Chapter 9

THE KOREANS

BACKGROUND

In 1970, there were an estimated 70,000 Korean residents of the United States; by 1980, the population had grown to 357,393; and the 1990 census indicates a total of 789,849. This growth is almost entirely due to immigration, meaning that Korean Americans are primarily a first-generation group. However, unlike the early Chinese, Japanese, and Filipinos, Korean immigrants often arrived in family groups, so even though all of the individuals were born in Korea, the family may have included infants, adolescents, and young adults along with the father and mother. As a consequence, intergenerational differences in terms of acculturation, identity, language facility and coming to grips with the dominant culture have an immediacy that was delayed for the older Asian groups. Parents, barely arrived in the United States, have sent their children to American schools and have been faced with the question of differences between their traditional ways and the norms of the new culture. The Chinese and the Japanese old-timers faced these issues much later—the early Japanese immigrant was a single male who sent for a wife from the old country after several years in the United States and whose children were then American born; the Chinese male immigrant remained even more isolated for many years. Therefore, whereas generational terms are meaningful for Japanese Americans, for Koreans they have a different connotation. An individual may have been born in Korea as an Issei, or first generation, but his arrival may have been as an infant or small child so that his socialization may be more like the Nisei or second generation. The difference is important enough so that terms such as "knee high," or 1.5 generation, have been used to identify this generation. Another factor compounding the difficulty of classification is the relative ease of flying to and from Korea, so that there is a constant movement between the two countries. In addition, Koreans from South and Central America are a part of the mix.

The following structure is not unusual in the current community: father and mother, born in Korea, following traditional, old-country patterns; eldest daughter, arriving with a Korean high school diploma, being more Korean than American; second daughter finishing high school in America and having more American than Korean ways; and youngest son, having gone through his entire schooling in the United States, being almost thoroughly American. But acculturation is seldom linear and predictable; parents may selectively adopt American ways, and the almost completely Americanized youngster may hold onto some old-country values. The mixture, referred to as *culture conflict*, can cause considerable discord within families.

KOREAN IMMIGRATION

There are a variety of ways of describing Korean immigration to the United States. One way is to view it in terms of waves, although only the current flow is large enough to warrant such a description. Korean political exiles were living in the United States as early as 1885,[1] but the first significant influx, albeit just a trickle, was to Hawaii (1903–1905); the second migration came after the Korean War (1950–1953); and the current immigration, which is still in progress, was the result of the 1965 Immigration Act. Each group of newcomers differed in demographic characteristics, the conditions surrounding their migration, and the kind of America they entered. Consequently, their adaptation and their experiences in America were different.

Background

Modern Korean history reflects the influence of three powerful neighbors—China, Japan, and Russia—and Korea's strategic location in proximity to them. The three countries struggled over who should have the most influence over Korea. China dominated Korea as a tributary state until 1868, when Meiji Japan began to contest her influence. China's defeat in the Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895) led to the Japanese replacing the Chinese overlords. Japan's aggressive policies drove Korea to appeal to other foreign powers who could serve to limit Japanese aggression, and this led to relationships with Russia and the United States.

American diplomatic relations with Korea started in 1882 with the Korean-American Treaty at Chemulpo (now Inchon). The treaty, also known as the Treaty of Amity and Commerce, called for free traffic between the two nations, including the permission for Koreans to reside, rent homes, and purchase land in America. Very few Koreans took the opportunity to come to the United States during this period.

Internal and international events soon led to the initial immigration of Koreans to Hawaii. In 1894 the Tonghak Rebellion, basically an antimodern revolt much like the Boxer Rebellion in China, failed because of the lack of unity and discipline. The rebellion served as a catalyst for the Sino-Japanese War, which was fought on the Korean peninsula. China's defeat gave Korea political independence but in essence conceded the country to Japan. From 1895 to 1905, Russia and Japan struggled over who should "protect" Korea; the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905) saw Russia defeated, and in the Treaty of Portsmouth (1905), Russia recognized Japanese power over the nation. Japan annexed Korea in 1910.[2]

Hyung-chan Kim views the treaty with the United States and the two wars as the main spurs to Korean emigration to America.[3] Korea had earlier been known as the "hermit kingdom" because of the reluctance of its subjects to travel out of their country. However, the wars uprooted a large number of Koreans, forcing many to move to port cities in search of employment, which was scarce, and the treaty with the United States signaled a possible opportunity in a new land.

