The Casino as Lifeline - NYTimes.com

Written by Administrator
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For dozens of Korean and Chinese immigrants living in Flushing, Queens, riding the casino buses has become a way of life. Twice a day, they descend on unmarked bus stops off Main Street to secure a $15 seat to the Sands casino in Bethlehem, Pa. Many do not gamble. They make the trip solely for the free gambling and meal vouchers they receive when they arrive, coupons they sell on the black market. A half-day trip to the Sands can net around $40.

Since February, the photographer Yeong-Ung Yang has been documenting what he calls the "endless commute" of these regulars, known as "bus-kkun" (bus riders in Korean). "For many of them, it's a job," Mr. Yang, 28, said. "There are those that arrive at the casino and go straight to the waiting room and immediately start waiting for the next bus to go home."

For hours at a time, Mr. Yang is drawn in by stories of tragic loss. His photographs expose a closed world, capturing the sad reality that casinos — advertisements for the easy life — attract the most vulnerable. Some are homeless and seek shelter in bakeries and Internet cafes between trips. Others ride buses to Connecticut and Atlantic City casinos as well, but the Sands offers the best incentives. "The whole routine itself," he said, "even though many are not gambling, is an addiction, and very hard to quit."

Chun Hae-Young, 57, who is ethnically Korean but arrived from Shenyang, China, 14 years ago, has been gambling in the out-of-state casinos for years. He said that when he got cleaned out, he sold coupons to replenish his cash. Mr. Chun described the Sands as a resource for those who are physically unable to work because of poor health or old age.

"The casino is a kind of place that can bleed you dry of everything," he said. "It can also save your life when you have nothing."

Yeong-Ung Yang Waiting for the bus home at the station inside the Sands casino.

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