



AAP Interview: Sun Yung Shin

Sun Yung Shin was born in Seoul, South Korea and was raised in Chicago. She has lived in Boston, Pittsburgh, St. Paul, and Minneapolis and has worked at a variety of jobs including a clerk at a sheet music-and-band instrument store, drugstore delivery girl, a nanny, an often laid-off software development analyst, and a poet-in-residence. Shin's poetry, reviews, and essays have been widely published. She currently lives in Minneapolis with her husband and their two children. She recently published her first children's book, Cooper's Lesson.

Interview by:
Bryan Thao Worra
of the Asian
American Press

Asian American Press (AAP): So, how does it feel now that *Cooper's Lesson* is finally out?

SYS: I'm very happy to see it in print!

AAP: How would you describe it to people thinking about picking it up?

SYS: It's about an American-born mixed-race boy who is confused by and struggling with his relationship to his mother's language, which happens to be Korean. It's also about immigrants' struggles to find a place in the United States while retaining their dignity and their connection to their selves they had to leave behind.

AAP: Will you be writing any follow-up children's stories?

SYS: Yes.

AAP: What are some of your other projects you're looking forward to next?

SYS: I'm working on my second children's book, which is about a Korean adoptee, taiko drumming, and her White American grandfather. I'm also in the pre-pre-production stage of a documentary about cross-cultural adoption. And writing more poetry, mostly about the technology of reproduction & distributive maternity (which includes adoption and the globalized one-way traffic of children of multiply disadvantaged mothers to multiply advantaged White mothers in the so-called First world).



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AAP: How long have you been writing?

SYS: Poems, since 1998.

AAP: What got you started in writing?

SYS: A professor in a class who encouraged me after I wrote a poem for an assignment. But I did a lot of reader/writer-ish things my whole life; had an underground newspaper in high school, was an editor at the school literary journal at Macalester, was an English major, etc.

AAP: What are some of your favorite themes to work with?

SYS: Women's economic status, class shifts, transnationalism.

AAP: What has been your biggest challenge as a writer?

SYS: Ideological struggles about representation. (And finding time to read.)

AAP: How has the Korean community responded to your work?

SYS: Well, from the ones that I've heard from. I'd be interested in reactions from native speakers and Korean nationals.

AAP: Has your family been supportive of your writing?

SYS: Yes, although it's probably been hard on them (my husband and kids).

AAP: What do you look for most in your own writing?

SYS: The things that I would like to read but can't find. Also, hybrid forms, things that surprise.

AAP: Who are some of your favorite writers?

SYS: Myung Mi Kim is my poetry hero. She is a Korean native and now teaches at the Poetics program at SUNY Buffalo.



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AAP: Do you have any advice for younger writers?

SYS: Read into the past. Don't just look at what your contemporaries are doing. Read criticism. Read outside the U.S. Look at how language is used for what purposes and by whom, examine how our condition has been located in language. And fight the Man! As my teacher Mark Nowak says, poetry should be revolutionary.