



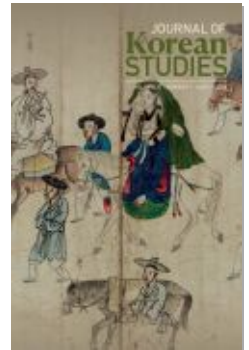
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Memory, Archives, History: The Intellectual Legacies of Carter J. Eckert

Hyung-Gu Lynn

This memorial article extends conventional tributes to Carter Eckert's contributions to Korean history and Korean Studies, using personal, analogical, and multidisciplinary perspectives to examine the empirical foundations and analytical tendencies of his scholarship. Engaging with Eckert's two touchstone books, this essay examines his drive for archival research, stemming from an awareness that he was not "a man who knew too much," but rather "a man who knew he did not know too much." This intellectual curiosity and humility produced significant empirical contributions and deep engagement with works in Korean and Japanese. For methodology and analysis, his implicit explanations and inductive approach meant the linkages between his data and arguments were occasionally opaque, leading to varied readings of his works. The richness of Eckert's empirical scholarship, however, is a vital lodestar magnifying the complexities of historical inquiry and memory, especially amid Fordist academic production and large language-model-generated data. Ultimately, this essay encourages an appreciation of Eckert's intellectual legacy through his awareness of the limits of his knowledge, rather than the usual metrics of scholarly accomplishment and institution-building.

Keywords: Carter J. Eckert, archival research, Korean Studies, historical methodology, epistemology

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INTRODUCTION

Memories are often unpredictable creatures. Some remain as vivid as if they had been magically preserved in some mnemonic amber, while others irretrievably drift away on life's currents into the vast, roiling seas of forgotten thoughts and discarded dreams, rumored to be located somewhere deep within the temporal lobe.¹ In writing this essay on the meanings of Carter Eckert's scholarship for Korean studies, history, and epistemology, revisiting my own memories—recent and distant, vague and clear—as a starting point feels both natural and inevitable.

Even decades later, I can recall with vivid, perhaps deceptive, sharpness the fading summer warmth in the Cambridge air that sunny, late-afternoon September day I first met Carter, my PhD advisor. After touring the Harvard-Yenching Library, I was guided from there by John Seel, Carter's first student to start the doctoral program, via what seemed like an impossibly mazelike and possibly secret alleyway to a separate building a block away, which at the time housed the Korea Institute. There, in the small second-floor room teeming with books and *chokpo*, I met Edward Wagner, the Institute's director and doyen of Chosŏn period history in North America, and his doctoral student at the time, Milan Hejtmanek.

However, it was only an hour or so after the Yenching Library closed that I met Carter. On sabbatical and engrossed in the distant places and difficult sources of his first book manuscript, a revised version of his 1986 doctoral dissertation titled "The Origins of Korean Capitalism: The Koch'ang Kims and the Kyŏngsŏng Spinning Company, 1876–1945," he made his way out of his office, which back then was ensconced within the depths of the library. Emerging from the dimly lit rooms lined with academic tomes and rare books, he seemed to me an embodiment of probity, intent on adhering to the highest standards of historical research and writing, his research and writing pushing him beyond the closing hours of the library. This impression would find confirmation in his publications. These were characterized by regular engagement with scholarship in Korean and Japanese; eclectic samplings from literature and other social sciences disciplines, encased in lustrous, nearly inimitable, prose; and most strikingly, the rare depth of his archival research.

Conveying a rich life, dense scholarship, and complex person within the confines of an essay is an implausible assignment, regardless of the clarity or the opacity of associated memories. Nonetheless, through critical engagement with Carter's major books, this essay aims to provide supplemental depth to the memorials often centered on important yet familiar lists of achievements. This is in part because the impact of Carter's publications on the fields of modern and contemporary Korean history, as well as his contributions via institution building (he succeeded Ed Wagner as the director of the Korea Institute) and his impact as an academic mentor, have already been documented to varying degrees via previously published memorials, Michael Kim's substantive review essay, and the Roundtable that accompanies this

essay, as well as other commemorative events.² Consequently, rather than retreat this firmer ground, or engage in comprehensive summaries of the contents of Carter's publications, my aim is to map a more granular landscape through the application of personal, analogical, and multidisciplinary tools to illuminate the implications of Carter's academic research, in particular his two *magna opera*, *Offspring of Empire: The Koch'ang Kims and the Colonial Origins of Korean Capitalism, 1876–1945* (hereafter *Offspring*); and *Park Chung Hee and Modern Korea: The Roots of Militarism, 1866–1945* (hereafter *Park Chung Hee*). This, I would like to imagine, is a *nisus* that Carter himself would have approved of as a meaningful way to engage with his intellectual legacies.

This essay is organized into two sections. The first examines Carter's commitment to archival research and his use of a range of works in Korean and Japanese. These two drives were animated not only by linguistic abilities, but also by a strong sense that he did not in fact know enough about a particular historical subject or question. This resulted in his use of documents that remain rarely deployed by other scholars in Anglophone contexts, and even in Korean and Japanese-language ones. Carter's archival awareness embodied the need for research, especially in the discipline of history, to strive for potential empirical contributions rather than merely relying on published secondary sources and familiar stories. The second section engages with his methods, analyses, and their strengths and ambiguities. Carter did not explicitly explain his methods for selecting and interpreting archives in his books. For his arguments or analyses, while dealing with issues that intersected with subfields such as development economics, political economy, and military sociology, Carter's interpretations were committedly inductive and centered on Korea, and to a lesser extent, the Japanese Empire, which in turn led to some misreadings within cross-disciplinary and cross-linguistic contexts.

