speaking audience in Latin America, especially in Mexico. I arrived at these conclusions and these sources of my research because of my parents. While my parents were scrolling on YouTube shorts, they suddenly came across videos of South Koreans that were making content in Mexico while speaking Spanish. Although my parents were exposed to these YouTubers through YouTube shorts, my parents eventually clicked on their profiles and started watching their full-length videos. When I would visit home throughout the school years in college, they would show me some of the videos that they found interesting because they knew that I had shown interest in the Korean culture. These videos were particularly interesting to my parents because the videos described culture shocks that the South Korean YouTubers felt. Moreover, the YouTubers shared their own perspectives, or even their family members’ perspectives on Mexican food. Through the YouTubers’ sense of culture shock in Mexico, they created clickbait videos where they describe their own experiences, while also utilizing their Korean families to create clickbait videos describing more of the culture shocks. The two content creators, or Youtubers, that I chose to research--and the ones that my parents described the most-- were Coreano Vlogs and Chingu Amiga, also known as Cristian Kim and Sujin Kim respectively. While watching their videos, I identified four important categories for thinking about the issue of possible solidarities. These themes demonstrate the complexities of planting a South-South solidarity in the context of the attention economy and of the economic inequalities that connects the two contexts: 1) language and translation, 2) themes of (un)equal exchanges, 3) labor, and 4) food.

In prior research, Rachel Lim has also researched Korean content creators in Mexico. In her article “Racial Transmittances: Hemispheric Viralities of Anti-Asian Racism and Resistance in Mexico,” Lim discusses re-heightened Anti-Asian rhetoric utilized in Mexico during the time of the pandemic as well as analyzing the discourse that certain Korean-Mexican creators have made. The content creators, or ‘influencers’ that she utilizes are those who speak fluent “Spanish, culturally Mexican, but phenotypically Asian, these influencers were either born in Mexico or immigrated from South Korea at a young age” (“Racial Transmittances” 449).

Moreover, Lim describes these immigrants as:

Form[ing] part of an aspirational and upwardly mobile class of recent Asian migrants who live thoroughly transnational lives. At the same time, by proudly claiming belonging in Mexico, they counter the dominant narrative, in which ‘Asians are characterized as having ‘too much’ culture...and are represented as being unwilling to give up their respective cultures in order to ‘assimilate’ into Mexican culture,’ as Siu and Ng’weno argue (“Racial Transmittances” 449-50).

These content creators, or influencers, have tied themselves to the Mexican culture and attempt to disprove a sense of un-assimilability. By making content of themselves exploring the Mexican republic, the content creators showcase different parts of Mexico and even interact with some of the Mexican economic practices like running elote stands to show that they can assimilate to the culture; this is something that I will describe in more detail later. Additionally, these content creators produce their videos for a “non-Asian, Spanish-speaking public,” (“Racial Transmittances” 450) unlike Asian American content creators in the U.S. Moreover, Lim describes the success of the Korean-Mexican content creators being attributed to the:

growing Mexican subculture that is fascinated with Korean popular music, television dramas, and other cultural products...their popularity is inextricable from the global influence of Asian popular culture and the densifying cultural connections between Asia and Latin America, which travel across South-South routes of relative peripherality instead of being mediated by hegemonic cultural powerhouses located in North America and Europe (“Racial Transmittances” 450).

Lim claims that the popularity of K-pop and other cultural products have facilitated the popularity of these Korean-Mexican influencers through a South-South transmission. However, the influencers, or Youtubers, that I have analyzed were originally Korean expats who decide to live in Mexico and produce content for Mexican and other Spanish-speaking people, but they have now gone through the process of getting Mexican citizenship. This distinction generates a series of interesting questions in relation to the possibility of Asian-Latin American interactions that can be understood as “South-South.” Moreover, despite these YouTubers producing content that establish direct contact between Asia and Latin America, up to what point do these YouTubers bring to the light or erase the history of the Korean-Mexicans that arrived (and/or descended) from the 1905 immigrants? Can this content be considered a South-South transmission/solidarity, considering the status of South Korea as an economic and cultural world power in the twenty-first century?

