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Korean Immigrants in Los Angeles

by

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KOREAN IMMIGRANTS IN LOS ANGELES

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Abstract

A large number of Koreans have been admitted to the United States as legal immigrants since the change in the immigration law in 1965. A significant proportion of the new Korean immigrants have settled in Los Angeles. As a result, the Los Angeles Korean community, the home of some 200,000 Koreans, has become not only the largest Korean center in the United States but also the largest overseas Korean center. This paper provides an overview of Korean immigrants and the Korean community in Los Angeles. It focuses on Koreatown, Korean immigrant entrepreneurship, and Koreans' ethnic attachment and solidarity in Los Angeles. Interviews with some 500 Korean immigrants in Los Angeles were used as the major data source for this paper. It also depends upon public documents, ethnic directories, ethnic newspaper articles, and previously published materials by other scholars for information on Koreans in Los Angeles.

The liberalization of the immigration law in 1965 has led to a radical increase in the immigration of Asians to the United States. Following the settlement patterns of the old Asian immigrants, a great number of the new Asian immigrants have settled in California. And Los Angeles has been the destination of a large proportion of the new Asian immigrants. One of the major Asian ethnic groups that have emerged in Los Angeles since the passage of the immigration law in 1965 is the Korean. More than 15% of 30,000-35,000 annual Korean immigrants have settled in the Los Angeles-Long Beach metropolitan area. As a result, the Korean population in Los Angeles has increased to over 150,000 in 1990.

The Korean community has received more public attention than any other Asian community in Los Angeles. A radical increase in the Korean population in Los Angeles for a short period of time may have been enough to attract attention from the U.S. mass media and the general public. However, there are two other important factors that have contributed to the high publicity that the Los Angeles Korean community has received. The first important factor has something to do with their settlement patterns. Although the new Asian immigrants of the middle-class background, with the exception of Chinese immigrants, have not developed ethnic ghettoes, Koreans in Los Angeles have created a territorial community, known as Koreatown. Koreans' concentration in Koreatown, a Koreatown sign on Highway 10, and numerous Korean-language sign stores in Koreatown have probably given the Los Angeles Korean community much visibility. The other important factor that has contributed to Los Angeles Korean immigrants' visibility is their ethnic business development. Koreans in Los Angeles, like those in other U.S. cities, have developed a high level of ethnic business, controlling several business lines. Korean immigrants' aggressive commercial

activities, their business-related intergroup conflicts, and their reactive solidarity seem to have attracted much attention from local and national media.

This paper intends to provide an overview of Koreans and the Korean community in Los Angeles. It will focus on Koreatown, Korean immigrant entrepreneurship, and Korean ethnicity. Between August and September, 1986, 557 Korean immigrants in Los Angeles were personally interviewed. The interview results will be used as the major data source for this paper.1 Public documents, articles from Korean ethnic newspapers published in the Los Angeles area, the Los Angeles Korean ethnic directory, this investigator's personal observations, and other previously published materials will also be used as data sources.

THE INFLUX OF NEW KOREAN IMMIGRANTS TO THE U.S.

During the period of 1903 and 1905 approximately 7,200 Koreans immigrated to Hawaii to work for sugar plantations.2 The mass immigration of Korean workers to the U.S. almost came to an end after 1905, and it did not resume until 1965 when the U.S. Congress passed the current immigration law. Some 2,000 additional Koreans came to the U.S. during the period of 1906-1923, and almost all of them were picture brides of the 1903-1905 male labor immigrants or students. The Asiatic Exclusion of the 1924 national origins quota system put an end to the movement of any Koreans, whether labor immigrants or family members of U.S. residents. The immigration of Koreans resumed during and after the Korean War as the U.S. maintained close political, military, and economic relations with South Korea. More than 3,000 Koreans were admitted as legal immigrants during the period of 1950-1964, and the vast majority of them were Korean wives of U.S. servicemen stationed in South Korea or Korean children adopted by U.S. citizens.

The U.S. Congress passed a new immigration law in 1965, which abolished discrimination based national origins and the exclusion of Asians. It allowed

aliens to be admitted to the U.S. as legal immigrants based on three criteria: (1) having occupational skills useful for employment in the U.S. (occupational immigrants), (2) having relatives already settled in the U.S. (family union), and (3) the vulnerability to political persecution (refugees and asylees). The new immigration law set a quota of 20,000 per country each year. However, each country can send more than 20,000 immigrants per year, since spouses, fiancees, parents, and unmarried children of U.S. children can be admitted as legal immigrants exempt from the national quota limitation.

The passage of the new immigration law came to have a great impact on the Korean American community. Although the immigration of Koreans to the U.S. started in the beginning of the twentieth century, the Korean community before 1970 was insignificant in population size. Allowing for a great undercount of Koreans in the 1970 census (69,130), the Korean population in 1970 may have been no more than 100,000. However, as can be seen from Table 1, nearly half million Koreans have immigrated to the U.S. between 1970 and 1988. The number of annual Korean immigrants has steadily increased in the early 1970s. In 1976 it exceeded 30,000 and has maintained the same level throughout the 1980s. Korean immigrants have accounted for 6-8% of total immigrants to the U.S. over the last fifteen years. Korea has sent more immigrants to the U.S. than any other country with the exception of Mexico and the Philippines over the last fifteen years. Considering Korean students, visitors, illegal residents, and children born since 1970, the Korean population may be close to one million.3

Table 1 about here

The new Korean immigrants, like other Asian immigrants, have largely drawn from the middle-class strata of Korean society. The 1980 census (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1984: 1-12) shows that 32% of Korean immigrants admitted between 1970 and 1980 completed four years of college education. By contrast, only 6.8% of adult people in Korea received college education (The Korean National Bureau of Statistics, 1983: 164-165). This suggests that Korean immigrants are a select group in terms of their socioeconomic background. A comparable figure for the U.S. native born population was 16.2%. Thus, in college education Korean immigrants surpass the U.S. native population by a significant margin. Consistent with their high levels of education, the vast majority of the post-1965 Korean immigrants held professional and white-collar occupations prior to immigration. For example, one survey study (Hurh and Kim, 1984: 105) shows that 90% of the Korean respondents in Los Angeles held professional and white-collar occupations in Korea.

