

THE MORAL ECONOMY OF 'FACE': GIFT-EXCHANGE, RECOGNITION, AND DEPOLITICIZED SOLIDARITY



Seung Cheol Lee

Assistant Professor of Anthropology
University of Mississippi

The metaphors of 'face' are often found in South Korea's fair trade activism, as fair trade and ethical consumption are frequently described as 'trade with persons whose faces you know' and their goal is presented as building 'capitalism or market economy with a human face.' By asking how and why fair trade activists rely on the metaphors of face to problematize market economy, this talk analyzes the political implications of the metaphors of face. I first examine the intimate connection between gift-exchange and face based on Marcel Mauss' and Marcel Hénaff's discussion of gift and present face as a juncture of recognition and disciplinary empowerment. Next, drawing on research in Beautiful Coffee, the largest fair trade organization in South Korea, I illuminate fair trade as the hybrid practice of 'marketized gift-exchange' in which the faces of 'entrepreneurial producers' and 'responsible consumers' are produced and circulated. In consequence, I maintain that the prevalent metaphors of face in fair trade activism betray the contradictory nature of the market-based solidarity that seeks to redefine the economic structure without political challenges to it.

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