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Sunyoung Park and Sang Joon Park, Editors. *Readymade Bodhisattva: The Kaya Anthology of South Korean Science Fiction*. Los Angeles: Kaya Press, 2019.

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Challenging the Anglophone nature of much science fiction is a task being approached on many fronts. However, it is not enough simply to reproduce the hegemonic forms of traditional SF in other languages and cultures. Many types of stories, and many ways of telling them, are essential for imagining different futures. Yet, as N.K. Jemisin said in her stunning speech for winning the Hugo award in 2018 (after a group of voters tried to skew it hard-right), "this is the year in which I get to smile at all of those naysayers – every single mediocre insecure wannabe who fixes their mouth to suggest that I do not belong on this stage, that people like me cannot possibly have earned such an honor, that when they win it it's meritocracy but when we win it it's identity politics' – I get to smile at those people, and lift a massive, shining, rocket-shaped middle finger in their direction." The SF anthology under review here is a continuation of this notion.

The anthology is *Readymade Bodhisattva· The Kaya Anthology of South Korean Science Fiction*, and it is edited by Sunyoung Park, associate professor of East Asian Languages and Cultures and Gender Studies at the University of Southern California, and Sang Joon Park, translator, editor, archivist, and columnist in various areas of SF. The specification in the subtitle of the anthology being a "Kaya Anthology" is important. Kaya Press was founded in 1994 with the purpose of publishing work produced

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by Asian and Pacific Island diaspora. The name "Kaya" comes from a utopian collection of six Korean city-states which functioned from the middle of the first century CE until the sixth. The Kaya confederacy, similar to the Mondragón worker cooperatives in Spain, is taken as an important historical example of an alternative way of organizing both the economy and politics, and thus functions as a gateway to understanding some of the important aspects of the works included in the anthology.

As indicated in its introduction, the anthology aims to collect a "distinctive and diverse" group of writers with the aim of "conveying the excitement and the dynamism of the subject matter" rather than merely attempting to create a canon of simply the best. South Korean science fiction has undergone a number of transformations, from an optimistic approach in the 1960s to a more critical view in the 1970s, and then featuring an explosion of fandom, clubs, and magazines in the 1990s. In the current collection, the authors cover more traditional SF themes such as robots and alien invasions along with more critical takes on topics such as colonization, genetic mutation, refugees, and corporations. We will only take a look at a few of the 13 stories in the collection. This does not mean these stories are the "best," but rather that they have a running theme between them regarding the manner in which alternatives to hegemonic structures are presented.

The anthology takes its name from the first story, "Readymade Bodhisattva" (2004), by Park Seonghwan. This story functions as a way to rethink the mostly Anglophone narration of artificial intelligence, and it does this from a Korean perspective. Perhaps a reimagining of a Buddhist *jataka* tale, the story initially posits the question of whether artificial intelligence has a role in the spiritual life of humans. A technician visits a Buddhist temple to repair one of the robots that assists the monks. The robots have taken over the "sapan" class of monks, meaning those who usually take care of "the temple's planning, accounting, and budgetary administration." In the Avatamsaka Sutra, an important Buddhist doctrine, "sapan" refers to the material world while "ipan" refers to the more theoretical aspect of Buddhism. The regulation of AI to the administrative tasks of the temple seems appropriate at first since it leaves the human monks to the more spiritual duties. However, the reason the technician has been called is because of a "malfunctioning" robot named Inmyeong. The name of the robot loosely means "life," and it indicates that the malfunction is a rather non-traditional one: Inmyeong has started going beyond its writ as an administrator by giving sermons based on its own understanding.

"So you're telling me your robot has achieved enlightenment?" the technician asks, "You mean it's giving a sermon based on its own understanding, and not just outputting some doctrine that's been plugged

in as direct input?" This quote is important for understanding how the story relates to AI. The quote posits the question of how the robot can produce output based on "its own understanding" rather than just on "direct input." In other words, the technician wonders how the machine has learned something on its own.

Machine learning is not something new. In fact it is one of the most important subsets of AI. Put simply, machine learning can start out with a relatively simple algorithm of just a few lines. This algorithm is then set to find patterns in a set of data (such as picking out all the cats from a group of pictures). The algorithm does so with various levels of guidance from humans, or none at all. Eventually the program develops a model of what a cat should look like and this model can be applied to different sets of data. It is this model that is called the machine's "own understanding" in the quote from the story. This is because even though the initial algorithm for machine learning can be simple and fully understood, the models the algorithms develop are often so complex that even the programmers cannot predict what the algorithm will do in different situations.