As it has been noted, the spread of the Korean culture through the K-pop music and other cultural mediums have influenced the relations between South Korea and Mexico. Erica Vogel, a scholar on the Korean Hallyu Wave in Mexico, discusses the influence of K-pop culture on Mexicans, specifically those in Mexico City. In the chapter, “K-pop in Mexico: Flash Mobs, Media Stunts, and the Momentum of Global Mutual Recognition,” Vogel begins with describing

flash mobs, which refers to groups of people, mostly girls, from different backgrounds gathering together to perform K-pop dances. Vogel conducted ethnographic fieldwork by interviewing some of the people that partook in these flash mobs. She writes:

Club members told me proudly that their flash mobs, which by most definitions should be spontaneous and organic, were cosponsored and sometimes even made to order for the Korean Embassy and the Korean Cultural Center. Rather than feeling manipulated by the global plans of the Korean Wave machine, when fans expressed their delight at being covered by the media for their roles in these coscripted events, it highlighted the fact that they saw themselves as an important part of the machine (Vogel 57).

This raises the question of whether these Korean influencers are also contributing to the cog in the Korean Cultural Wave in Mexico. Moreover, Vogel argues that:

it is the transnational circulation of the *stories* of the rising global popularity of K-pop in the media and internet formats such as YouTube that allows for this mutual recognition and acknowledgement on a global scale and fuels the excitement and events around K-pop in Mexico City.... and the fans and media alike thrive on the fact that they are individually recognized as being both the consumers and producers of the Korean Wave's global popularity and that they can contribute a part of a global story that is still being written (58).

Although Vogel's argument is centered on the K-pop scene, this can be applied to the content that I am analyzing. The influencers Chingu Amiga and Coreano Vlogs utilize YouTube to promote their experiences as Koreans living in Mexico, and they experience success as a result of the fascination of the Korean culture that has been promulgated through the K-pop scene.

Who Are Chingu Amiga and Coreano Vlogs?

Sujin Kim, most notably known as Chingu Amiga, began her content career by teaching Korean to Spanish speakers online. In the New York Times article “A Burnout in Korea, She’s a Superstar in Latin America,” Sujin’s “success has been propelled not just by her ingenuity and charisma, but also by a wave of South Korean popular culture that has swept the world, driven in part by a government effort to position the country as a cultural giant and to exert a soft power” (Cantú). As the quote implies, Sujin Kim’s rise to success has also been fueled by the Hallyu Wave—also known as the Korean Wave—in Latin America. Although she started off with Korean lessons on YouTube, she did not see a large success until later during the pandemic in 2020. Cantú writes, “Her videos were straightforward language lessons: ‘Easy Words in Korean—3 Minutes!’ But then she pivoted to TikTok and uploaded a short clip, this time explaining Korean culture. ‘That same day it had like 5,000 views and I was like, what?!’ she said, her pointy nails adorned with jeweled stars, bows, and moons. Very quickly, her TikTok following exploded.” It took a while for Kim to see her success, but now, she has held interviews with South Korean celebrities and K-Pop stars, Mexican celebrities, and even Hollywood celebrities.

Cristian (Jung Hyun) Kim, most notably known as Coreano Vlogs, is a Korean YouTuber that has permanently settled in Mexico and has married a Mexican national. Kim is a South Korean national who learned to speak Spanish because he had lived in Guatemala from the age of 5 to 13 (“10 Cosas Sobre Mí Que No Sabían” 2:17-2:21). In Rachel Lim’s *Racial Transmittances: Hemispheric Virality of Anti-Asian Racism and Resistance in Mexico*, she describes Kim’s content as follows: “[He] features videos where his Mexican friends try Korean snacks or restaurants for the first time or catalogues how he introduced his Mexican girlfriend

[now wife] to his Korean parents” (450). Since the time that Lim’s article was published, Kim’s content has grown. His channel features videos of him introducing aspects of the Korean culture, traveling, food, his family, and his business ventures.

Language and Translation:

As I had mentioned previously, one of the most notable things that differentiates these Korean content creators is that their content is done in Spanish, rather than Korean. Because Coreano Vlogs and Chingu Amiga can speak Spanish, they reach a much larger audience rather than speaking Korean for those in their native land or Koreans living outside of the peninsula who might not speak Spanish.