The First Wave

Hawaii was a natural target for the immigrants. Hawaiian sugar planters wanted to replace Chinese and Japanese laborers—especially the Japanese, who had become militant in their demands for better treatment. However, Wayne Patterson notes that the first proposal to import Korean labor was denied and that it took seven years, until 1903, for the first Korean laborers to arrive in Hawaii.[4] But in the next two years, 7,266 Koreans arrived in Hawaii, and another, 1,033 went to Mexico.[5]

The immediate trigger for emigration was a severe famine, bolstered by such additional factors as an epidemic of cholera, heavy taxes, and government corruption. The exodus was not solely to the New World; Koreans went to Manchuria, Japan, and Russia as well.

Although the first Korean immigrants to Hawaii were primarily from the lower classes, very few were peasants. The Korean peasant was very conservative—upholding Confucian tradition and staying on the land were high priorities, to the point that immigration was viewed as unthinkable and even immoral.[6] A goodly number of the immigrants had been converted to Christianity before they left Korea.

Life in early Hawaii was not easy, especially for women. One writer describes poverty, frustration, and less than human treatment.[7] Typical jobs were farm laborer, tenant farmer, cook, janitor, and launderer.

The migrants were neither integrated nor assimilated; plantation life was characterized by racial and ethnic segregation, hard work, low wages, and minimal contact with other groups. Interaction was further limited by language and cultural differences and a sojourner's orientation. There was no pressing need to think about entering the mainstream or cooperating with other groups. However, after Korea was formally annexed by Japan in 1910, there was no home country to which the migrants could return. The Japanese also prevented Koreans from leaving their country, so the number of Koreans in America remained static. Even though most early Korean newcomers arrived in Hawaii with a weak national identity, life in a strange land and the takeover of their homeland by Japan led many to adopt a strong nationalism.

One consequence was that emotional attachment to Korea became very strong. The immigrants started Korean-language schools in 1905, and their children were taught Korean values, customs, history, and geography as well. They also set up churches and patriotic societies, including military training centers to support Korean independence movements and an end to Japanese rule. They followed a government-in-exile model, putting the emphasis on military training and retaining old-country ways until such time as they could return to liberate their country from foreign domination.

It might be expected that a small group, cut off from the country of origin and unable either to go back or to be replenished by new immigration, would soon disappear as a distinctive entity. But just as in the case of the Japanese immigrants, the Koreans resorted to "importing" wives ("picture brides") from Korea, permitting family life for some and the beginning of an American-born generation. But the number of Koreans was very small; in 1930, they constituted only 1.8 percent (6,461) of the entire Hawaiian population of 347,799. Yet Adams reported that only 104 Korean males married non-Koreans in the period from 1912 to 1924.[8] Higher rates of exogamy would occur several generations later.

Details of the adaptation of the descendants of the early Korean immigrants to Hawaii are revealing. Factors such as small numbers, the lack of a cohesive community after the demise of the independence movements, acculturation, and the pull of the Hawaiian melting pot all had an effect. Harvey and Chung report that in addition to these factors, Koreans placed a high value on becoming American, being well educated, and entering the professions.[9] As a consequence, the children and grandchildren of the initial immigrant group have one of the highest interethnic marriage rates in Hawaii. Between 1960 and 1968, 80 percent of the Koreans married non-Koreans, compared to the 40 percent outmarriage rate for Hawaii's other ethnic groups during the same period. Korean brides generally chose

Caucasian grooms, whereas Korean husbands chose Japanese wives. The outmarriage rate rose even higher, to 90 percent, in the 1970s.[10]

But the rapid move toward acculturation and assimilation into the Hawaiian mainstream has not been without cost. High rates of separation and divorce, psychological problems, and other dysfunctional symptoms have been reported. The course of experience of Korean immigrants in Hawaii between 1903 and 1945 can be summarized as follows: political preoccupation, Christianity and the Christian churches, importation of brides, birth of a second generation, ethnic dormancy, rapid acculturation, and rising rates of outmarriage.[11]

A smaller group of Koreans migrated to the U.S. mainland; the 1930 census showed fewer than 2,000 in California. The irony of their situation—coming from Korea, which had been subsequently taken over by Japan; organizing to free Korea from Japanese rule; and yet being officially represented by the Japanese government—is seen in an incident described by Eunsik Yang. In 1913 a group of Korean laborers was attacked in Hemet Valley, California, by a white mob that had mistaken them for Japanese. The Japanese consul general in Los Angeles stepped in to protect the Koreans and asked for compensation on behalf of "their nationals," an offer that was rejected by the Koreans because they questioned the authority of the Japanese government.[12]

The assassination of Durham Stevens in 1908 further illustrated the feelings of Koreans about their relationship with Japan. Stevens, who had been appointed as adviser to the Foreign Affairs Department of the Korean government, made a number of statements that were printed in the *San Francisco Chronicle*. His points were (1) that Koreans had been exploited and corrupted by their own officials, (2) that they were illiterate and backward, (3) that if not for Japanese protection, they would be under Russian domination, and (4) that under the present Japanese resident general, they were happy and enjoyed life in every respect.