There were not many Koreans already settled in the U.S. in the early 1970s. For this reason, a relatively small number of Korean immigrants admitted in the early 1970s came here based on family union, and a large proportion of them came as beneficiaries of occupational immigration. As shown in Table 1, occupational immigrants constituted more than 30% of Korean immigrants admitted in the early 1970s. A large proportion of Korean occupational immigrants in the early 1970s were medical professionals such as physicians, pharmacists, medical technologists, and nurses. Table 1 shows that the proportion of Korean occupational immigrants has gradually decreased since 1975, accounting for less than 10% of annual Korean immigrants over the last several years. This reduction of Korean occupational immigrants is closely related to the general reduction of occupational immigrants in the U.S. since the mid-1970s. When the unemployment

rate rose with the economic recession in 1976, the U.S. Department of Labor did not issue labor permits to many qualified prospective occupational immigrants. The Health Manpower Act, passed by the U.S. Congress in 1976, required that prospective alien medical professionals obtain a job offer from a U.S. employer before being admitted to this country. This revision of the 1965 Immigration Act almost put an end to the immigration of Korean medical professionals.

KOREAN IMMIGRANTS CONCENTRATION IN LOS ANGELES

As can be seen from Table 2, approximately 20-30% of annual Korean immigrants chose California as the state of residence and 7-9% chose Los Angles City as the place of residence. New York City and Chicago are the second and third largest entry points of Korean immigrants. The proportion of Korean immigrants who chose California as the state of residence steadily increased from 20% in the early 1970s to almost 30% in 1979. The proportion of Korean immigrants who chose Los Angeles City as the intended place of residence has been consistent over the years ranging from 7% to 9%. Table 2 also shows that the number of Korean immigrants settled in Hawaii, the center of the old Korean immigrants, has proportionally decreased relative to other states over the years.

Table 2 about here

Eight percent of U.S. Koreans were settled in Los Angeles City in 1980, 17% in the Los Angles-Long Beach metropolitan area, and 29% in California (see Table 3). Both the state of California and the Los Angeles metropolitan area achieved a higher increase rate in the Korean population between 1970 and 1980 than the U.S. as a whole. Although Korean Americans heavily concentrate in California,

other Asian ethnic groups even more highly concentrate in the state. The 1980 census (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1983a: 125, Table 63) reveals that 46%

Table 3 about here

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of Filipino Americans, 40% of Chinese Americans, 37% of Japanese Americans, and 340/6 of Vietnamese Americans were settled in the state. And there were more Japanese, Filipino, or Chinese Americans in the Los Angeles-Long Beach metropolitan area than Korean Americans in 1980.

KOREATOWN

Los Angeles can be considered the capital for Korean Americans not merely because it has the largest Korean American population in the U.S. but also because it has Koreatown, the only Korean residential and commercial center in the U.S. Located about three miles westward from Los Angeles downtown, Koreatown covers approximately 16 square miles, four miles from the east to the west and another four miles from the north to the south. The area is bounded by Beverly Boulevard on the north (North 200), Pica Boulevard to the south (South 1,400), Hoover Street to the east (East 2,000), and the line connecting Crenshaw Boulevard and Plymouth Boulevard to the west (West 4,200). The north-south line covers 15 blocks and the east-west line covers 26 blocks. Koreatown includes 20 census tracts, ten of which constitute the heart of Koreatown.

As in the case of other immigrant ghettoes, Koreatown was initially formed clustering around Korean ethnic stores. Professor Yu, a Korean sociologist and long-time resident of Los Angeles, says that the establishment of the Olympic Market by a Korean at the corner of Olympic Boulevard and Hobart Street in 1969 was the origin of Koreatown (Yu, 1985). Starting with the Olympic Market, many

Korean restaurants, gift shops, and other ethnically oriented stores were opened up along the Olympic Boulevard in the 1970s. The establishment of an increasing number of Korean ethnic stores has led to the increasing residential concentration of Koreans in Koreatown, which in turn has further increased the number of Korean-owned stores serving co-ethnic customers. Thus, Koreatown is a both residential and commercial center for Los Angeles Koreans. Koreatown has extended its boundary to the north since the late 1970s. Not only Olympic Boulevard, but also Eighth and 7th Streets, covering 15 blocks between Hoover Street and Western Avenue have been the heart of Koreatown since the mid-1980. Many ethnically oriented stores such as Korean restaurants, boutiques, and bakery stores have been recently established several blocks north of Beverly Boulevard, which many Korean residents believed to be the northern boundary of Koreatown a few years ago.

Table 4 shows the racial composition of residents in 20 Koreatown census tracts and 10 Koreatown Core census tracts based on the 1980 census. Koreans constituted 10.5% of the total Koreatown population in 1980. Minority members make up the vast majority of Koreatown residents, with whites constituting only 27% of the total population. Mexicans, making up the largest group in Koreatown, contribute to Koreatown economy by serving as customers and employees of Korean-owned businesses. Koreans constitute a small minority group even in the heart of Koreatown, with only 14.4% of the population. Since many Koreans have moved to

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Table 4 about here

Koreatown since 1980, Koreans will comprise a larger proportion of Koreatown residents in the 1990 census.

Although Koreatown Koreans comprise a small proportion of its residents, they account for a significant fraction of Koreans in Los Angeles. The 1980 census shows that Koreans settled in Koreatown constitute 35% of Koreans in Los Angeles City, 19% of those Koreans residing in the Los Angeles-Long Beach metropolitan area, and 15% of those in Southern California (see Table 5). Partly because of the heavy residential concentration of Los Angeles Koreans in the area, it has been considered Koreatown. No other recent Asian immigrant group, with the exception of Chinese immigrants, maintains this level of residential concentration in an area. A large proportion of recent Chinese immigrants have been settled in Chinatowns in Los Angeles and other cities. However, Chinatowns were created in the nineteenth century in response to prejudice and racial violences against Chinese. Los Angeles Koreatown, along with the Cuban enclave in Miami, is probably the only immigrant ghetto created in the post-1965 era (Portes and Rambaut, 1990).