Coreano Vlogs or Cristian Kim’s very first video uploaded to YouTube is titled “Korean Speaks Spanish!!!,” and it was uploaded to his page on December 29th, 2015. This video evokes a sense of amateur-ness, in which Coreano Vlogs appears to be holding the camera and is sitting in a car in a parking lot. In terms of the content of the video, he presents himself to a new general audience as a Korean who learned to speak Spanish from living in Guatemala for eight years. He states that the reason he filmed this particular video was to practice his Spanish because his grammar and vocabulary needed work (“Korean Speaks Spanish!!!” 0:24-0:27). Moreover, he mentions the difficulty of speaking and practicing Spanish because it is not as popular and easy to speak in South Korea. Coreano Vlogs also noticed that a lot of the content about South Korea is not offered in Spanish, so he wanted to help share his knowledge of South Korean sites and cultures with a Spanish-speaking audience (“Korean Speaks Spanish!!!” 1:23-1:44). Another important point to note is that Coreano Vlogs also speaks fluent English, but he preferred to make his content in Spanish because it is easier for him to practice English in South Korea (“Korean Speaks Spanish!!!” 1:47-2:03). My argument with this first video is that this type of

content helps create a much more direct relationship between Asia-Latin America, not mediated by English as Junyoung Verónica Kim states, but through Spanish. In this case, Coreano Vlogs' primary motivation for creating content in Spanish stems from a lack of Korean cultural content in Spanish.

On the other hand, Chingu Amiga's initial content geared towards teaching Spanish-speakers Korean. One of her earlier language videos is titled "Malas Palabras en Coreano Que se Escuchan Normal en Español." In this video, she is speaking in Spanish to her audience, while also conversing with a Korean friend. She begins by explaining that her friend has been working in Mexico for three years, and during those three years, he had thought he was being insulted by Mexicans because some of the Spanish words and phrases sounded like insults in Korean ("Malas Palabras en Coreano Que se Escuchan Normal en Español" 0:34-0:45). As a result, Chingu Amiga decides to make a video for Spanish speakers to learn about some Spanish phrases that sound phonetically similar to Korean curse words and insults. One of the Spanish words that her friend mentioned is "choca." He tells Kim that the word "choca" from the verb "chocar", which means to bump or clash in Spanish, was one of the words that cost him a friendship with a Mexican because he thought his friend was telling him to "chin**te a la ver** (f*** off) in Korean ("Malas palabras en coreano que se escuchan normal en español" 3:26-4:02). This video marks a shift in Chingu Amiga's content in which she begins to describe more of the linguistic differences in a clickbait style. Rather than focusing on teaching Korean grammar, she decides to jump towards teaching Korean curse words in order to keep people interested. @michaelaparralles9242 writes, "Pues como dijo una vez alguien: a veces lo primero que aprendes de una lengua es insultar/ Yo: ps si, yo ni sé presentarme, pero ya sé insultar en coreano jsjsjsj/ Me subscribe adoro el contenido uwu (heart emoji)" ["Well like someone once

said: sometimes, the first thing you learn in a language is how to insult/ Me: well yes, I don't know how to introduce myself, but now I know how to insult in Korean hahahah/ I subscribed I love the content uwu (heart emoji)"] ("Malas Palabras en Coreano Que se Escuchan Normal en Español"). As this commenter mentions, they liked the fact that they learned insults, and she even decided to subscribe to the channel. This demonstrates the impact of clickbait content because learning Korean insults reinforces Spanish-speaking stereotypes about Asian languages. Similar to the aesthetics of Coreano Vlogs's first video, this video also shows that this was more of a part-time hobby, rather than an income source. This video is not made with a high-resolution camera, and the special effects feel clunky, compared to her later content. Comparing this video with Coreano Vlogs's video, Sujin Kim's video is used to compare linguistic differences between Spanish and Korean. Through this video, Kim presents herself as an insider by knowing both Korean and Spanish as she is explaining the differences both to her friend and to her YouTube audience.

Both Coreano Vlogs and Chingu Amiga attempt to build a solidarity between a Spanish-speaking audience, and they don't contemplate that there could be Mexicans of Korean ancestry who are now more likely to speak Spanish than Korean. Their videos do not seem targeted towards a Korean-Mexican audience that have familial ties to the Korean peninsula but do not have the ability to speak the Korean language or experience the Korean culture in South Korea. Moreover, they originally intended to create a point of linguistic communication between Spanish and Korean, but this changes over time. For example, looking at the comments section in the video "Korean Speaks Spanish!!!," there is one that left an impression. Written by @pizza8445 six years after the video was originally published, they point out that Cristian Kim's vlogs do not teach Spanish-speakers about Korean culture but only about Mexico and his culture

shocks. They write “-Voy a hablar sobre Corea/ Años más tarde: Puros videos sobre México xd” [“-I’m going to talk about Korea/ Years later: only videos about Mexico xd”] (“Korean Speaks Spanish!!!). Although Cristian Kim made an emphasis to produce Spanish content about South Korea, his newer content does not reflect that specific cultural exchange anymore. In the same way, Sujin Kim’s content shifts away from language learning to discussing cultural shocks and differences between South Korea and Latin America. Through their culture shock experience, Cristian and Sujin Kim realized that there was greater engagement with those videos rather than the linguistic communication videos.