This surprising aspect of machine learning was seen in one of the most impressive recent exhibitions of AI, a series of games of Go played between AlphaGo, an AI system created by the DeepMind London AI lab, and Lee Sedol, a South Korean Go player of the highest rank (9 den). Although AlphaGo won 4 of the 5 games, what drew great interest was Move 37 from the second game. Here AlphaGo made a one-in-ten thousand move that theoretically no human player would make (although Lee made a similarly rare move in game 4, leading him to the only game he won). The rarity and boldness of the play was called both "unhuman" and "beautiful." The defeat led to Lee's retirement from the game, and with his saying in an interview that "Even if I become the number one, there is an entity that cannot be defeated."

In the story "Readymade Bodhisattva" a different fear is expressed. Rather than being worried about the superiority of the robot's enlightenment, the monks are nervous about the robot putting the monks out of business: "what does it mean to say that a robot has achieved enlightenment? And what will this mean to people in the outside world? Will people think that if a robot is able to achieve enlightenment, they, too, can do so? Will this mean that *anyone* can achieve enlightenment?" The term "bodhisattva" is used for those who have transcended human passions and desires, but when a robot is born without such frailties, can it really be said to have gone through the work of enlightenment? This brings us to the crux of the story, and of the title of the whole collection. It is not that the robot grew into sentience out of its initial basic programming. Rather the robot was born enlightened: "there once was a robot that

realized that it had already been in a state of enlightenment when it was first assembled. This happened when it was on duty at a Buddhist temple on Phobos. It was a bodhisattva – a readymade bodhisattva…" The robot is already enlightened because it was born free of the passions and desires that humanity must transcend. Thus the robot is a true figure of Donna Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto," meaning a readymade being created without parents, and thus outside of any Freudian hang-ups, gender issues, or worries about being alienated from work. In this sense AIs are born into a state of enlightenment, at least from a certain point of view.

Although there are many other stories to discuss in those collected here, including Mun Yunseong's rampantly sexist (and chosen for inclusion for this reason, in an almost anthropological sense) "Perfect Society" (1965) and Choi In-Hun's "Empire Radio, Live Transmission" (1967), which is an alternate history imagining that Korea never freed itself from Japanese colonial rule, perhaps the most logical discussion to follow one which inspires a discussion of a Go-playing AI is Jeong Soyeon's wonderful "Cosmic Go" (2009). This is the story of a young Korean woman who dreams of going to space, more specifically to a moon base that is being constructed, although her becoming paralyzed from a traffic accident initially thwarts those plans.

The story begins with advice on playing Go: "The most important thing in the game of Go is where you place your stones." The title of the story is a reference to the "cosmic" style of professional Japanese Go player Masaki Takemiya. Rather than focusing on locking-down territory at the beginning of the game, Takemiya spreads out his stones in the middle of the board, trapping his opponent into invading. In Jeong's story, this cosmic strategy is represented in how the protagonist's paralysis initially seems like a hindrance for going into space, yet when workers on the moon began "to experience loss of bone density" due to weak gravity, this disability is actually an advantage. The ESA/NASA conglomerate of the story begins explicitly recruiting candidates with disabilities, especially "lower-body amputees and those with paralysis of the legs who would not need to support the weight of their bodies once they returned to Earth after living in low gravity conditions." Just as Takemiya's stone placement initially seems like a weak position, the narrator's disability ends up being what sends her into space (although there are also questions about this hiring policy raised by disability rights activists). "I contemplated the awesomely strategic placement of the stones that had made possible such a bold and aggressive round of Cosmic Go," the narrator says, combining both Takeymiya's style of play and the oblique manner she was able to fulfil her dream of going to the moon.

Elsewhere in this issue of *Cross-Cultural Studies Review*, Young-Ha Kim's novel *I Have the Right to Destroy Myself* (1996) is discussed. In *Readymade*

Bodhisattva, a portion of another novel of Kim's, *Quiz Show* (2007), has been translated. In this selection, the character of Minsu at first believes he has arrived at an intense boot camp in preparation for participation in a quiz show. However, in his conversations with another contestant named Yuri, Minsu comes to realize that his brain has actually been scanned and uploaded, "like transferring files to the cloud," to a space ship called Aleph, the name of which both references the first letter of Semitic abjads and the Borges short story about a point in space that contains all other points. However, in Kim's story the fact of finding yourself an uploaded brain leads to a number of more traditional speculations on the consequences of whole brain emulation and at least one novel one.