Table 5 about here

Many new Korean immigrants who have language difficulty, settle in Koreatown, seeking employment in Korean-owned stores. Koreatown also attracts a large number of temporary visitors and illegals, who can find employment in Korean restaurants, garment factories, and other types of Korean-owned stores. Most Korean immigrants, however, consider Koreatown, which has a high crime rate and low-quality schools, a place for temporary residence. Once they live in Koreatown long enough to get adjusted to American society, many of them move to suburban areas. In the 1986 survey twenty-eight percent of Koreatown respondents reported to have been in this

country for three years or less, in comparison to 13% of respondents in other areas (Min, 1989b).

A large number of Korean-owned businesses with Korean-language signs are located in Koreatown. Thus, Koreatown is not only a residential but also a commercial center for Los Angeles Koreans. The level of Koreans' commercial concentration in Koreatown is reflected in the 1986 Los Angeles survey. Although Koreatown covers only 16 square miles, it contained 260h of total Korean-owned businesses in Los Angeles and Orange Counties. This does not mean that a higher proportion of Koreatown Koreans are business owners than Koreans in other Los Angeles areas. In fact, the 1986 Los Angeles survey showed that Koreatown Koreans were self-employed in a smaller proportion than Koreans outside of it (Min, 1989b). This suggests that many Koreans who live outside of Koreatown have a business in Koreatown. The 1986 study indicated that 59% of Korean-owned businesses located in Koreatown were owned by Koreans who lived outside of it.

The vast majority of Korean businesses located in Koreatown meet culturally-based consumer demands by co-ethnic members. That is, they serve Koreans with Korean food, Korean groceries, Korean books/magazines, and services with distinctive Korean cultural tastes. Approximately 730/6 of Korean businesses located in Koreatown were found to serve Koreans as the majority of customers, in comparison to 21% of those in other areas of Southern California (Min, 1989b). This makes a good contrast with businesses located in Chinatown and Little Tokyo, which mainly serve outgroup members. Only 13% and 23% of Korean businesses located in Koreatown respectively serve blacks/Mexicans and whites as the majority of their customers. Many Koreans, especially the elderly, live in Koreatown mainly because all kinds of services are available there.

Table 6 shows the types of businesses in Southern California mainly concentrated in Koreatown. First of all, Koreatown has a large number of Korean restaurants and night clubs. Restaurants and night clubs located in Koreatown respectively account for 43% and 48% of those in Southern California, although only only 15% of Koreans in Southern California live in Koreatown. Since a large number of Korean restaurants in Koreatown are involved in strong competition, they provide Koreans with better services for more reasonable prices than Korean restaurants located in other parts of the country. There is a general consensus that Koreans can enjoy eating quality food for cheaper prices in Koreatown than in Seoul. Many Koreans who work outside of Koreatown regularly drive to Koreatown for lunch and/or dinner. Koreatown also has a larger number of Oriental grocery stores in proportion to the Korean population. Moreover, Oriental grocery stores located in Koreatown are generally larger than those outside of it.

Table 6 about here

Korean immigrants with language difficulty depend upon Koreans for professional services. A large number of Koreans provide accounting services for Korean business owners, and most Korean accounting firms are located in Koreatown. Korean lawyers and medical doctors also partly depend upon co-ethnic customers, and a large proportion of their professional offices are located inside or near to Koreatown. Insurance and real estate agencies are the other professional service businesses where Korean entrepreneurs and Korean clientele depend upon each other, and thus the concentration of these two businesses in Koreatown is quite natural. There are approximately ten large Korean-owned buildings along Wilshire Boulevard, and many Korean medical professionals, lawyers, accountants, insurance, travel, and real

estate agents rent offices in these buildings. Koreatown also houses a large number of businesses based on the Korean cultural tradition. Fifty-three percent of 130 Korean herbs and acupuncture services and ten of seventeen fortune tellers have their office in Koreatown.

Koreatown is a mixture of commercial and housing areas, and zoning restrictions severely hamper Koreatown business development. Although a few shopping malls have been established in Koreatown, there is no enough parking space. Heavy traffic jams and the lack of English-language signs make it difficult for outside non-Korean customers to visit Koreatown for shopping and sightseeing. Koreatown residents, predominantly non-Korean, have complained about the Korean commercial encroachment into residential areas. Koreatown community leaders have tried to persuade the city government to rezone some residential areas in the heart of Koreatown for commercial and community use. However, they have been so far little successful in their persuasion. Until a major renovation, involving demolition of several residential areas, is made, Koreatown may not be able to draw many non-Korean customers from outside of the area.

Koreatown is also a social and cultural center for Los Angeles' Koreans. The Korean Federation of L. A., the central organization of the Los Angeles Korean community, and ail eight major Korean business associations, including Korea Town Development Association and Korean Chamber of Commerce of L.A., have their office in Koreatown. The Korean Youth Center, the Korean Family Legal Counseling Center, and other Korean social work organizations are also located in Koreatown. Twenty of 32 Korean ethnic newspapers and magazines in Southern California, including all three ethnic dailies, have their office in Koreatown. Koreatown also houses nearly half of 32 Korean ethnic book stores in Southern California. Korean business associations, social service organizations, alumni associations, and other social

clubs have regular seminars, meetings, and parties at offices and restaurants in Koreatown. Many Korean families settled in other parts of Southern California often come to Koreatown restaurants for a wedding reception, a birthday party, a New Year Day dinner, etc. Koreatown holds its annual festival known as "Koreatown Festival" in October, in which traditional Korean dances, songs, dresses, games, and food are introduced to its non-Korean residents and visitors. There are eight Korean-owned hotels and motels in Koreatown, and two of them hold a Korean professional convention on the national level almost every month. The Koreatown hotels also accommodate many Korean visitors and entertainers from Korea.

CONCENTRATION IN SMALL BUSINESSES

As previously indicated, Korean immigrants are characterized by high educational and pre-immigrant occupational backgrounds. However, Korean immigrants probably have more language barriers than any other immigrant group with a similar level of education. For example, Filipino and Indian immigrants spoke English in their native country prior to immigration. Although almost all Korean immigrants learned English as a second language in Korean schools, few of them were able to speak English fluently prior to immigration. The difficulty of Korean immigrants in spoken English was well reflected in the 1986 pre-departure survey. Only 9.2% of the respondents selected from the 1986 Korean immigrants reported that they did not need an interpreter for the visa interview (Park et al., 1989). Mainly because of this language difficulty and partly because of no recognition of diplomas and professional certificates earned in Korea, many Korean immigrants with college education cannot find jobs comparable to their education. Instead, a large majority of adult Korean immigrants with college education have to take blue-collar occupations, to which they are not accustomed.