(Un)equal Exchanges:

Additionally, both of these content creators have created content where they are exchanging goods, whether it be to other Mexicans, or even with their native country. While these videos were heart-warming and sympathetic, they also raise issues about whether these exchanges are done on an equal basis.

In a video titled “Dando Dispensas a Familias del Rancho” by Coreano Vlogs, he goes to Veracruz to give “pantry” items to families in need in a rancho (ranch town). At the beginning of the video, Kim states that the town that he is visiting was one of the first places he went to out of Mexico City and is part of the reason why he decided to settle in Mexico, rather than going back to South Korea (“Dando Dispensas a Familias del Rancho” 0:13-0:25). Cristian Kim visits the family that took care of him in Veracruz, and he has breakfast made by his “Abuelita.” While in this town, he decides that he wants to distribute “dispensas” (“care packages”) to families in need, so he buys food and household products to produce ten dispensas for ten households (“Dando Dispensas a Familias del Rancho” 0:26-0:30). Although this is a good cause for the residents, this act of giving necessities can also be attributed to anti-Asian rhetoric that was being

fueled by the COVID-19 pandemic. In Lim's "Racial Transmittances: Hemispheric Viralities of Anti-Asian Racism and Resistance in Mexico," she writes:

[I]n the early days of the global pandemic, many of these influencers used their relatively wide reach and public profile to display a variety of responses to the anti-Asian racism that has abounded in Mexico. The aforementioned Cristian Kim of Coreano Vlogs has posted videos showing him distributing packets of cash to street vendors in Mexico City to encourage them to stay home because of the pandemic—a performance of civic responsibility and mutual aid. In so doing, he implicitly counters the common impression that Asian migrants are secretive, closed-off, and exclusionary, indifferent to and uninterested in the struggles of broader, mainstream Mexican society (Lim 451).

Comparing the excerpt with the video, Coreano Vlogs is returning the favor to a town that he holds dear to his personal migration story, and the people that receive the care packages were grateful for receiving them. Although the act of giving care packages is very considerate, the video gives the impression that he has a great civic responsibility to the people of Mexico, especially those who inspired him to settle in Mexico. Moreover, looking at the comment section of this video, there were many people thanking him for his generosity. The top comment, written by @zenishaddai5426, states "Los youtubers extrangeros aman mas a nuestra gente mexicana que los otros youtubers mexicanos ojala empiecen hacer lo mismo" ["The foreign YouTubers love our Mexican people more than other Mexican YouTubers I hope they start doing the same"] ("Dando Despensas a Familias del Rancho"). As Lim mentions, Cristian Kim attempts to overperform a civic responsibility to the Mexican people, but there are viewers that believe that Kim is doing more for the Mexican people unlike other Mexican Youtubers. Another commenter

also shares similar sentiments. @MrMartin080 writes “Mis respetos para este chavo que esperanzas que otros influencers, youtubers o como quieran llamarles hagan este tipo de acciones. Y el. qué no es mexicano de nacimiento pero si de corazón hace este tipo de acciones. Lo repito mis respetos y admiración para ti Christian, ojalá otro youtubers como el” [“My respects for this guy, what hopes that other influencers, YouTubers, or whatever you want to call them do these types of actions. And him. Who is not Mexican by birth but by heart, do these types of actions. I repeat, my respects for you Christian, I wish for other YouTubers like him] (“Dando Despensas a Familias del Rancho”). In this case, a commenter calls Coreano Vlogs a Mexican because of his actions, showing that there is some form of acceptance from the Mexican audience, even if Kim feels as though he has to do grand acts of service to show that he isn’t “closed off” (or a “perpetual foreigner”) from the Mexican people.