ARCHIVAL AND NON-ENGLISH AWARENESS: THE MAN WHO KNEW HE DIDN'T KNOW TOO MUCH

Alfred Hitchcock made two films with the same title in his oeuvre, *The Man Who Knew Too Much*—the first a leaner, British version in 1934, and the second a 1956 Hollywood version in Technicolor, both featuring protagonists whose partial knowledge compels action. The title was actually drawn from G. K. Chesterton's stories, featuring a detective plunged into prolonged perturbation due to an insider's knowledge of systemic corruption.³ While none of these are considered major cinematic or literary works, the resonances of the works and their parallels to Carter's dedication to archival research in both *Offspring* and *Park Chung Hee* are apt. While I do not recall conversing with Carter about Hitchcock (even if we talked about Herman Melville and *Midnight in Paris*), I would venture that an awareness of the perils of partial knowledge, and the burdens of thorough understanding drove his extensive and extended dives into the archives. The subjective nature

of intellectual humility and curiosity (not to be conflated with personal humility) can pose challenges for consistent definitions and measures across various research settings. At the risk of reduction and porting an idea across too many spaces, we shall consider William James's 1899 definition of curiosity as "the *impulse toward better cognition*," the desire to know more based on a recognition of the limits of one's current understanding.⁴

Archives and Interviews

Carter's intellectual humility and curiosity found tangible expression in his rigorous engagement with multi-lingual primary sources, largely Japanese and Korean. This approach is crucial in a field where many works sidestep relevant materials, whether published or archival, in these languages. Language proficiency ought to be a cornerstone of humanities research, providing access to otherwise recondite sources and contexts. For *Offspring*, Carter spent months fruitlessly searching for the Kyōngsōng Spinning Company (hereafter Kyōngbang to refer to the spinning company as well as the entire conglomerate) archives. Carter's dissertation research time in Korea was nearing its end without yielding any materials to work with, and he was beginning to consider the possibility of an entirely different career path. During a visit to the Kyōngbang headquarters in Seoul, a coffee delivery boy overheard him inquiring about old corporate records, and informed Carter that a giant cache of old documents had been transported to the Yongin factory just days before. This information led Carter to a fateful meeting with this archival treasure trove.⁵

More impressively, Carter's diligence did not stop at this hard-earned, if serendipitous, discovery. He also made effective uses of letters written in notoriously difficult-to-decipher *kuzushiji* (cursive or handwritten *kanji*) from the National Diet Library's Constitutional Documents Room in Tokyo. These substantive letters were penned by Kyōngbang founder Kim Sōngsu, his brother Kim Yōnsu, and the *Tonga ilbo* newspaper's Song Chinu (Sōngsu's "confidant and alter ego in business and politics") to Sekiya Teizaburō—a politically well-connected Japanese official who was the Education Bureau Director in colonial Korea (1910–19) and later Vice Minister of the Imperial Household Ministry (1921–31).⁶ By poring over these dense correspondences, Carter revealed a far more complex, even if ultimately colonial, bundle of personal, class, and racial relations between Korean elites and Japanese officials, thereby challenging nationalistic narratives that depicted these groups in a state of constant, immutable antagonism.

Carter was likely the first academic to make use of the Sekiya Papers, donated first by Sekiya himself in 1981 and later by his family; in fact, only a small number of Japanese-language works have extensively used them since. At the time, access required family permission, which Carter obtained from Sekiya Teizaburō's second eldest son, Masahiko (I also obtained permission from Masahiko, and later, the third son, Tomohiko, and other family members; this requirement

for permission has since been lifted).⁷ This is not to say Carter exhausted all available archives on colonial Korea's economy. Rather, the fact that he tackled daunting sources in *kuzushiji*, despite being more comfortable reading Korean than Japanese, reflects his profound commitment to archival research. His dedication is best summarized in his own words in *Offspring*: "I hope that this book, if it does nothing else, will convey to younger scholars in the field some sense of the human complexity, archival richness, and intellectual challenge of a period whose historical significance has too long lain hidden under a blanket of comfortable clichés and distortions."⁸

A notable trait of *Park Chung Hee* is the number of interviews Carter conducted with Park's classmates from the Manchurian and Japanese military academies (hereafter MMA and JMA respectively) of the late 1930s and 1940s. I recall Carter recounting his travels to Korea, Northern China, and Las Vegas for these interviews. Carter was particularly excited by his access to so many former schoolmates and the sharp, salient stories they shared about Park and the academies. Noted in the roundtable discussion from this special issue, this assiduousness with sources is further affirmed by the impression his intensive visits left on archivists at the Presidential Archives in Sejong City.

Park Chung Hee uses archives and interviews at various scales. At a micro-level, he used these materials to challenge the story of Park receiving a gold watch from Manchukuo Emperor Puyi upon his 1942 graduation.⁹ To understand the ideologies saturating the pre-1945 Japanese military academies, he visited Tokyo's Yasukuni Kaikō Archives and the National Institute for Defense Studies (Bōei Kenkyūjo), and spent a residential week at the South Korean Military Academy at T'aenūng. Using the previously unused diary of the MMA cadet Hosokawa Minoru, Carter also explored how Japanese recruits struggled to digest the paradox of being trained to serve Manchukuo's emperor.

At a macro-level, he demonstrated Japan's influence on Park's 1961 coup and policies. He used letters from Park to Japanese Prime Minister Kishi Nobusuke—found in the Kishi Nobusuke Papers—and a 1979 Japanese biography, avoiding reliance on standard secondary works.¹⁰ While this research did not include the statesman's own memoirs, which came out in two different versions, Carter's thoroughness in researching a figure who plays a relatively small role in his book reflects his fidelity to empirical depth. Through such sources, Carter traced Park's statements, benchmarking his policies against the Meiji Restoration across sources ranging from press reports to private handwritten letters.

No other work on colonial Korea's political economy, the South Korean developmental state, or Park Chung Hee demonstrates a comparable use of archives and interviews. Indeed, many critics of Carter's work on Park provide no indication of having read the same archival sources themselves. This gap reflects significant research barriers. These include the challenge of deciphering Taishō and Shōwa-era *kuzushiji*—a script that exhibits more idiosyncratic variance than its Meiji or Tokugawa counterparts and presents distinct difficulties for Anglophone scholars.

Furthermore, the sheer effort required to access and conduct forty-four extended, intensive interviews cannot be understated.

Archival research on a range of ostensibly disparate subjects can generate knowledge innovation in several ways. First, it develops new angles on familiar figures, as seen in Carter's *magna opera* on Kim Söngsu and Park Chung Hee. Second, it can broaden perspectives to include neglected actors, a key example being Kim Tongch'un's book on the Korean War, which used alternative readings of primary sources to shift focus from armies and anti-communism to the everyday lives of non-combatants, massacre victims, and refugees.¹¹ Third, archives can uncover suppressed histories that force a re-evaluation of dominant narratives. Christa Paul's book, for instance, documented institutionalized sexual violence in Nazi Germany, including state-organized brothels for the Wehrmacht and Schutzstaffel, proving it was a system of institutionalized dehumanization, not merely aberrant behavior.¹² Embodying his rare curiosity and an awareness of the limits of what he knew, Carter's commitment to archival research therefore belongs to a larger body of work that assiduously uses archives to shift interpretations, illuminate unknown connections, and unveil discomfiting complications.