As an alternative to undesirable blue-collar occupations, a large proportion of Korean immigrants are self-employed in small businesses (Min, 1984b). Results of survey studies in several major Korean communities suggest that 40% to 60°h of Korean immigrant households own at least one business (Hurh and Kim, 1988; Min, 1988a, 1989b, 1990). Koreans' small business activities are pronounced particularly in Los Angeles. A survey conducted in 1973 showed that 25% of Korean household heads in Southern California were self-employed (Bonacich et al., 1976). The self-employment rate of household heads in the Los Angeles Korean community increased to 40% in 1977 (Yu, 1982). As presented in Table 7, the 1986 survey indicates that 53% of Korean male household heads and 480h of all Korean workers in Los Angeles are self-employed. Thirty percent of Korean workers in Los Angeles are also employed in Korean firms. Thus, only one out of four Los Angeles Korean workers is employed in a non-Korean firm. Those households that own at least one business accounted for 52.5% of total Korean households in Los Angeles in 1986 (Min, 1989b).

Table 7 about here

Table 8 provides information on the major lines of business in which Korean immigrants in Los Angeles concentrate. Trade businesses dealing largely in Korean-imported items such as wigs, handbags, jewelry, and clothing constitute approximately 15% of Korean-owned businesses in Los Angeles. They include a large number of import and wholesale businesses. The 1986 Directory of Southern California listed 320 Korean-owned import-export companies (Keys and Printing Company, 1986-87). Koreans' concentration in businesses dealing in Korean-imported merchandise, which is not unique to the Los Angeles Korean community, is possible

mainly by virtue of trade relations between the U.S. and South Korea (Min, 1984a). Korean exports to the U.S. have substantially increased since the early 1970, when a massive influx of Koreans to the U.S. started. By virtue of the advantages associated with their language and ethnic background, many Korean immigrants have been able to establish import businesses dealing in Korean-imported merchandise. Korean importers distribute Korean-made consumer goods mainly to Korean wholesalers, who in turn distribute them mainly to other Korean retailers. As a result, Korean immigrants have nearly monopolized the wig and several other businesses, which are vertically integrated from Korean importers to Korean retailers.

Table 8 about here

Five professional businesses (medical, legal, accounting, real estate, and insurance services) comprise almost 130Ya of Korean businesses in Los Angeles. As previously indicated, the majority of these professional businesses are located inside or near Koreatown, serving mainly Korean customers. The 1986 survey reveals that 76% of Korean-owned professional businesses depend mainly (50% or more of total customers) upon Korean customers whereas only 17% of non-professional businesses do so. Restaurants and other related businesses serving food and drinks constitute the third important type of Korean-owned businesses in Los Angeles. Whereas overseas Chinese usually serve Chinese food for non-Chinese customers, Korean immigrants in the U.S. mainly serve American fast food such as hamburger, pizza, and doughnuts for American customers. There are many Korean restaurants in Koreatown and other areas of Los Angeles, but they mainly serve Korean customers.

Another line of business in which Koreans in Los Angeles concentrate is the grocery/liquor business. The grocery business, which requires long work hours, is

not appealing to native-born people, but it is an acceptable alternative to many immigrants with labor market disadvantages. Korean immigrants are no exception. The president of the Korean-American Grocers' Association of Southern California told me that there are approximately 1,500 Korean-owned grocery stores in the Los Angeles-Long Beach metropolitan area and 2,250 Korean-owned grocery stores in Southern California as of March, 1990. The grocery business is the single most significant line of business in the Los Angeles Korean community. In many other Korean communities the American grocery business is the major line of Korean businesses. In Atlanta, for example, grocery stores constituted 31% of total Korean-owned businesses in 1982 (Min, 1988a).

Gas station service, garment manufacturing, and maintenance service are the other major business lines for Korean immigrants in Los Angeles. Gas station service and garment manufacturing have a commonality in that both are directly tied to U.S. corporations. That is, Korean immigrants franchise gas stations and subcontract garment manufacturing from U.S. corporations. The direct connection between Korean small businesses and U.S. corporations is possible mainly because Korean owners can use family members and new immigrants as cheap labor sources. Korean gas station owners and garment manufacturers help U.S. corporations by providing cheap labor, to which the latter do not have access. This is why Bonacich argues that Korean small businesses are being used by the interests of big U.S. corporations (Light and Bonacich, 1988, Chapter 15). However, only 20% of Korean-owned businesses in Los Angeles are found to be either franchise or sub-contracting businesses (Min, 1989b). Moreover, fewer Korean immigrants in other Korean centers seem to be engaged in gas station franchise or garment industry sub-contracting.

Does self-employment in small business help Korean immigrants to achieve economic mobility? Table 9 contains information that can help to answer this

question. The median household income for all U.S. households in 1986 was $24,897 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1987: 422), and over 70% of Korean immigrant households in Los Angeles reached the income level in the same year. Whereas only 16.8% of U.S. households earned $50,000 or more in the year, 30.6% of the Los Angeles Korean immigrant households marked the income level. These figures suggest that Korean immigrants in Los Angeles do very well economically relative to other groups.

Table 9 about here

What is more important for understanding the economic effects of Korean immigrant entrepreneurship is the income gap between self-employed and employed workers. As expected, there is a significant differential in family income between self-employed and employed Koreans. Approximately 19% of self-employed workers, in comparison to 36% of employed workers, reported their annual family income to be below $25,000. In contrast, 43% of entrepreneurial respondents chose $50,000 or more as their family income in comparison to only 20% of employed respondents. Moreover, other indicators such as home ownership, the number of bedrooms, and number of cars owned suggest that Korean business families maintain a higher standard of living than non-business families (Min, 1989b). However, self-employed and employed respondents are similar in educational level, English skills, length of residence in the U.S. and number of workers per family. Thus, the differentials in family income and other indicators of the standard of living between self-employed and employed workers seem to be due mainly to the self-employment status itself. This means that small business is the main avenue for economic mobility for Korean immigrants, as many theorists of immigrant adjustment have hypothesized.