On the other hand, Chingu Amiga also engages in an exchange of a different form. A few months ago, Chingu Amiga uploaded a two-part video series titled “Compré Todos Sus Puestos Para Promocionarlos en Corea Por un Comentario PT.1,” and “Puse Puesto de Artesanía Mexicana en Corea y Eso Pasó! PT2.” In these two videos, Kim tells her audience about her subscriber and follower goals on YouTube and Instagram, where she wishes to reach eleven million subscribers on YouTube and thirteen million followers on Instagram (“Compré Todos Sus Puestos Para Promocionarlos en Corea Por un Comentario PT.1” 0:51-0:58). Moreover, she told her followers on Instagram to leave a comment saying what they would like her to do, and the most liked one would be the thing she would do. The comment that won stated “Comprale todo el puesto a personas indígenas y ayúdales a promocionar lo que venden” [“Buy the whole stand from indigenous peoples and help promote what they sell”] with 10.6 million likes (“Compré Todos Sus Puestos Para Promocionarlos en Corea Por un Comentario PT.1” 0:59-

1:20). Although she had not met her goals yet, Chingu Amiga decided to go ahead and do what the comment suggested, and she goes to Oaxaca to buy the items. Since the comment did not clarify where Kim should promote the items, Kim states that because Mexican people are more aware of artisanal goods, it would be better to promote these goods in her homeland because they aren't aware of these cultural items (“Compré Todos Sus Puestos Para Promocionarlos en Corea Por un Comentario PT.1” 1:30-1:56). Moreover, she explicitly states that she was giving out the items for free, not selling them to Koreans (“Compré Todos Sus Puestos Para Promocionarlos en Corea Por un Comentario PT.1” 2:03-2:07). At the first vendors she visited, Kim buys loomed sets of tops with either a skirt or a wrap-around pant. While talking with the vendors, one of them states that the clothes aren't from China, and the other vendor comments that she, as in Kim, is Chinese, not the clothes (“Compré Todos Sus Puestos Para Promocionarlos en Corea Por un Comentario PT.1” 4:20-4:25). At the first listen, this comment seems to highlight the anti-Asian and Chinese sentiment in Mexico, but there is more to unpack. Junyoung Verónica Kim mentions that “[g]lobal modernity—the global dominance of capital—has unhinged a bounded static notion of the world order creating a cacophonous topography where spaces, peoples, economies, societies, and cultures overlap, crisscross, interchange, and come into conflict” (“Asia-Latin America as Method” 101). Therefore, this comment creates a cacophony on the issues of racialization in Mexico as well as the role of Chinese industrial production of Mexican artisanal crafts. First, there is the issue of Chingu Amiga being racialized as a person of Chinese origin due to a cultural-political imposition by the post-Revolutionary Mexican government to create a national identity through *mestizaje* (racial mixing). Because she has an East Asian phenotype, Chingu Amiga is assumed to be of Chinese descent. Moreover, the vendor who commented that the clothes were not from China reveals new issues on the authenticity of

Mexican artisanal goods. In an article from *The World* titled “Chiapas Artisans Face Major Threat From Knockoff Handicrafts, Mostly Made in China,” Adriana Alcázar González discusses this issue happening in Chiapas, but this same issue can be seen in Oaxaca as well. Alcázar González mentions the story of Bolom Moshan, who makes leather goods but has lost customers due to the cheaply produced items from China. Moshan tells Alcázar González ““The products are cheaper, but the end product is different, too. It’s fake leather and synthetic, and they say everything is leather — and the tourists buy it.”” Moreover, Moshan claims “One of his bags takes up to two days to make and sells for 600 pesos (\$32.80). But a Chinese import of similar size and style sells for 250 pesos” (Alcázar González). With the import of the Chinese-made Mexican artisanal goods, there are some vendors that want to be transparent on whether their goods have been made in Mexico or produced abroad. Therefore, the vendor’s comment to Chingu Amiga highlights a tension where Mexican goods are not valorized by foreign industrial powers, but then, this comment is directed to someone who looks phenotypically “Chinese.”

With a different vendor that Chingu Amiga visits, the vendor mentions her difficulty in selling her items, and she only has a couple items on display. Chingu Amiga then responds that because the vendor does not have a lot of items for sale, the vendor made it easier for her to buy and carry all the items with her since she had bought a store worth of items before running into this vendor (“Compré Todos Sus Puestos Para Promocionarlos en Corea Por un Comentario PT.1” 13:16-13:26). Although Kim is helping out the vendors by buying all their goods, she is unintentionally exhibiting her superior purchasing power. Moreover, Kim tells the vendor that she will help sell the items with her. When a couple of foreigners walk by without looking, Chingu Amiga says why do they come to Oaxaca if they are not buying any goods (“Compré Todos Sus Puestos Para Promocionarlos en Corea Por un Comentario PT.1” 16:18-16:45). Later