Korean and Japanese-Language Scholarship

Furthermore, Carter made intensive use of a range of books published in Korean and Japanese, particularly in *Park Chung Hee*. He took multiple dives into an underused 1994 autobiography by Yi Hallim, a classmate of Park's at both the MMA and the JMA, and later a prominent military officer (one of the few who opposed Park's May 16, 1961 coup). Carter was also able to interview him in 1990 (Yi died in 2012). Another remarkable example is the obscure, privately published memoir by Kishi Yonesaku, Park's former teacher from the Taegu Normal School. Park had attended the school from 1932 to 1937, and Kishi recalls his former pupil with the kind of clarity that might stem from repeated visits to the same synapses. A rare hard copy of this book is now housed in the Harvard-Yenching Library, courtesy of Carter.

Carter's use of diverse Korean and Japanese sources practiced a decentering of English in academia well before the rise in prominence of calls to decolonize research. Relying entirely on secondary works in English marginalizes directly relevant research publications in non-English languages. While many scholars still ignore or are unable to read non-English works, or cite them in a tokenistic fashion, Carter treated them as part of a single discursive space.¹³ Although challenging the nationalistic agendas in some Korean-language scholarship made him a target for criticism, his serious engagement with the work was, I would argue, a mark of respect. He grappled with the publications of the eminent business historian Cho Kijun and used a densely researched 1985 book by the economist Kim Söngsu (not to be confused with the founder of Kyöngbang), treating them as vital interlocutors.¹⁴ Critically reading works on indigenous (*minjok*) capitalism

is preferable to the common practice of superficial “show-and-tell” introductions to foreign-language scholarship. This deep reading also fortified his arguments in cases where he did not use primary sources. For example, while he did not use any of the voluminous Saitō Makoto (Governor of Korea 1919–27, 1929–31) Papers, he cited Kang Tongjin’s paradigmatic 1979 work that first analyzed them. Still, there were unavoidable elisions; Carter’s books do not use the massive Ōno Rokui-chirō (Vice Governor of Korea, 1936–42) Papers nor Miyata Setsuko’s 1985 book, which was the first to make extensive use of them.¹⁵

In many respects, Carter’s approach reflects the unavoidable tensions inherent in a “man who knew too much” and a “man who knew he didn’t know too much.” On the one hand, an awareness of the paucity of documentation about the inner workings of colonial businesses or Park Chung Hee’s formative years in the colonial period propelled Carter on his journey through multiple sites, languages, and archives with focus and energy, somewhat akin to the protagonists of the Hitchcock films. On the other hand, his awareness of the complexities of human experience prevented him from acting or publishing rashly, resulting in decades-long research for his books, and unfortunately, the second of the planned two-volume Park Chung Hee work not seeing completion. But the works he has left with us reinforce the notion that the in-depth research and thinking demanded by archival sources retain a crucial, possibly defiant, significance in an era of exponential growth and proliferation of artificial intelligence/large language models and the Fordist production of publications.

METHODOLOGICAL AND ANALYTICAL AMBIGUITIES: THE MAN WHO MIGHT HAVE EXPLAINED MORE

Carter’s meticulously researched books, while clear on the “what” of his scholarship, were intertwined with an occasionally ambiguous approach to the “how.” More specifically, he did not consistently spell out his method of data collection and interpretation either explicitly or in terms that intersect with qualitative methods; nor did his arguments always integrate with the rich empirical data or engage fully with directly relevant works in other fields. These ambiguities left room for a range of readings and misinterpretations when ported across language and disciplinary contexts.

Methodology

Carter’s acknowledgments for *Park Chung Hee* show he used snowball sampling for his interviews, citing figures like Yi Hallim and Suzuki Michihiko, who provided access to a wide range of subjects.¹⁶ However, he does not state this explicitly, nor does he detail his interview methodology. He indicates that he videotaped and transcribed the interviews, but does not specify the length of these meetings,

the structure (structured, semi-structured, unstructured, etc.), the format (one-to-one, focus groups, or group conversations), or the settings (whether in someone's home, a café, or a meeting room). I sympathize with the challenge of preserving such notes over a twenty-five-year-plus project. Furthermore, history as a discipline, with the exception of oral history, often relies on what social scientists would call "purposive" or "convenience" sampling—essentially talking to relevant and accessible people—rather than formal methods. Nevertheless, while historians need not adopt every social science concept, an idea like "theoretical saturation" from grounded theory, which in simplified terms indicates sufficient qualitative data to demonstrate a concept, could have been useful for Carter's study of enduring military values, even after Park Chung Hee's graduation from the MMA and the JMA.¹⁷

Analogous methodological transparency is also important for archival work, especially for large and heterogenous assemblages. Archives are not neutral repositories of pure truths; individual archivists and their institutions, as well as natural and human disasters, invariably shape what is stored.¹⁸ Carter would ideally have identified and explained further the inevitable biases of record-producers (e.g., colonial ideologies and priorities in the Government-General of Korea documents); the choices of archivists and record-keepers for what to preserve and catalogue; and the record-user or historian's own reading strategies, selections, and interpretations. In a field such as Korean studies where many monographs contain no meaningful archival sources, requesting more methodological discussion is tantamount to a cavil. However, a researcher's selection bias can often be more prominent when dealing with collections or sources of a large volume, diversity, and opaque structure, leading to possible misinterpretations of evidence and a drift into confirmation bias, regardless of discipline or subject.¹⁹ Just as many if not all ethnographers explain their rationale for their research design and site selection, historians can reinforce transparency and analytical cogency by explicitly stating their rationale for source selection and interpretation, and acknowledge the potential limitations of their case.²⁰

This holds especially true due to the proliferation of multiple rubrics and possibilities for poring through archives, whether "along the grain," which involves analyzing the internal workings, logics, categories, and affective states of the archive itself and its creators; "against the grain" for hidden transcripts of resistance; "contrapuntal"—that is, looking for independent but imbricated strands; and reading for the "dust" that calls for greater awareness of the layers of forgotten agendas and fragmented priorities of the past.²¹ Other concepts and metaphors dovetail with such approaches. More specifically, Foucault highlighted how power actively produces reality and its attendant truths, converging with the "against the grain" tactic of seeing the information itself as archaeological or anthropological constructs. One might also think of epistemological designs that foreground the imbrications between the past and the present, the interpretation and the interpreter, even if they all have divergences in accents and beats, such as Gadamer's "fusion of horizons," Ricoeur's hermeneutics theory, and Bakhtin's "dialogized heteroglossia."²²

