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## Jewish brainpower is a mixed blessing

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From following the Arab press, I'm well-versed in world Jewry's various dastardly schemes -- spreading AIDS, inventing the Holocaust, plotting 9/11, etc. But this was a new one for me: According to a best-selling series of Asian comic books, U.S. Jews are conspiring to prevent Korean immigrants from living the American dream.

The 12-book series, Meon Nara, Yiwoot Nara ("Distant Countries and Neighbouring Countries"), has sold more than 10 million copies in South Korea since 1987. It purports to present a broad global survey for readers interested in learning about the world beyond Korea's borders. I've been reviewing translated material from the chapter on ethnic relations in the United States. The good news is that political correctness apparently hasn't yet caught on in Korea. The bad news is that Koreans' image of Jews is arrested in the Charles Coughlin era.

The author of Meon Nara, a certain Rhie Won-bok, believes "the Jews are the invisible force that controls the U.S." In his comic, he argues that 9/11 was caused by Jewish domination of America; that the U.S. media "is the voice of the Jews;" that both Hollywood and Wall Street are Jewish-occupied territory; and that ambitious Korean-Americans are continually thwarted by "the fortress of the Jews."

Thanks to agitation by outraged American -- most notably Rabbi Abraham Cooper of the Los Angeles-based Simon Wiesenthal Center, who travelled to Seoul last month -- Meon Nara's publisher is taking the book off store shelves. Unfortunately, the company is powerless to recall the existing copies that are providing legions of Koreans with a Borat-like view of the Jewish race. (If you spot a Korean tourist throwing cash at a cockroach, you'll know why.)

And yet it is precisely the weirdness of Meon Nara that proves the stubbornness and ubiquity of the ugly ideological weed we call anti-Semitism. It is a weed most commonly found among those desperate for scapegoats -- such as failed Muslim societies and impoverished communist dictatorships. But South Korea ranks among the most dynamic, successful and well educated nations on Earth. The fact that Rhie's comic could become a best-seller in this sort of locale provides bizarre but convincing proof of Ruth Wisse's famous description of anti-Semitism as "the most successful ideology of the 20th century."

Why won't anti-Semitism die? The Muslim world's bloodthirsty demonization of Israel and the Jews who inhabit it obviously plays a major role. But another factor -- which is more relevant in capitalist, secular nations such as Korea -- is that Rhie's caricature of the all-powerful Jew, like all stereotypes and prejudices, has a tiny grain of truth behind it.

I am not aware of any systematic study of Jewish overrepresentation in the film and financial industries (though I don't doubt that it is significant in both cases). But in the April issue of Commentary magazine, Charles Murray lays out some astonishing statistics about Jewish influence on the modern Western intellectual landscape. "In the first half of the 20th century, despite pervasive and continuing social discrimination against Jews throughout the Western world, despite the retraction of legal rights, and despite the Holocaust, Jews won 14% of Nobel Prizes in literature, chemistry, physics and

medicine/physiology," Murray writes. "In the second half of the 20th century ? that figure rose to 29%. So far, in the 21st century, it has been 32%."

Since Jews constitute only about 0.2% of the world's population, this suggests they are overrepresented at the most elite intellectual strata by a geometric factor of about 100. Anecdotal evidence and informal surveys of top-ranked universities suggest Jews are similarly overrepresented in law, medicine, publishing and the other commanding heights of Western culture. Given this, one can perhaps understand why an extremely simplistic observer looking on from the other side of the Pacific Ocean might see newly immigrated Korean-Americans -- who often must resign themselves to entry-level business enterprises such as convenience stores -- as being locked out by Fort Jew.

What lies behind Jewish intellectual prominence? In Murray's view, it all goes back to AD 64, when the Jewish high priest Joshua ben Gamla ordered universal schooling for all Jewish boys aged six and over. Within a century, Jews became the first people in the history of civilization to achieve universal male literacy and numeracy.

As Murray notes, the ordinance almost coincided with the destruction of the Second Temple. Both events, he writes, "mark the moment when Judaism began actively to transform itself from a religion centred on rites and sacrifices at the Temple in Jerusalem to a religion centred on prayer and the study of the Torah at decentralized synagogues and study houses ?. Since worship of God involved not only prayer but study, all Jewish males had to read if they were to practise their faith."

The more accepted and (to my mind) convincing theory is that many European Jews of the Middle Ages were legally restricted to occupations involving finance and trade. Such capitalist metiers, far more than traditional village-based farming, required numeracy, literacy and basic genetic intelligence. These traits were thus favoured by the forces of natural selection among Europe's Ashkenazi Jews, thereby producing a modern population whose average measured intelligence level corresponds roughly to the 75th percentile of Western societies.

In a perfect world, it's the sort of statistic that Jews might trumpet with unalloyed pride-- the way the Dutch brag about their height (6' average) or Kenyans from the western edge of the Great Rift Valley boast of their exceptional long-distance-running ability. But intelligence, unlike height and speed, is not an unmitigated asset -- at least not when demagogues are afoot. What you or I might define as brainpower, others may define as cunning, shrewdness, guile. And to explain that such predilections originated naturally in the markets of Europe through a long history of money lending, deal-making and mercantile pursuits ... well, you can see how that tends only to make matters worse.

Rhie Won-bok may not be much of a cartoonist or a thinker. But he's unwittingly captured one of the sad truths of Jewish history. In peoples, as in people, great intellect can be a mixed blessing.

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