on, there is a large group of foreign tourists that walk by and don't bat an eye to the goods the vendor is selling, and the vendor tells Kim that they only come to "turistear"—referring to a verbalization of the word tourist ("Compré Todos Sus Puestos Para Promocionarlos en Corea Por un Comentario PT.1" 17:55-18:08). In a way, this interaction is also cacophonous, in which Kim is critiquing other foreigners who have the ability to buy artisanal goods, but then, she is buying entire 'stores' worth of items, something that the average Mexican would still not be able to do. After visiting three different vendors, Kim goes to a larger store that sells different types of artisanal items. While walking around the store with an employee, Kim spots a woven straw bag, and while she was editing the video in South Korea, she saw similar bags that were being sold for \$200 dollars ("Compré Todos Sus Puestos Para Promocionarlos en Corea Por un Comentario PT.1" 24:56-25:13). Similarly, while looking at the tortilla cloths, Kim states that making Mexican food in South Korea is considered trendy, and it shows that the person is well traveled ("Compré Todos Sus Puestos Para Promocionarlos en Corea Por un Comentario PT.1" 25:52-26:04). At the end of the video, Kim states that she bought \$26,000 Mexican pesos worth of items which equates to about \$1300 USD, considering that the exchange rate is about \$1 USD to \$20 MXN pesos ("Compré Todos Sus Puestos Para Promocionarlos en Corea Por un Comentario PT.1" 29:25). Although there is a good intention in buying artisanal goods, Kim unintentionally disbalances the exchange because she has the ability to purchase so many goods, whereas most people could not be able to buy that many things and take them back to their home country.

In part two of the artisanal item series, Chingu Amiga is in Seoul giving out the items. The specific part of Seoul where she chose to give the items away is Hongdae, which is known to be the "hip" area, and from my personal experience, there are mostly college-aged Koreans and foreigners that consistently frequent the area. While setting up for the stand, Kim makes posters

and labels for the items that she is giving away. On one of the posters, she writes “무료 멕시코 문화 체험 하나씩 가져가세요” (*mu-ryo mekshiko munhwa cheheom hanashik gajyogaseyo*) which literally translates to “free Mexico culture experience please take one” (“Puse Puesto de Artesanía Mexicana en Corea y Eso Pasó! PT2” 4:42-4:47). Rather than utilizing the word for traditional items in Korean, Chingu Amiga describes the items as an experience. By calling it a Mexican experience, she embellishes the act of giving away the artisanal goods which indicates her efforts to promote the vendors’ works adequately to people of her homeland. While giving the items, Kim would ask some of the Koreans what they knew about Mexico. One of the responses I found interesting was the mention of the Disney Pixar movie *Coco*. Moreover, while distributing some of the artisanal goods with her friends, Kim shows them a dog alebrije, and her friends fight for it because it’s from *Coco* (“Puse Puesto de Artesanía Mexicana en Corea y Eso Pasó! PT2” 27:49-28:02). I found this interesting because *Coco* was produced in the U.S., and it was exported through the U.S., rather than Mexico. While promoting the items, Kim notices that people are avoiding her, and she mentions that Koreans avoid others that they don’t know, which explains why people walk by without batting an eye (“Puse Puesto de Artesanía Mexicana en Corea y Eso Pasó! PT2” 21:39-22:11). Although she does share the items with other Koreans, there are plenty of other foreigners that also interact with her. Moreover, two of the people that came up to the stand were Koreans that lived in Guatemala. When she asks them how life is in Korea, they respond that life is different, but they agree with Kim that the people in South Korea are colder (“Puse Puesto de Artesanía Mexicana en Corea y Eso Pasó! PT2” 8:54-10:00). It was interesting to see that there were Central American Koreans that approached Kim and knew about her content. Additionally, there were two instances where Chingu Amiga experiences a cultural shock in her own homeland. Because Kim was standing outside in the summer heat, a

café owner offered to give her drinks, and she mentions that she thought that Koreans were cold and uncaring (“Puse Puesto de Artesanía Mexicana en Corea y Eso Pasó! PT2” 14:49-14:53).

The other culture shock Kim experiences is when two college-aged South Koreans tell Kim that they eat tortillas, to which Kim is shocked because she didn’t expect that tortillas could be found in South Korea, and that they ate more tortillas than her (“Puse Puesto de Artesanía Mexicana en Corea y Eso Pasó! PT2” 16:07-16:34). These instances of culture shock are interesting because Kim profits off her culture shock as a Korean in Mexico, but then she also experiences a different culture shock in her homeland.