BASES FOR ETHNICITY

The extent to which members of an ethnic/immigrant group maintain their native cultural tradition and social interactions with co-ethnic members is referred to as "ethnic attachment" or "ethnicity" (Hurh and Kim, 1984; Reitz, 1980). Korean immigrants in the United States maintain a high level of ethnic attachment. That is, the vast majority of Korean immigrants speak the Korean language, eat mainly Korean food, and practice other Korean customs most of the time. Most Korean immigrants are affiliated with at least one ethnic organization and involved in active informal ethnic networks. For example, Hurh and Kim (Hurh and Kim, 1988) report that 90% of Korean immigrants in Chicago mainly speak the Korean language at home and that 82% are affiliated with one or more ethnic organizations. A comparative study of three Asian ethnic groups--Korean, Chinese, and Filipino--indicates that a much larger proportion of Korean Americans (75%) than Filipino (50%) or Chinese Americans (19%) have joined one or more ethnic associations (Mangiafico, 1988: 174).

There are several important reasons why Korean immigrants maintain a high level of ethnic attachment. First, the affiliation of a large proportion of Korean immigrants with Korean immigrant churches significantly contributes to Koreans' ethnic attachment. In Korea Christians constitute 21.2% of the population and the vast majority of Korean Christians (76%) are Protestants (Korean National Bureau of Statistics, 1987). However, Christians are overrepresented among Korean immigrants. More than 1,800 of the 1986 Korean immigrants to the United States were interviewed in Seoul prior to their departure from Korea. Fifty-four percent of the respondents in the 1986 pre-departure survey reported that they were affiliated with a Christian church in Korea (Park et al., 1989).4 Many Korean immigrants, who were not Christians in Korea, attend the Korean immigrant church probably for practical

purposes. Thus, an overwhelming majority of Korean immigrants are involved in ethnic church. In the 1986 Los Angeles survey, 66.8% of the Korean respondents were found to attend Korean ethnic church at least every two weeks. The 1986-87 Korean Directory of Southern California listed 341 Korean immigrant churches, and the actual number may have been larger than this.

Korean immigrant churches serve several practical functions for Korean immigrants, which is indispensable to their adjustment in the U.S. (Min, 1989a). Two of these practical functions contribute to Korean ethnic attachment. One is the fellowship function. Many Korean immigrants attend ethnic church to maintain social interactions and friendship networks with fellow Koreans. In this connection, it is useful to note the findings from the Chicago study of Korean immigrants by Hurh and Kim (1988: 63). In the study 23.6% of the church going respondents indicated fellowship or meeting friends as the primary motive for attending church. All Korean immigrant churches have a fellowship hour after Sunday service, which usually lasts between half and one hour. During the fellowship hour, church members exchange greetings and enjoy informal talks with fellow church members. All Korean churches serve refreshments during the fellowship hour,, and a large proportion serve a Korean style lunch or Kimbap (Min, 1989a).

The other practical function of Korean immigrant churches, which contributes to Korean ethnic attachment, is maintenance of the Korean cultural tradition. Korean churches help to preserve Korean culture in several different ways. First, Korean churches contribute to maintenance of Korean culture partly because the Korean language and customs are more strictly observed inside the church than outside of it. Korean ministers give sermons in Korean for almost all adult worship services. Even for children's services they use the Korean language more often than English. A survey of Korean ministers reveals that only 200/b of the New York City Korean

churches provide services for children in English alone, -and the others use either Korean (25%) or bilingual (55%) (Min, 1989a). Moreover, a large proportion of Korean immigrant churches provide the Korean language program for children, which is vital to language retention for the Korean American community. It was found that nearly half of the Korean churches in New York City have established the Korean language school.

In addition to the common Christian background, Korean immigrants share strong cultural and historical ties, and this is another reason why they have developed a high level of ethnicity during a short period of settlement in the U.S. The cultural homogeneity of Korean immigrants becomes clearer when they are compared with other immigrant groups. It is a well known fact that Filipino immigrants consist of a number of subgroups based on language and the origin of province. The absence of the national language and regional differences partly contribute to factionalism and disunity characterizing Filipino immigrants' community organizations (Pido, 1986: 95). Although approximately 85% of Filipino immigrants are Catholics, only a small proportion of them attend ethnic churches (Mangiafico, 1988). Most Filipino immigrant Catholics attend American Catholic churches probably because of their absence of a common native language. Indian immigrants, like Filipino immigrants, consist of many linguistic-regional sub-ethnic groups. Thus, close friends and visiting patterns among Indian immigrants often involve people from the same region and language group (Saran, 1985 114). Moreover, Indian immigrants consist of religiously heterogeneous subgroups, which is one major source of internal conflicts (William. 1988).

By contrast, Korean immigrants have only one native language and regional differences are insignificant in their identity. More than half of Korean immigrants came from Seoul, the capital, and more than three-fourths came from the

four largest cities (Park et al., 1989). The vast majority of them have received high school or college education in Seoul and other large metropolitan cities. Thus, alumni associations can tie almost all Korean immigrants. The 1986-87 Korean Directory of Southern California listed 74 middle-high school and 47 college/university alumni associations. Korean alumni associations in Los Angeles, like those in other Korean communities, play an important--although less important than ethnic churches--role in sustaining Korean ethnicity. Ethnic media play the central role in integrating geographically dispersed immigrants in the post-1965 era. Ethnic media seem to be more effective for enhancing ethnicity for Korean immigrants, especially because Koreans have only one native language. Almost all Korean immigrants can read Korean-language newspapers and understand Korean-language T.V. programs. Native-language ethnic media, however, can serve only a small proportion of Indian or Filipino immigrants, who consist of several language groups.