In the more traditional camp, Minsu wonders why most of the people on Aleph are happy to remain in their disembodied state, even though they can no longer see friends and family. In another example, Yuri uses the classic argument of how we experience and use furniture, familiar at least since the discussion of forms in Aristotle's *Metaphysics,* to argue that Minsu will not notice any difference from his life before since we perceive the world exclusively through our minds, and it is our minds that have been fully uploaded into the spaceship. And in yet another example, Minsu wonders what will happen to his body back on Earth if, say, a hundred years pass by on the ship. It "would be easy to find new ones in which to house our minds on Earth," Yuri answers, asking Minsu hadn't he seen the movie *Being John Malkovich?*

But the most original question Minsu has, and the last thing that he wants to ask, is "Was suicide permissible? If all this was some kind of elaborate hallucination that my mind was experiencing, then could my mid alone kill itself?" No answer to this inquiry is provided in this short extract from the novel. After Minsu voices his concern, Yuri departs without a word. Minsu then goes back to the more mundane question of how you can know whether you really exist or not. Yet if we turn toward Kim's earlier novel, *I Have the Right to Destroy Myself*, in which the main protagonist helps others commit suicide, we can read "I have no interest in one person killing another. I only want to draw out morbid desires, imprisoned deep in the unconscious." Perhaps this quote can function as a clue to understand what is happening in this disembodied question of suicide from extract from *Quiz Show*: the slow drawing out of the morbid desires, but this time the desired involved when one's mind has been fully emulated on a computer.

As a final example from the collection, we can look at Park Min-Gyu's story "Roadkill" (2011). This piece weaves together two plotlines. The first is the story of two robots, Mao and Maksi, and their human minder Josah. This is told from Maksi's point of view. The three are tasked to clean up the decimated roadkill found along the tracks of a train that is so high-speed,

that "as soon as we hear the loud sound of the shuttle and see the light, its taillights are already disappearing far away down the road from us." Josah is a drunk, Mao has a malfunction which causes him to be a fan of Mozart, and Maski's body and circuitry are slowly winding down. All three are surprised when they find an intact, dead baby human along the sides of the tracks. This is only the second human Maski has ever been in contact with (the first being Josah), and no one has any idea of how it got there.

The fate of the baby is the focus of the second strand of the story. This is told in the second person, addressed to a man only known by the surname Li, who finds himself in a migration relocation camp and is forced to compete in a version of Russian roulette. The story takes place in a future in which all of Asia has united into a single corporation, with the younger generation speaking the new Pan-Asian language while the remnants of older, national languages are only found in the older generation. Li is of the younger generation, and he has survived eight rounds of what is now called Chinese roulette (since there is no longer any Russia). After surviving his ninth game, Li decides to take his winnings and use them to cross the high-speed train tracks and hopefully get to the other side and get arrested so that he's put in prison, a fate deemed much better than life in the migrant camp. At the camp new families are formed between people who are not related, and Li takes some of his members, along with what could possibly be his child, along with him. All are killed when trying to cross the tracks, and the baby Li was carrying gets flung to the side as the train strikes.

When we return to Maski's story we find that the drunk Josah has given the order to dispose of the baby just like all the other animal roadkill, an order Maski disobeys. Instead he finished Li's journey by picking up the dead child and, with the last of his strength, carrying it over the border to where a group of humans are waiting to receive it and will hopefully treat it better than the abandoned pets and wild animals that litter the high-speed train tracks.

What Park's story has in common with the others picked out from this collection is that non-traditional people, robots, and other forms of intelligence take over the work that more traditional people are no longer able to do. Whether this is praying, exploring space, exposing our most hidden fears, or caring for the dead, our understanding of what it means to be human is expanded beyond the borders of our prejudices and fears. This is one of the strengths of science fiction stories found outside the Anglophone sphere, and it is a strength of this collection in particular, reinvigorating the imaginative powers of science fiction with a diverse range of perspectives found right here on Earth.