This is not to treat touchstone names as if they were magical talismans that obviate the need for further critical thought if cited with sufficient frequency. After all, some researchers proclaim they can avoid state-centric or colonial biases by not bothering to read such sources at all, finding comfort instead in regurgitating existing accounts. This ought to remind us of a striking irony: criticisms that decry “archival fetishism” are often most vociferously expressed by those least familiar with the indispensable practice of source verification and triangulation.²³ Furthermore, it is important to emphasize that Carter’s enthusiasm for and abilities in archival research did not render him an uncritical acolyte of the archive, treating each source as a font of some singular truth. Based on practice if not explanation, his orientation was something close to, even if implicitly, Umberto Eco’s notion of the “limits of interpretation.” According to Eco, while a document may contain the potential for multiple readings à la Bakhtin, it possesses an *intentio operis*—an internal coherence and structural integrity that is only partially informed by the authorial intent (*intentio auctoris*) of the source.²⁴

Under this framework, the historian’s task requires forming and testing hypotheses against the archival record with disciplined curiosity, something Carter adhered to via triangulation or contextualization of available sources. Nonetheless, given that his two major books were exceptions to the widespread decline of sustained archival research in modern Korean history, ideally, Carter would have extended this challenge to common disciplinary practice by rendering his methodology more explicit, since researchers, regardless of their disciplinary affiliation, unavoidably approach archives with pre-existing knowledge, implicit assumptions, and guiding questions that shape their selection and interpretation of documents, as Carter himself explicitly acknowledged in *Park Chung Hee*.²⁵

Analysis

Turning to analysis, as discussed above, Carter’s inductive, archive-driven *magna opera* offer rare empirical richness. Nevertheless, their reluctance to engage in explicit cross-disciplinary theoretical framing and differentiation—particularly regarding causality and scales of analysis—partially compromised their wider impact and left both titles open to misinterpretation and misappropriation across disciplinary and linguistic boundaries. Moreover, in leaving many major theories in relevant social sciences fields unaddressed, both books understated their own contributions to broader academic debates.

Grounded theory and Max Weber’s concept of *Verstehen* are foundational qualitative and interpretative frameworks that resonate with Carter’s archival and inductive analysis. The iterative process of grounded theory, where themes emerge directly from the data through repeated cycles of collection and analysis, mirrors the inductive nature of archival exploration. This helps minimize the imposition of preconceived notions on the historical record, instead allowing theoretical insights to be “grounded” in the evidence itself.

Similarly, Weber's *Verstehen*, or interpretive understanding, compels the researcher to move past description and strive to grasp the subjective meanings that historical actors attach to their actions within their specific socio-historical contexts, while remaining faithful to the questions steering the research project.²⁶ For instance, when examining colonial Korea, applying *Verstehen* means attempting to reconstruct the plausibility structures that shaped the decisions of diverse individuals—be it a Japanese colonial official, a Korean landlord collaborating with the regime, a student engaged in resistance, or a mobilized laborer. This involves understanding their choices not as abstract moral failings or heroic triumphs within a teleological narrative, but as actions situated within the complex web of constraints and possibilities of their era. This makes possible the conceptual leap necessary to transform descriptive historical or area studies into incisive analysis.²⁷ An additional merit is that inductive, archival perspectives allow for relative protection against the pitfalls of confirmation bias that can often infuse deductive research frameworks: the desire for a coherent analysis, often in fealty to a favored theory, leads to motivated reasoning, where discordant data are downplayed or alternative interpretations ignored.²⁸

Thus, Carter demonstrated in *Offspring* that Kyōngbang's growth during the colonial era and its expansion into Manchuria often occurred in intricate interrelationships with the colonial state rather than in opposition to it. This was because the financial tools, new business economic opportunities, and labor regulations were all under the purview of the Government-General. Carter's work addressed two temporal arguments that left the colonial period a black box. First, he countered ahistorical social science analyses of the post-war "miracle on the Han" that credited only US aid or Park Chung Hee. This was congruent with some earlier criticisms of economics analyses of South Korean development and growth.²⁹ Second, he challenged the dominant internal development theory and sprouts theory, both of which saw the colonial era solely as an interregnum characterized by the extinction of the sprouts of indigenous, Korean capitalism and solely by exploitation. This historiographical perspective arose in both South Korea and Japan during the 1960s (or earlier according to some accounts) to counter colonial narratives that depicted the Chosŏn period as economically stagnant.³⁰ The motivations behind this school of thought were twofold. In South Korea, it was closely allied with nationalist and pro-democracy sentiments, while in Japan, it stemmed from a scholarly desire to redress the multifaceted wrongs of colonial rule, particularly its biased historical interpretations. Whether capitalism could be understood through strictly endogenous factors—and the logical robustness of that theory—became a regular and varied part of debates and perspectives in both countries after the 1990s, a discussion sparked in part by *Offspring*.³¹ Carter in lieu focused specifically on how the Koch'ang Kims transmogrified themselves from landlords into industrialists, whose activities and investments spread from Kunsan and Pusan to Pyongyang and Manchuria, thereby tracing the roots of 1960s South Korean development to the colonial period and in close contact with the colonial state,

contra earlier work that depicted Koreans as being entirely excluded from meaningful economic opportunities and experiences prior to 1945.³²

In *Park Chung Hee*, Carter shifted focus from general military-civilian relations to the human capital and psychological legacies of Japanese military education that shaped Park and his cohort. He hypothesized three waves of militarization in Korea—late Chosŏn, colonial, and post-1945—reserving the third wave for a planned second volume. He offered a thoroughly grounded explanation of militarization up to 1945, and in doing so, indirectly countered critics of *Offspring* who questioned how colonial legacies from the 1930s and 1940s could be the engine of development in the 1960s, especially in light of the material damage inflicted by the Korean War.