In addition to commonalities in culture and historical experiences, the development of a high level of ethnic business also enhances immigrant/minority group's ethnic attachment and ethnic solidarity (Bonacich and Modell, 1980; Reitz, 1980). The concentration of Korean immigrants in small business is another important factor for Koreans' high ethnic attachment. First, Korean immigrants' occupational concentration in small business enhances ethnic ties by tying ethnic members together. Korean proprietors depend mainly upon family members and other co-ethnic employees for their operation of businesses. The 1986 Los Angeles study shows that Korean workers make up an average of 78% of their co-workers for Korean ethnic employees in comparison to 8% for those employed in non-Korean firms (Min, 1989b: 168). Korean immigrants working for Korean stores, both proprietors and ethnic employees, speak the Korean language, eat Korean lunch, and practice Korean

customs during most of work hours. Moreover, Korean immigrants extend frequent social interactions with fellow Koreans to off-duty hours. In the 1986 Los Angeles survey, 47% of Koreans in the ethnic market reported that they meet other Koreans for dinner or picnics at least once a week, whereas only 23% of Koreans employed in the general labor market said they do so. The same survey indicated that Koreans in the ethnic market exhibit a higher level of ethnicity than those in the general labor market in term of frequency of speaking Korean at home, frequency of watching the Korean T.V. and number of subscriptions to Korean newspapers and magazines (Min, 1989b: 167-168).

Second, Korean businesses enhance ethnic solidarity partly because of their concentration in several kinds of businesses. When a minority/immigrant group specializes in small business, it usually concentrates in a few business lines, as is the case with the Chinese restaurant and garment manufacturing businesses for Chinese Americans. As previously noted, Koreans in Los Angeles concentrate in the grocery/liquor trade, dry cleaning service, the trade of Korean-imported items, and a few other business lines. Korean immigrants in New York City heavily concentrate in the produce retail. Korean grocers in Los Angeles feel a strong sense of group solidarity because their class and ethnic interests overlap. That is, Korean grocers in Los Angeles as petit-bourgeoisie maintain a higher level of class unity than white grocers in Los Angeles because they share brotherhood associated with the same nationality. Few Korean immigrants in Los Angeles would be interested in white-dominant labor unions or trade associations. Yet most Korean grocers in Southern California are affiliated with the Korean Grocers' Association and active in protecting their group interests.5

Third, Korean immigrant entrepreneurship enhances ethnic solidarity because operation of small businesses involves conflicts with outgroup members (Min, 1988b).

The fact that minority/immigrant groups are segregated in certain business specialties may not be a sufficient condition for stimulating ethnic solidarity. Clustering of ethnic businesses can increase internal solidarity because minority/immigrant proprietors engaged in the same or similar lines of business face intergroup conflicts for economic survival. Korean immigrant proprietors have come into conflict with several outside interest groups: (1) minority customers, (2) white suppliers, (3) white landlords, (4) local residents, (5) white labor unions, and (6) governmental agencies. And their business-related intergroup conflicts have strengthened ethnic solidarity.

The most serious intergroup conflicts have arisen between Korean ghetto merchants and black customers. Korean ghetto merchants in major Korean communities have encountered strikes, boycotts, and other forms of rejection by black customers over the last several years.6 The Los Angeles Korean community has also experienced major business-related conflicts with the black community (Light and Bonacich, 31% 320; Njeri, 1990; Sunoo, 1988), although the conflicts have probably not been as severe as those in New York and other north-eastern metropolitan cities. As previously noted, Korean merchants in Los Angeles' Koreatown have also received much resistance from non-Korean residents in Koreatown. Non-Korean residents have complained about the invasion of Korean businesses into residential areas and the exclusive use of Korean-language signs for Korean-owned stores (Light and Bonacich, 309). The garment contracting business, over which immigrants have a monopoly (Waldinger, 1985), is more active in the Los Angeles Korean community than any other Korean community. Korean garment contractors, like other garment contractors in Los Angeles, have been investigated and fined by state and city agencies for violating minimum wage, overtime pay, and other labor laws (Light and Bonacich, 1988:305-308).

Residential segregation facilitates maintaining ethnicity, and the existence of

Koreatown as a territorial community enhances Korean ethnic attachment on the part of Koreans in Los Angeles. Of course, the Koreatown Koreans maintain more frequent social interactions with co-ethnics and thus speak Korean with their neighbors more often than those in other areas. The Koreatown Koreans are also likely to speak Korean at home more often than those in other Los Angeles areas. In a question asking about the frequency of speaking English at home, 68% of the Koreatown respondents reported speaking English rarely or never in comparison to 47.5% of the respondents settled in other areas of Los Angeles. This means that two-thirds of Koreatown Koreans speak Korean at home most of the time whereas less than half of Koreans in other Los Angeles areas do so. The Koreatown residents also eat Korean food more often and preserve other Korean customs more.

The existence of Koreatown as a Korean social and cultural center reinforces ethnic attachment and ethnic identity not only for Koreatown Koreans but also for those in other Los Angeles areas. Moreover, a large concentration of Koreans in Los Angeles encourages social interactions among Koreans, thereby facilitating maintenance of the Korean language, food, and customs. For these reasons, we expect Koreans in Los Angeles to maintain a higher level of ethnic attachment than those in other parts of the U.S. The census report provides the percentage of the foreign born five years old and over who speak their native language at home. It shows that 92.1% of foreign born Koreans residing in the Los Angeles-Long Beach metropolitan area speak Korean at home in comparison to 83.8% of total foreign born Koreans in the U.S. (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1988, Table 43).

SUMMARY

Korean immigrants constitute one of the major new Asian immigrant groups that have emerged since the revision of the U.S. immigration law in 1965, and Los Angeles has received more Korean immigrants than any other city in the U.S. The Los Angeles

Korean community is interesting to researchers particularly because it includes Koreatown, Koreans' residential, commercial, and cultural center. Los Angeles' Koreatown, together with Little Havana in Miami, is probably the only ethnic ghetto developed by any of the post-1965 immigrant groups. Another unique feature of Korean immigrants' adjustment is that a large proportion of them in the middle-class background are self-employed in small businesses due to their language barriers and other labor market disadvantages. Korean immigrants maintain a higher level of ethnic attachment than other Asian immigrant groups. The affiliation of the majority of Korean immigrants with Korean churches, their cultural homogeneity, and their concentration in small businesses contribute to their high ethnic attachment. Korean immigrants in Los Angeles preserve even a higher level of ethnicity than those in other parts of the U.S. partly because of the existence of Koreatown as a territorial base and partly because of a large concentration of Koreans in the city.