Labor:

Although Sujin Kim is seen as a superstar in Mexico, Kim’s mother does not see that success. In “A Burnout in Korea, She’s a Superstar in Latin America,” Cantú writes, “To her mother in South Korea, SuJin Kim is a failure: She’s over 30, single and not working for a big Korean corporation...In her homeland, Ms. Kim, 32, struggled with the grind of a hypercompetitive society where success is defined narrowly and young women face diminishing labor prospects, grueling work schedules, sexism and restrictive beauty standards.” For Sujin Kim, her life in South Korea was unbearable, but she found consolation in the more “relaxed” Mexican culture. In a podcast video titled “Los coreanos en Mexico así me hicieron bullying...,” Chingu Amiga describes her experience while working in a Korean company in Mexico with another Mexican YouTuber by the name of Christian Burgos who does content in both Korean and Spanish in South Korea. Kim never mentions the name of the Korean company because she mentioned that she was sued by her boss for making a TikTok where she described the difficulty of working there. However, Kim did not face any legal action because she did not reveal her boss’s name nor where she worked (“Los coreanos en Mexico así me hicieron bullying...” 3:52-

4:35) In this video, Kim mentions that while working in this company, her other Korean co-workers would bully her for being close to the Mexican employees because they felt superior about their status as people from the Republic of Korea (“Los coreanos en Mexico así me hicieron bullying...” 4:56-5:40). Moreover, Kim mentions that she had to work the same brutal hours that she had when working in Korea and was criticized for leaving on time, despite the company’s location in Mexico (“Los coreanos en Mexico así me hicieron bullying...” 2:42-3:12).

After shifting away from corporate to a successful content creator career, she has also confronted hate online. In the New York Times article, the author highlights, “She does get criticized online by users who say she should go back to Korea, who ask whether she pays taxes in Mexico (she says she does) and who consider her another foreigner lured by life on the cheap and who contributes to the gentrification of parts of the country at the expense of Mexican residents” (Cantú). Kim faces criticism over her motivation for living in Mexico, in which she is seen as a settler in Mexico, just like any other foreigner who is lured by the cheap standard of living compared to the one of their own home countries.

On the other hand, Coreano Vlogs has a different experience. After Kim had married and settled permanently in Mexico, Kim decided to start his own business in the country. In “¡¡¡Ya Soy Empresario en México!!!,” Kim announces that he had started his own business in Mexico, and he makes sure to emphasize that he had gone through all the paperwork necessary to start a business in Mexico (“¡¡¡Ya Soy Empresario en México!!!” 0:31-0:41) because he feels the need to perform a civic duty and compensate the Mexican people. This is related to the time this video was released because it was during the COVID pandemic where there was a rise in Anti-Asian rhetoric that does not necessarily go away even after the peak of the pandemic. Moreover, he

recollects that he started off as a traveler, but then he fell in love with the country. In addition to this comment, Kim states that he has visited most of the states in Mexico as well as tried most of the foods that the average Mexican has not tried (“¡¡¡Ya Soy Empresario en México!!!” 1:53-2:04). While this is very impressive, it also presents as an overcompensation in which he can travel the country because the “average” Mexican does not have that ability to travel within their own country. As one commenter--@luisf1841--mentioned, “1:50 conoce más lugares de México que yo siendo mexicano jaja. Muchas felicidades Christian, este logro solo es uno de muchos que te faltan por cumplir” [“1:50 he knows more places in Mexico than me, who is Mexican ha ha. Congratulations, Christian, this accomplishment is one of many that you have to complete”] (“¡¡¡Ya Soy Empresario en México!!!”). Despite the commenter congratulating Kim for his successes, the commentary about being a Mexican who does not have the opportunity to see all the places that Kim has traveled to is worth noting. In a way, this commenter is one of many who probably enjoys watching Kim experience what he/she/they cannot. At another point in the video, Kim explains his business to one of his closest helpers (and driver) for his channel named Wicho, and Wicho tells Kim that he is doing a lot of good and that his business is doing great things by creating jobs during that time (4:05- 4:14). During the time Kim established his business, it was also the time of the COVID pandemic, so Wicho’s comment of the business being a good source of jobs for Mexicans is important.