The Koreans in San Francisco were outraged over these remarks. Stevens was attacked by several Koreans and died two days later. Chang In-hwan was charged with the murder, was sentenced to serve twenty-five years in prison, and was released in 1919. He died in 1930, and in 1975 his corpse was flown to Seoul, where he lies as a patriot in the national cemetery.[13]

There were also a small but important number of Korean students and political exiles who emigrated to the United States. Many of them were from the upper classes and were admitted without passports because the American government sympathized with the plight of anti-Japanese Koreans who could not go back to their homes without fear of persecution. Nowadays they would be classified as refugees.

Probably the best known of these exiles was Syngman Rhee.[14] A controversial figure in the Korean American community, Rhee was nevertheless able to establish a base of support that gave him prominence and a position of leadership. After the defeat of Japan, the gaining of Korean independence, and the split between north and south, Rhee was elected the first president of South Korea in 1948. He had influential American supporters, including General Douglas MacArthur and other U.S. military authorities, who saw in Rhee a staunch conservative and a militant anticommunist. But Rhee's rule was wracked with problems, and he was forced from office in 1960. One writer observed, "Rhee's police state fell because of official corruption, favoritism, political oppression and fraudulent elections. . . . practiced in the name of patriotism and in the guise of anti-communism."[15]

The Second Wave

The second group of Koreans, who came between 1951 and 1964, was a heterogeneous one, consisting of wives of American servicemen (the Korean War took place in 1950–1953), war orphans, and students.

It is perhaps too easy to forget the destructiveness of the Korean War. The popular movie and TV series *M*A*S*H* merely hinted at the ugliness of the conflict; a more telling account by Choon Soon Kim indicated that destruction and disease were widespread.[16] There were an estimated 1 million civilian and 300,000 military casualties. On the civilian side in South Korea alone, the war was responsible for 300,000 widows, 230,000 wounded, 330,000 permanently handicapped, 100,000 orphans, and 1 million cases of tuberculosis. It is reasonable to assume that figures for North Korea were similar.

A total of 28,205 Korean "war brides" arrived in the United States between 1950 and 1975. Few studies are available on this generally invisible minority. They integrated and assimilated before they acculturated, and since most followed their husbands, they could be found throughout the United States. Many could be found clustered around army bases; one author remembers being greeted by a group of Korean wives at an isolated army base at Fort Huachuca, Arizona.

In one of the few studies made, Bok-Lim Kim evaluated the adjustment of Korean wives of American servicemen and noted some of their problems.[17] They suffered from culture shock, lack of education, isolation, problems of communication, and general alienation. Kim notes that some marriages were happy, but there were also cases of physical abuse, suicide, and attempted suicide, and the divorce rate among these couples was high. The wives were marginal, both to the dominant community and to the Korean community, and the high incidence of social problems may be attributed to that marginality.

Even less is known about Korean war orphans. Hurh and Kim, citing various sources, indicated that in 1950 some 24,945 children were institutionalized in Korean orphanages. Of these, 6,293 were adopted in the United States, mostly through the Holt Adoption Agency, between 1955 and 1966. Roughly 46 percent had white fathers, 41 percent were full Koreans, and the rest were black Koreans.[18]

Dong Kim conducted a nationwide study of adopted Korean adolescents. In general, they were place in white, middle-class, Protestant families in rural and small communities. Religious and humanitarian reasons were given as primary motives for adoption, and family relations were deemed as supportive. The children were reported to have healthy self-concepts, and the adoptions were generally considered successful.[19]

However, in a later report, the problem of racial differences was observed.[20] Although all of these children's surroundings and inputs were typically American, their physical characteristics set them aside from the mainstream. The adoptees were seen as Asian, yet they were almost totally cut off from their native contacts and culture. The implications of this "dual identity" with minimal ethnic support may be a cause of future problems.