FOOTNOTES

1. Detailed information on data collection is provided in Min, 1989b.

2. For detailed information on the Korean labor immigrants to Hawaii between 1903 and 1905, see Wayne Patterson, The Korean Frontier in Hawaii, 1987,

3. The Korean Consulate in New York estimated that as of May, 1989 the U.S. Korean population was 1,162,487. See The Central Daily of New York, May, 27, 1989.

4. The overrepresentation of Christians among Korean immigrants can be partly explained by the fact that Korean immigrants have drawn largely from the urban, middle-class segment of the Korean population, in which the Christians religion is very strong. Many Christians fled from North Korea to South Korea before the Korean War, and North Korean refugees, who have no strong kin ties in South Korea, have immigrated to the U.S. in greater proportion than the general population in South Korea. This is another reason why Christians are overrepresented among Korean immigrants. Finally, Korean Christians are more likely to choose immigration to the U.S. than Buddhists or Confucianists, which has also contributed to the heavy Christian background of Korean immigrants.

5. Many Korean grocery owners in Southern California are involved in overcompetition with other Korean grocers and thus the Koreans' concentration in a few business lines is also a source of intragroup conflicts. However, the competition among Korean merchants has never destroyed a community-wide solidarity, and the Korean Grocers' Association and other business associations have been established partly to prevent this kind of intragroup competition.

6. Issues involved in interracial conflicts between Korean ghetto merchants and black customers are analyzed in considerable detail: in Light and Bonacich (1988: 318-320) and Min (1989c).

TABLE 1: KOREANS IMMIGRATED, 1970-1988

Year	Total US Immigrants	Total Korean Immigrants	% of Korean Occupational Immig.	Korean Naturalized
1970	373,326	9,314	30.8	1,687
1971	370,478	14,297	41.9	2,083
1972	387,685	18,876	45.0	2,933
1973	400,063	22,930	32.2	3,562
1974	394,861	28,362	33.5	4,451
1975	386,194	28,362	22.2	6,007
1976	398,613	30,803	14.6	6,450
1977	462,3 15	30,917	8.6	10,446
1978	60 1,442	29,288	11.8	12,575
1979	460,348	29,248	5.2	13,406
1980	530,639	32,320	2.9	14,073
1981	596,600	32,663	8.3	13,258
1982	594,131	30,814	3.5	13,488
1983	559,763	33,339	8.3	12,808
1984	543,903	33,042	8.8	14,019
1985	570,009	35,253	7.8	16,824
1986	60 1,708	35,776	8.6	18,037
Total	7,883,158	447,242	—	166,107

Note (a): Immigration and Naturalization Service tabulates immigrants by the country of birth and the country of last residence. The figure for Korean immigrants admitted annually included in this table indicates the number of immigrants who chose Korea as the country of birth.

Sources: Adjusted from Annual Reports by Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1970-1988.

TABLE 2: KOREAN IMMIGRANTS INTENDED PLACES OF RESIDENCE, 1970-1987

Year	CA	LA City	New York	Illinois	Maryland	Hawaii	NJ	PA
1970	21.5%	6.7%	11.5%	6.1%	4.7	6.4	4.0	4.0
1971	18.7	7.7	12.9	7.4	5.2	4.0	4.3	4.3
1972	19.9	8.5	14.7	7.3	5.9	4.6	4.4	3.9
1973	21.5	8.3	11.2	6.3	6.0	5.6	3.9	4.2
1974	22.2	8.6	9.2	6.3	7.8	4.0	4.1	5.3
1975	23.3	9.1	8.2	6.3	6.7	5.2	4.0	4.6
1976	23.8	8.2	8.5	11.8	4.2	4.9	3.2	4.2
1977	23.9	7.3	8.1	6.9	4.0	4.1	2.8	3.4
1978	24.7	7.7	8.6	7.6	4.4	3.3	3.5	4.7
1979	28.2	8.6	9.0	5.6	3.8	4.1	3.2	3.9
1982	29.1	6.9	9.2	5.7	3.8	3.2	3.7	3.5
1983	28.2	__-	10.0	4.7	4.0	2.7	4.0	4.0
1986	27.5	-_-	11.2	5.3	4.8	2.5	4.4	4.0

Sources: Adjusted from Annual Reports by Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1970- 1987.

TABLE 3: CONCENTRATION OF KOREANS IN CALIFORNIA AND LOS ANGELES IN 1980

	1980		1970		% of Increase From 1970 To 1980
Area	N	%	N	%	
LA City	33,066	9.3	---	---	---
LA-Long Beach SMSA	60,618	17.1	8,811	12.7	588.0
LA-Long Beach-Anaheim SCSA	75,587	21.3	___	___	___
California	103,845	29.3	15,756	22.8	559.4
U.S. Total	354,529	100.0	69,130	100.0	412.8

Sources: Adjusted from 1980 Census of Population, PC80-l-B1 (U.S. Bureau

TABLE 4: RACIAL COMPOSITION OF KOREATOWN RESIDENTS

Racial Group	Koreatown N	Koreatown %	Koreatown Core N	Koreatown Core %
Korean	11,675	10.5	8,840	14.4
Other Pacific/Asian	15,693	14.1	8,837	14.6
Black	10,962	9.9	6,103	10.1
Hispanic	40,780	36.7	23,376	38.5
Indian	519	0.5	312	0.5
White	29,852	26.9	12,475	20.5
Others	1,626	1.4	973	1.4
Total	111,107	100.0	60,716	100.0

Sources: Adjusted from 1980 Census of Population and Housing, Census Tracts, Los Angeles-Long Beach, California, PHC 80-2-226, Table P-7, Tracts 2111, 2112, 2113, 2114, 2115, 2117, 2118, 2119, 2121, 2122, 2123, 2124, 2125, 2126, 2127, 2129, 2131, 2132, 2133, and 2134.

