Mimicry and Subversion in Korean American Spy/
Detective Novels: Chang-rae Lee’s *Native Speaker*
and Leonard Chang’s *Over the Shoulder*

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David Leiwei Li, in his critical essay "The State and Subject of Asian American Criticism: Psychoanalysis, Transnational Discourse, and Democratic Ideals," points out the paradigm shifts occurring in both Asian American literature and criticism. According to him, Asian American articulation in the 1960s and the 1970s was preoccupied with

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national inclusion, criticizing racial discrimination while seeking the legitimacy of Asian American presence and more visible representation. However, with the changes in the nature of the nation-state brought about by the expansion of global capitalism and the ensuing phenomenon of porous national borders, Asian American literary criticism has begun to turn to the transnational and the psychoanalytic (605). Elaine Kim also explains this change that turns away from cultural nationalist intentions towards the international impulse embedded in contemporary experiences. She argues that future Asian American literature will go beyond "railroads, 'bachelor societies,' and internment" and deal with "subtleties, hybridities, paradoxes and layers" (13) in the Asian American diasporic experiences. If Asian Americans' demographic changes and their achievement of economic affluence and mobility are indeed related to taking on this transnational dimension of Asian American literature, then the poststructuralist suspicion of the subject has compelled Asian American literary production to investigate Asian Americans' psychological trauma induced by the process of acculturation and assimilation in the dominant culture. These theoretical and paradigmatic shifts taking place in the Asian American literary field are demonstrated in the "tendency towards formal complexity, psychological depth, and away from the juridical assumptions of representation" (Li 607).

Chang-rae Lee's Native Speaker and Leonard Chang’s Over the Shoulder demonstrate this turn to the transnational and the psychoanalytic by Asian American literature in terms of form and contents. Since the 1990s, a growing number of Korean American writers have begun to experiment with a new form of ethnic literature by introducing the popular genre of the detective and spy novels into the narrative convention of immigrant literature. In addition to these two novels, Suki Kim’s The Interpreter, and Susan Choi’s most recent