He contended that the 1960s economic transformations were designed and implemented by a cohort of elites whose core values and orientations were branded into them at the MMA and the JMA during the late-colonial era. Rather than applying generalized notions of human capital or organizational learning, Carter argued that Park carried within him specific colonial-era military values from the late-1930s into the 1960s, thus partially answering questions about the chronological leap required to substantiate the colonial legacies position. Though he was unable to complete the second volume, it would have needed to address the immediate colonial legacies in the late-1940s, the Korean War's economic impact, the post-1953 reconstruction, the shifts in mainstream economic thinking within South Korea as a result of the War, variations by site and locale within Korea, and other intervening variables. Spurred in part by discussions that *Offspring* helped trigger, Korean scholars have produced a burgeoning volume and variety of new publications—including regional, rural, and local histories—that complicate any argument about the militarization and economic development of post-1945 South Korea.³³

A tension in Carter's analysis, common in the field of history, is the gap between a strength in descriptive inference and chronological recalibration versus a relative opacity in causal inference and scales of analysis. Description is essential, as an authoritative qualitative method text acknowledges, even when establishing causes and effects remains the "ultimate goal."³⁴ Nonetheless qualitative analysis invariably requires the difficult leaps from description to chronological contiguity to causation.³⁵ This tension is evident in *Offspring*. The book was not explicit about its counterfactuals or hypotheticals, such as whether Korea would have industrialized without colonial rule, nor precise about the weight attributed to agency versus structure, more specifically, the Koch'ang Kims' agency relative to the colonial state. The book credits the entrepreneurs' skill, noting they "made brilliant use of the economic opportunities afforded their class."³⁶ Yet, it also describes Kyŏng-bang as being "placed . . . securely within the bosom of the state itself," intensifying these ties throughout the 1930s.³⁷ Another way to interpret this is that Carter's core argument, revealed through a close reading, mirrors the complexities and the ambiguities of the period. The book contends, regardless of what other readers and Carter himself might have argued at one point, that Koreans such as the Kims

exercised significant agency by navigating and utilizing available resources within the colonial economic framework. This nuanced perspective—avoiding simple narratives of either oppression or collaboration—is precisely what became a focal point for subsequent academic debate. It at the same time highlights the difficulty of as-signing simple cause-and-effect in history.

This ambiguity allowed the translator of the Korean version of *Offspring*, the economic historian Chu Ikchong, to position his own accompanying book as one armored by a more accurate emphasis on the agency and the autonomy of the Kim brothers, in contrast to Carter’s book, which allegedly accented the colonial state as the primary cause.³⁸ This (mis)interpretation resonated with some scholars in Korea who saw many Korean businesses from the period as mere tools of Japanese colonial policy, or as collaborators, while other researchers in Korea found fault with the emphasis on ties between Korean businesses and the colonial state, as this seemed to underplay the violence and the suffering endured under Japanese rule. The critics also pointed to the attenuation of the argument from the colonial period to the 1960s without buttressing information on Korea’s post-1945 economic history.³⁹

In addition, *Offspring*’s publication dovetailed with the rise of the developmental state as an analytical paradigm in cognate social science disciplines and sub-fields, further cementing misinterpretations that the book treated the role of the colonial state in fostering development as a paramount and necessary cause, rather than simply being an empirically verifiable key player within a more complex economic terrain. Some heterodox development economists, as well as specialists of international political economy, found much empirical utility in Carter’s close readings of colonial history, interpreting it as a work concordant with the developmental state literature.⁴⁰

Such readings were possible in part due to the nuanced, inductive, and often implicit or suggestive analysis in *Offspring*. Carter’s accent on “origins” as empirical fact, rather than “causes” as variables, reflects both strengths and limits of his analysis. Indeed, direct and indirect critical engagement with *Offspring*, along with other works in the revisionist view of colonial economic impacts, fueled research on economic policies and performances in 1950s and 1960s South Korea that addressed issues of pre- and post-1945 continuities and discontinuities; comparative research of colonial economies; and continuities between the colonial and post-1945 North(ern) Korean economy.⁴¹

For *Park Chung Hee*, the causal chains for the first two waves of militarization are clearer. But a more rigorous causal treatment of temporality, for example, would have involved addressing military education not just in terms of duration (how long a process unfolds), but also its tempo (the speed or intensity of the conditioning), its direction (whether a trend accelerates or decelerates), and its timing (how it interacts with individual life trajectories and wider concurrent events) in an explicit fashion. Carter was aware of these complex rhythms—even naming a section in *Park Chung Hee* “Temporality.”⁴² But this is a one-page discussion of

periodization of the three waves, which left unaddressed the pertinent question of why someone like Yi Hallim opposed the 1961 coup despite the fact that he was exposed to the same military education as Park. Further, Carter appeared to view the book as a biography—despite the fact that his unit of analysis was a more innovative focus on a cohort of military officers, rather than a single individual or an entire army.

The relatively ambiguous treatment of causality is further reflected in missed opportunities for differentiation from and mobilization of existing work. *Park Chung Hee* engages the work of the famed conservative journalist Cho Kapche, but stops at noting that social scientists had increasingly published on Park in Korean and English without flagging the incomparable empirical research that enlivens the book.⁴³ In addition, the hyper-professional and intensely political Korean officer corps who implemented the May 1961 coup presented a direct contradiction to Samuel Huntington's hypothesis that military professionalization has the impact of *reducing* political intervention. Instead, they hewed closer to Morris Janowitz's argument that professionalization risks divorcing the military from civil society, thereby *increasing* the likelihood of coups. Although Carter cited these foundational works in a substantive footnote, he did not clearly articulate his own contribution to this debate.⁴⁴ Similarly, while works on coups by political scientists posited a dichotomy between external "pull" elements, such as domestic political instability or interventionist trends, and internal "push" factors, such as motivations and views of the military, empirical limitations steered many scholars to focus primarily toward the "pull." In contrast, Carter was able to explore the "push" dynamics—the specific ideology driving the officer corps—due to the strength of his empirical research.⁴⁵ By not explicitly framing his findings against this debate, Eckert missed a chance to show why his cohort-based, ideology-focused "push" factor was a significant intervention in a field that had long favored Huntington's "pull"-centric or professionalism-as-apolitical approach. To add just one more example of an overlooked theoretical intersection, Eric Nordlinger argued that militaries intervene in politics largely to protect their own interests, among which was the desire to impose social order. This emphasis on worldviews converges with Carter's argument about the "disciplinary inclination" instilled in Park and others by Japanese training.⁴⁶