TABLE 5: KOREATOWN KOREANS AS % OF LOS ANGELES KOREANS

N of Koreans Koreatown	Koreatown Koreans as % of LA City Koreans	Koreatown Koreans as % of LA SMSA Koreans	Koreatown in in % of S. CA
11,675	35.3	19.3	15.4

Sources: Adjusted from 1980 Census of Population. Refer to Table 3 for the number of Koreans in each area.

TABLE 6: MAJOR KOREAN BUSINESSES LOCATED IN KOREATOWN

Business Line	Total Businesses	Businesses Located in Koreatown	% of Total Business
Boutiques	67	37	55.2
Korean Restaurants	231	100	43.3
Night Clubs	90	43	47.8
Oriental Grocery Stores	113	27	23.9
Korean Bakery	29	20	70.0
Accounting Services	109	82	75.2
Medical Services	424	110	25.9
Law Firms	69	40	58.0
Insurance	49	29	59.2
Real Estate	114	42	36.8
Beauty Salons	141	59	41.8
Barber Shops	15	11	73.3
Travel Agencies	64	48	75.0
Video Shops	64	28	43.8
Recreational Centers	23	16	69.6
Ethnic Newspapers and Magazines	32	20	62.5
Ethnic Book Stores	32	15	46.9
Oriental Herbs & Acupuncture	130	69	53.1
Fortunetellers	17	10	58.8
Total	1,813	806	44.5

Sources: Keys Advertisement and Printing Company, The Korean Directory of Southern California, 1986-87.

TABLE 7: LOS ANGELES KOREANS IMMIGRANTS SELF-EMPLOYMENT RATE AND ECONOMIC SEGREGATION BY SEX

	Male Respondents		Female Respondents		Total Respondents		Respondents, Spouses & Others	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Self-Employed	179	53.0	57	35.8	236	47.5	374	45.1
Employed in Ethnic Firms	88	26.0	49	30.8	137	27.6	248	29.9
Employed in Non-Ethnic Firms	71	21.0	53	33.3	124	24.9	207	25.0
Total	338	100.0	159	100.0	497	100.0	829	100.0

Sources: The 1986 Survey of Koreans in Los Angeles by this investigator

TABLE 8: CLASSIFICATION OF KOREAN BUSINESSES IN LOS ANGELES

Business Lines	N	%
Trade of Wigs and Other Fashion Items	44	14.8
Professional Businesses	38	12.8
Restaurants & Related Businesses	32	10.8
Grocery & Liquor Stores	31	10.4
Gas Stations	29	9.8
Garment Factories	16	5.4
Maintenance	13	4.4
House Painting	11	3.7
Others	83	27.9
Total	297	100.0

Sources: The 1986 Survey of Koreans in Los Angeles by this investigator

TABLE 9: FAMILY INCOME BY SELF-EMPLOYMENT STATUS

Annual Family Income	Self-Employed N	%	Employed N	%	Total N	%
Below $25,000	47	19.4	108	36.7	155	28.9
$25,000-49,999	90	37.2	127	43.2	217	40.5
$50,000 or More	105	43.4	59	20.1	164	30.6

$x^2 = 39.032$ $p < 0.001$

Sources: The 1986 Survey of Koreans in Los Angeles by this investigator

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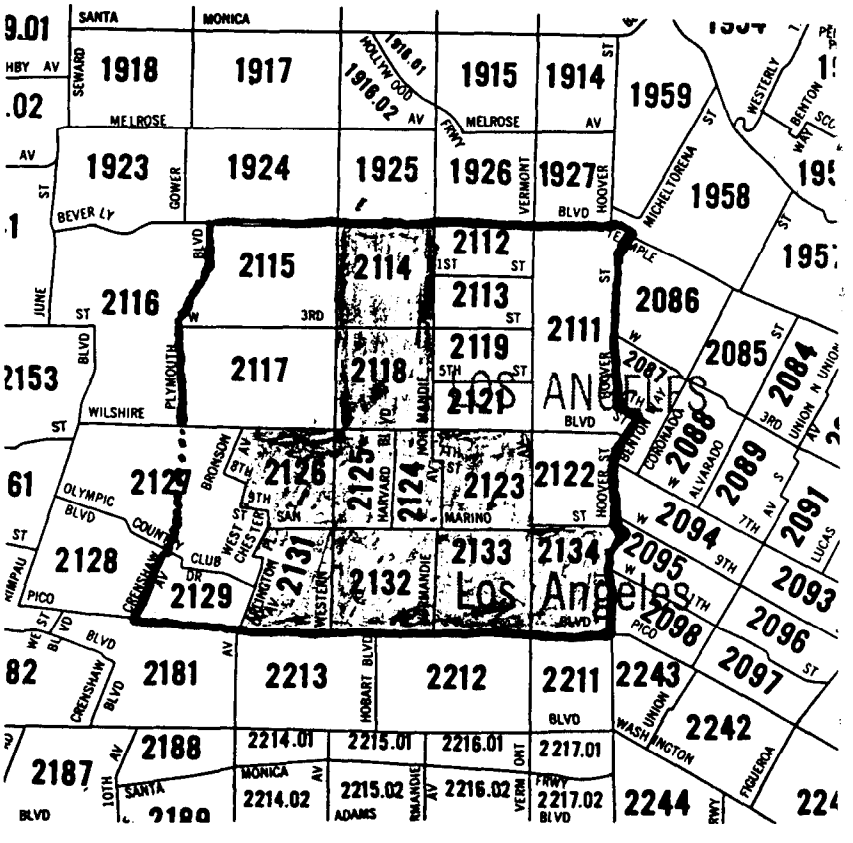
TABLE 4: REASONS FOR CHOOSING LA
AS THE PLACE OF RESIDENCE

Reasons	N	%
Relatives and Friends	265	47.7
Availability of Jobs	91	16.4
Family Union	75	13.5
Mild Weather	38	6.8
Many Koreans Live in the City	34	6.1
Convenient for College Education	23	4.1
Others	29	5.2
Total	555	100.0

Sources: The 1986 Survey of Koreans in Los Angeles by this investigator

MAP 1: CENSUS TRACTS FOR KOREATOWN



The square-shaped area is Koreatown, and the shaded area is Koreatown Core.

Sources: Adjusted from 1980 Census of Population and Housing, Census Tracts, Los Angeles-Long Beach, California, PH 80-2-226, Table P-7

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