Food:

A couple of months ago, Cristian Kim made a video titled “Comida de Mercado en Yucatán.” After he had established a restaurant in Mexico City, he decided to visit Yucatán to try the food and get a supplier for one of the dishes at his new restaurant in Mexico City called Don

Core which is a Mexican restaurant that will bring the most delicious dishes to the city (“Comida de Mercado en Yucatán” 1:48-2:05). While the concept of having multiple dishes at one central location is worth noting, Coreano Vlogs said that he was utilizing the most delicious dishes that he has tried. This implies that there would be greater preferences for some regional dishes, and it builds on the idea that taste is subjective. While in Yucatán, he visited a market in Merida where they sell Yucatán-style dishes such as lechon and mondongo. When he tries the mondongo with the soup, he starts speaking in a very Mexican lexicon, starting off with “no manches” which is an expression of disbelief (“Comida de Mercado en Yucatán 4:14-4:21). After finishing up at the first market, Cristian Kim states that he is stopping by OXXO, a Mexican gas-station chain, before heading over to the next market. While it did not seem unusual for Kim to be at the OXXO at first, it was clear that Kim was doing an ad for OXXO (“Comida de Mercado en Yucatán” 7:35-8:23). From all the videos I analyzed, this was the only one that had an ad placement, and this highlights Kim’s status as a YouTuber in Mexico, especially since it’s a promotion for Mexican gas-station chain. Finally, Kim mentions that there are a lot of things to see and try in Yucatán (“Comida de Mercado en Yucatán” 10:42-10:49), but there is no mention of the Korean-Mexican museum in Mérida, or Korean-Mexicans for that matter. There is still a significant population of Korean-Mexican descendants in the city Kim is visiting, but there is no sense of acknowledgement for that population.

Chingu Amiga created a series on her channel titled “Un Chingu de trabajo” which is a play on words using “chingu” (friend) instead of “chingo” which is a Mexican slang word for “sh*t.” The video I chose to analyze from this series is titled “Abrí Mi Puesto de Elotes | Un Chingu de Trabajo.” In the video, Sujin Kim was visiting the town of Tepetzotlán—a small town located outside of Mexico City--and she came across an elote stand (Mexican corn on the

cob). Then, she asks the manager of the stand if she can work at the stand, and the manager says yes. After a while of making and selling corn, Sujin Kim decides to start selling Korea's version of corn, after receiving approval from her "jefa" (manager). She states that this style of corn is called "마약 옥수수" (*mayak oksusu*)—which translates into "drug corn"—because the corn is so addicting to the point where that person cannot stop eating it ("Abrí Mi Puesto de Elotes" 9:27-9:35). To make this corn, Kim applies butter, sugar, and mayonnaise and then she takes it off the grill once the sugar melts and tops it off with Korean chili powder ("Abrí Mi Puesto de Elotes" 9:57-10:33). In this case, there is a sense of dietary similarities between South Korean and Mexican corn that help to create a cultural solidarity. After working three hours, Kim counts how much money the stand made which was \$1030 Mexican pesos, which is about \$51.50 USD, but then it would be about \$350 pesos per person ("Abrí Mi Puesto de Elotes 13:13- 13:43). The money that the elote workers make, on average, is meager to the amount of money that Chingu Amiga makes from just that video. Although there is some sincerity in trying out different types of labor, Kim has the ability to "experiment" while others, like the elote vendors, rely on doing that job for a long time.

Conclusions

Altogether, both Chingu Amiga and Coreano Vlogs create cacophonous solidarities as a result of the attention economy. Rather than creating a form of solidarity with the descendants of the Korean migration, they profit as visible South Koreans in Mexico. The South Korean-Mexicans get recognized by both the Mexican and South Korean governments, but there isn't visibility on the historical diaspora of Koreans. Although the South Korean government has helped fund the Korean Culture Center and has invited Coreano Vlogs to host events, there has

been a lack from the Korean government from recognizing that there could already be Mexicans of Korean descent. Moreover, Mexico has also not actively recognized that history either. Moreover, it is important to note that the popularity of Chingu Amiga and Coreano Vlogs comes during a time where there is a fascination with all things “Korea.” This then implies that there is not a “South-South” solidarity being formed; both YouTubers attempt to build that solidarity at the beginning of their content careers, but then, they switch their content style to be culturally exoticized as new (and hyper-visible) Koreans in Mexico. Altogether, the problem with the “clickbait” attention economy is that the content does not recognize that there has already been contact with Asia and Latin America, and that there are Latin Americans with Asian—specifically Korean—ancestry.

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