Offspring was more direct in questioning several previous works, but it also sidestepped multiple opportunities to critically engage them to more firmly position its analysis.⁴⁷ For example, published in the same year as *Offspring*, Kawai and Yun argued in their co-authored book that although industrialization occurred during the 1930s, the colonial legacy was in fact a *deterrent* to post-1945 economic development in South Korea as the colonial economy had been divided into industrial, light industry, and primary good zones within a larger, integrated block economy that covered the entirety of the Japanese Empire. The end of the colonial period led to national division, which truncated the connections within the peninsula, as well as other parts of the Empire, an argument that stands in contrast to *Offspring*.⁴⁸

These arguments in fact overlap to a significant extent with the 1946 reports written for the Japanese government by Suzuki Takeo, who had been a professor of economics at Keijō Imperial University from 1928 to 1945 (he would move on to positions at Musashino University, followed by the University of Tokyo, after 1945). Suzuki's evaluation, while acknowledging the displacement of farmers and other failures of colonial rule, ultimately saw a steady, incremental march toward industrialization and integration into the Asian economic bloc, which he saw as a negative legacy for the South Korean economy in the post-liberation years.⁴⁹ By omitting opportunities to spotlight overlaps and divergences with such older and more contemporary works, Carter missed key chances to anchor his findings in established debates, and further galvanize and render explicit his causal analysis.

Cross-disciplinary criticisms of *Offspring* at times stemmed from the implicitness of the specific scale of analysis. Some critics argued that its focus on a single colony undermined its conclusions about the colonial state's causal impact on development, let alone states in general.⁵⁰ Yet, the book's project was more particular: examining how named individuals—from entrepreneurs and officials to settlers and workers—navigated incentive systems and personal networks within Korea's place in the Japanese Empire, rather than framing a universal theory of state-led development.

Carter's research was intentionally multi-scalar, incorporating individual lives, public and private organizations, and broader flows of imperial history, all informed by an eclectic array of thinkers including Ortega y Gasset, Hemingway, Shakespeare, Hegel, and Gramsci, among many others.⁵¹ Notwithstanding, this expansive approach was ultimately mobilized for the specific study of Korea. Despite post-nationalist inclinations and judicious use of Japanese and Korean archives, his commitment remained with problematizing a particular national history, forgoing sustained comparisons with other parts of the Japanese Empire such as Taiwan or Okinawa. While the debates around developmentalism and the developmental state swirled, *Offspring's* role within them faded as works based on more precarious empirical foundations but with more explicit analysis increased in number and range.

This central tension in Carter's work illustrates a foundational challenge in area studies: the spectre of methodological nationalism. This unconscious default to the nation-state as the primary unit of analysis, which Michael Billig termed "banal nationalism," haunts fields like Korean studies, area studies, or any other spatially bounded field of research.⁵² For disciplines concerned with multiple states and significant diasporas, such a nation-centric frame can obscure the very transnational movements and regional dynamics that defy modern borders.⁵³ Ultimately, Carter's insistence on connecting the specifics of Korean history to wider experiences, grounded in multilingual and multi-sited archival work, necessitates a crucial but difficult balance. To counter the persistent pull of methodological nationalism, contextual accuracy within a national frame must be paired with a versatile command of alternative scales of analysis, such as global, regional, or microhistorical.⁵⁴

The cross-linguistic reception of Carter's scholarship demonstrates how scholarly nuance—especially when causal explanations are implicit and the scales of analysis are ambiguous—can be contested and misappropriated. Even as Carter's research emancipated historical figures from simple hagiography or condemnation, it was also used in Korea to frame them within a different hegemonic narrative: one of pro-Japanese collaboration. Criticisms of sources and logic in Korea during the 1990s and 2000s merged with identity, reflected in reviews that pointedly identified Carter as an "American" historian of Korea. Such conflation of nationality with persuasiveness raises intriguing implications about how these critics would then view "Korean" scholars of, say, modern Turkish, Chinese, German, or American histories, regardless of whether or not they can read sources in the relevant languages.

If the Korean reception wrestled with the spectre of collaboration and ownership of the past, the Japanese reception involved a more overt political distortion, a process facilitated by the book's translation. Published in Japanese four years before the Korean version and handled by a professional translator rather than an academic specialist who might have been more attuned to the nuances of the scholarly debate, the absence of an explicit overarching causal argument about colonialism, combined with a focus on pockets of economic opportunity, provided rich fodder for right-wing historical revisionists in Japan.⁵⁵ Some Japanese scholars had found the post-1980s academic-revisionist research on colonial Korea published in Korean and Japanese useful in their efforts to paint Japanese colonialism as a largely edifying experience for the colonized, with positive results hidden from view only by the unstinting efforts of ingrate Korean nationalists propagating the myth of an oppressive and exploitative colonial system.⁵⁶

Carter's findings converged with this trend. Japanese conservative revisionists selectively used Carter's book as evidence for a benevolent, modernizing empire, ignoring the deeply critical and post-nationalist spirit of the project. This divergence reveals the perils of cross-cultural scholarly communication. Carter's attempt to transcend nationalistic narratives—a goal seen as progressive in many English-language contexts—was interpreted through vastly different lenses in other discursive and language environments: as a chronicle of collaboration in some quarters and as a qualified defense of the Japanese Empire in others. This underscores how vital both precision in the scale of analysis and explicitness in causal arguments are when navigating contentious historical debates across linguistic, political, and disciplinary borders.

Fortunately, for *Park Chung Hee*, one of Carter's many former advisees, Matsutani Motokazu, translated the mammoth text from English to Japanese, vetting sources and capturing the subtlety and lyricism of Carter's writing style with a rare specialist's precision. This translation was published just a few weeks prior to Carter's retirement conference at Harvard in mid-September 2024, providing a robust platform that will allow scholars in Japan and Korea to engage with Carter's arguments with a reduced likelihood for misreadings.⁵⁷

CONCLUSION

All humans, historians or not, rely on memories, with their attendant mix of clarity and opacity, selectivity and unpredictability. Rather than a design flaw, the unpredictability and unevenness of memory help filter the overwhelming amounts of data and curveballs life throws at us all, allowing selected moments to form partial yet meaningful narratives of our own lives. My last conversation with Carter, at his home about ten days before his passing, is one such curated moment. While much of our conversation was familiar, some of the subjects we covered were new. Despite the visible physical toll, his mind was alert and his memories as clear as ever: this lucidity convinced me I would be able to see him again in the near future. I was wrong.

Carter's final, effortful act of engagement triggered questions about where, how, and why the time flew by ever since that distant Cambridge autumn of decades ago, and reminded me of the essence of academic progress itself—the importance of treating ideas as living forces, built on passionate and empathetic engagement, rather than as inert objects of study, critique, or worship. While achievements, advisee numbers, fundraising successes, and extensive archival visits are all significant elements of Carter's career, his most meaningful legacy for modern Korean history, Korean studies, and academic epistemology to my mind lies in his embodiment of an acute awareness of the self as *never quite knowing enough*. This scholarly humility—born not of ignorance but of rigorous engagement with the limits of evidence—stands in stark contrast to the unwarranted certainty that often pervades academic and popular discourse.

In attempting to capture such a legacy, one confronts the inherent limitations of the biographical act. Like the intricate, subjective, and temporally fluid nature of personal recollections, the study of any person, cohort, region, country, or empire is inherently selective, incomplete, and subject to constant reinterpretation. Academics, in our drive to order and genealogize, often reduce a lifework to reductive summary, a tendency to which I am not immune. Others will undoubtedly hold different interpretations of Carter's scholarship and different memories of him as a person, perhaps some even having seen his performance on the silver screen as the male lead across from one of the famous actresses in Korea's cinematic history, Yun Chōnghŭi (1944–2023), in the 1971 melodrama *Tong kwa Sŏ* (East and West), helmed by the prolific director Kim Kidŏk (1938–2017).⁵⁸

Yet, to paraphrase Franz Kafka's sentiment on the human soul, while one cannot fully comprehend it, there are doubtlessly margins where one makes contact.⁵⁹ Thus, I can state with certainty that my memories of Carter J. Eckert, however curated, partial, or limited, are fond. This fondness exists beyond our institutionally mandated relations as advisor and advisee, apart from the lasting impact of his research and the parade of posthumous accolades, and regardless of whether or not I always agreed with his interpretations of history and applications of methodology. I will miss most his infectious laugh, enthusiasm for so many things in life,

and above all, what his scholarship embodied: the indivisibility of relentless curiosity and keen epistemological self-awareness. Carter's absence will be deeply felt, but his spirit of inquiry and humility remains with and within us.

NOTES

I am grateful to Sun Joo Kim, Sun Ho Kim, the reviewers for *The Journal of Korean Studies*, and Paul Y. Chang for their comments and suggestions. I also thank all the participants of the Roundtable and Jaeyoun Won for sharing their recollections of Carter with me.

1. This literary liberty should not leave readers with the impression that aging and memory is not a firmly established, densely debated, and richly varied field. See, for example, Hwang, Whitman, and Umanath, "Associative Memory in Older Adults," 871–83; Castel, "Memory Selectivity in Older Age," 1–6; Amer, Wynn, and Hasher, "Cluttered Memory Representations," 255–67; Loftus, "Eavesdropping on Memory," 1–18; and Wardell and Palombo, "Stability and Malleability," 393–406.

2. Kwak et al., "In Memoriam"; Kim M., "Yöksajök chisoksöng üi sön'guja," 200–18; and Yang and Lynn, this issue.

3. Wood, *Hitchcock's Films Revisited*, 358–70; Chesterton, *Man Who Knew Too Much*. See also Glover, "Writers Who Knew Too Much," 36–49.

4. For details, see, for example, Kidd and Hayden, "Psychology and Neuroscience of Curiosity," 449–60; and Porter et al., "Predictors and Consequences of Intellectual Humility," 524–36. The quote is from James, *Talks to Teachers on Psychology*, 45, in a passage focused largely on curiosity in children.

5. I am grateful to Sun Joo Kim for providing me with a more accurate and precise version of the events than my own, less reliable memory of Carter's story.

6. Eckert, *Offspring*, 34.

7. *Ibid.*, xiv.

8. *Ibid.*, xiii.

9. Eckert, *Park Chung Hee*, 351 n120.

10. *Ibid.*, 126, 310, 376 n127. Many scholars, regardless of discipline, would likely have stopped at citing Johnson, *Japanese Miracle*.

11. Kim T., *Chönjaeng kwa sahoe*.

12. Paul, *Zwangsprostitution*.

13. Sabbar and Xie, "Language in the Information-Seeking Context," 103–26; and Curry et al., "Multilingualism of Global Academic Research," 318–35.

14. Cho K., *Han'guk kiöpgasa*; Cho K., *Han'guk chabonjuüi söngnip saron*; and Kim S., *Ilcheha Han'guk kyöngje saron*.

15. Kang, *Nihon no Chösen shihai seisakushi*; and Miyata, *Chösen minshü to "köminka" seisaku*.

16. Eckert, *Park Chung Hee*, 460–61.

17. See, for example, Low, "Pragmatic Definition of the Concept of Theoretical Saturation," 131–39; and DiStefano and Yang, "Sample Size and Saturation," 145–59.

18. Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 12, 19; and Caswell, *Urgent Archives*, 26–27.

19. Lee, "Library of Babel," 499–526.

20. Small, “How Many Cases Do I Need?”
21. See, for example, Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*; Guha, *Elementary Aspects*; James Scott, *Against the Grain*; Said, *Culture and Imperialism*; and Steedman, *Dust*.
22. Taylor, “Understanding as Metaphoric,” 110–12; Zeitlyn, “Anthropology in and of the Archives”; Emerson, “Isaiah Berlin and Mikhail Bakhtin,” 139–64; and Bakhtin, *Dialectic Imagination*, 306–07.
23. This irony has been flagged with regularity. See, for example, Evans, *In Defence of History*, 89; and Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 415.
24. Eco, *Limits of Interpretation*, 50–53.
25. Eckert, *Park Chung Hee*, 459.
26. Charmaz and Thornberg, “Pursuit of Quality in Grounded Theory,” 305–27; Bryant, “Continual Permutations,” 398–402; Weber, *Economy and Society*; and Oakes, “*Verstehen* Thesis,” 11–29.
27. Klag and Langley, “Approaching the Conceptual Leap,” 149–52.
28. Kunda, “Case for Motivated Reasoning,” 480–98.
29. See, for example, Moskowitz, “Korean Development and Korean Studies,” 63–90.
30. Kim C., “Singmin sagwan pip’annon ūi tūngjang.”
31. See, for example, Pak, C., “Hangukhak yōn’gu paerōdaim”; To, “Naejaejōk palchōnnon ūi ‘kōnjae’”; Yi H., “Han’guksa p’aak esō naejaejōk palchōnnon”; and Ch’oe, “Naejaejōk palchōnnon ‘ihu.’” See also Yoshino, “Chōsenshi kenkyū ni okeru naizaiteki hattenron”; and Kajimura, *Chōsenshi*, 169–78.
32. Eckert, *Offspring*, 53, 274. For earlier works that contrasted with Eckert’s approach, see, for example, Chung, “Economic System,” 275; and Suh, *Growth and Structural Changes*, 74.
33. See, for example, Hong, “Han’guk chōnjaeng kwa Han’guk kyōngje hakkye”; Pak K., “Han’guk chōnjaeng ihu chejōp pokku”; Yi C., “Haebang ihu Chōnnam tongbu”; and Yang Sōna, “Haebang ihu 1960-yōndae nongch’on maül.”
34. King, Keohane, and Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry*, 34.
35. Joan Wallach Scott, “Evidence of Experience,” 773–97; and Kreuzer, “Structure of Description,” 122–39.
36. Eckert, *Offspring*, 59.
37. *Ibid.*, 102.
38. Eckert, *Cheguk ūi huye*; Chu I., *Taegun ūi ch’ōkhu*.
39. See, for example, Chu I., review of *Offspring of Empire*, 221–29; U, “T’oron,” 180–85; and Chōng, “K’at’ō Ek’ōt’ū ūi Han’guk ‘minjokjuūi’ insik pip’an,” 156–74.
40. See, for example, Amsden, *Asia’s Next Giant*; Woo, *Race to the Swift*; Woo-Cumings, ed., *Developmental State*; and Kohli, *State-Directed Development*. For similar arguments about colonial Taiwan, see Wade, *Governing the Market*, 74–75.
41. For example, Kong, *1950-yōndae Han’guk ūi chabon’ga*; Pak T., “1950-yōndae kyōngje kaeballon,” 219–51; Han, “Kukka chudo kyōngje kaebal,” 1–19; Hō, “1945-nyōn haebang kwa Taehan Min’guk,” 464–507; Pak S., *Singminji ūi kyōngje pyōndong*; and Kimura, *Kita Chōsen keizai-shi*.
42. Eckert, *Park Chung Hee*, 13.
43. *Ibid.*, 327 n20.
44. *Ibid.*, 327, n17. See also Huntington, *Political Order*; Janowitz, *Military in the Development*; Burk, “Theories of Democratic Civil-Military Relations”; and Nielsen and

Liebert, “Theories of Democratic Civil–Military Relations.” I raised these points in more abbreviated form in Lynn, review of *Park Chung Hee and Modern Korea*.

45. See, for example, Finer, *Man on Horseback*; Zimmermann, *Political Violence, Crises, and Revolution*; Singh, *Seizing Power*, 18–21.

46. Nordlinger, *Soldiers in Politics*; and Geddes et al., “Military Rule.”

47. For example, Brudnoy, “Japan’s Experiment in Korea,” 155–95; Chang, “Colonization as Planned Changed,” 161–86; Cumings, “Origins and Development of the Northeast Asian Political Economy,” 1–40; Hattori, *Kankoku no keiei hatten*; and Nakamura et al., eds., *Chōsen kindai no rekishi-zō*. The Cumings article is cited in *Offspring*; the others are not.

48. Kawai and Yun, *Shokuminchiki Chōsen no kōgyō*.

49. See Suzuki, *Chōsen tōchi no seikaku to jisskeki*. See also Namiki, “Nihonjin no kagai katsudō,” 301.

50. Haggard, Kang, and Moon, “Japanese Colonialism and Korean Development,” 867–81.

51. Eckert, *Offspring*, 257, 162, xvi; Eckert, *Park Chung Hee*, 6, 11, 45, 65; and Eckert, “Exorcising Hegel’s Ghosts,” 363–78.

52. Wimmer and Schiller, “Methodological Nationalism and Beyond,” 301–34; Chernilo, “Critique of Methodological Nationalism,” 98–117; and Billig, *Banal Nationalism*.

53. Kang C., *Kūndae Ilbon ūi Chosŏn ch’imnyak*; and Sensui, ed., *Kindai kokka to shokuminchisei*.

54. See, for example, Kim K., “Han’guk yōksahak ūi chaegusōng,” 1–30; and Liu, “Ch’ogukasa pangbōmnon,” 51–75.

55. Eckert, *Nihon teikoku no mōshigo*.

56. See Hashiya, “Nihon ni okeru Chōsen kindaishi kenkyū,” 157.

57. Eckert, *Kankoku gunji shugi no kigen*.

58. *Tong kwa Sō*, Carter’s sole film credit, is now considered a lost film, as no prints of any quality have been found thus far. Nonetheless, surviving stills, posters, and plot summaries indicate it explored the issue of international marriage with some nuance and complexity, even if within the confines of the melodrama genre. The timing of its release placed it within a context of early socially conscious melodramatic cinema that depicted the effects of the American presence in Korea; it appeared only months after Kim Suyong’s *Ogap ūl kkaettūril ttae* [When a Woman Breaks Her Jewel Box]. That film, which also starred Yun Chōnghūi, was the first to address sexual violence by American soldiers against Korean women, and won Best Film at the 1971 Blue Dragon Film Awards in March. For additional details, see O, “Chōnjaeng kiōk kwa choech’aekkam.” *Tong kwa Sō* was also submitted for consideration at the Blue Dragon Awards the next year (it did not win), and it was exported to the US in 1972 as part of a ten-film package. *Chosŏn ilbo*, “Ch’ōngnyong yōnghwasang”; *Tonga ilbo*, “Han’guk yōnghwa 10-p’yōn.” For more details on Kim Kidōk, see Chu Y. et al., *Kim Kidūk, 60-yōn Han’guk taejung*. The art-house film director of the same name (1960–2020) did not release his first film until 1996. Yun was famous for being part of the “first-generation troika” of female films stars of the 1960s and 1970s, alongside Nam Chōngim and Mun Hūi. Yun starred in over forty films released in 1971 alone, in addition to *Tong kwa Sō*. I am grateful to Jaeyoun Won for flagging this film for me.

59. Kafka, *Blue Octavo Notebooks*, 30.

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