The last group in the second wave consisted of a relatively large number of Korean students who came to the United States between 1945 and 1965. An estimated 5,000 are still in the country today, yet almost nothing is known about them. Questions as to how many went back, how many changed their resident status, how many married and whom they married, and how well those who stayed adapted remain topics for future research.

The Third Wave

The third wave was a result of the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965, and the Korean migration still continues. For the first time in American immigration history, flows from Asian nations have exceeded those from European countries. For example, in 1965, the three countries outside of the western hemisphere that sent the most immigrants were the United Kingdom, Germany, and Italy; in 1975, the three main countries of origin were the Philippines, Korea, and China. The Korean share of the total U.S. immigration rose from 0.7 percent to 3.8 percent between 1969 and 1973.

However, note that the number of Koreans living in other parts of the world is much higher. An estimated 1,255,000 Korean residents were living in Manchuria (northern China) in 1961, approximately 600,000 are residents of Japan, and a large but unknown number are living in central Asia (Russia). The United States is home to the second-largest community of Koreans abroad.[21]

The current immigration is family-oriented and includes a large proportion of housewives and children. It is a highly educated group and differs from earlier Korean immigrants in that most live in the cities. They are arriving at a time when ethnic and racial groups are asserting their identities, and there has been a shift in the American ethos away from monolithic assimilation and toward ethnic and cultural pluralism.

Researchers conducted interviews with a sample of U.S. visa applicants in Seoul in 1986. The majority anticipated some racial discrimination, as well as problems related to their limited English proficiency. They expected little improvement in their economic status in the short run but expected to do well over the longer term. They were prepared to work hard and felt that their efforts would eventually be rewarded. The three aspects favoring the United States over Korea were higher wages, rewards for hard work and ability, and a more favorable political environment.[22]

It is too soon to detail the pattern of adjustment of these Korean newcomers, although several trends are clear, among them expectations of economic success in the majority culture, retention of aspects of Korean culture, rapid flight to more desirable housing in the suburbs, and the development of ethnic business districts. Other expectations include permanent residence, a good education for their children, and the acquisition of American citizenship.[23]

Major barriers to participation in the mainstream include lack of familiarity with American society and the language handicap. In this the Koreans are not unique; almost all immigrants have had to deal with these differences.

In summary, the present-day Korean immigrant is contending with a multitude of issues, including cultural and linguistic differences, parent–child stresses, changes in roles, conflicts in norms and values, achieving a healthy identity in a predominantly white society, and varied levels of acceptance by both the majority and other minorities already living here.

OCCUPATIONAL ADJUSTMENT

Occupational adjustment for the new immigrant generally means downward mobility (very few are able to find jobs of equal status), segregation from the mainstream (the small businesses are generally in "Koreatowns" or other minority areas), and general isolation from the white community. Many are in the small-business sector, which means working long hours, weekends, and holidays. There is a constant struggle to lower labor costs to survive, and the struggle can lead to poor work conditions and to the use of family, extended family, and relatives.[24]

An interview with a Korean student at UCLA demonstrates the family business model. The student cannot remember a single time when his parents closed their small market for a full day—even Christmas and other holidays. Only during the Los Angeles riot of 1992 was the store closed—involuntarily. The student remembers working Saturdays and Sundays at the market and admits, "Whereas most people loved three-day weekends, I just dreaded them. That just meant another day at the store."[25]

For many young Koreans, the weekend was not for swimming, going to the beach, and relaxing—it meant another two days at the store. They envied youngsters who had time to study and to play and even families in which the parents held 9-to-5 jobs and had free evenings and weekends.

Many of the small-business enterprises are run by immigrants with solid educational or professional backgrounds whose difficulties with English have forced them to take a different path. They may start by taking menial jobs, scrimping and saving enough to buy a gas station, liquor store, convenience market, or laundromat. Stores that sell wigs and mom-and-pop groceries are also popular. According to a survey by the Korean Chamber of Commerce of Southern California, there were about 7,000 Korean-owned businesses in Los Angeles County in 1984.[26]

Although the Korean business community in Los Angeles is located in an area that is at least half Latino and only 12 percent Korean, it serves as the hub of the ethnic community. Here the Koreans—newcomers, elderly, oldtimers, and young—can find ethnic food and ethnic stores, run into old friends and meet new ones, and (perhaps most refreshing of all) not have to understand English.

However, there are growing concerns about the unrestrained growth of Koreatowns. Zoning regulations, the need to attract non-Korean clientele, ethnic segregation, the proliferation of shopping centers, inadequate parking, and such matters have had an effect on Korean business. One Korean leader commented on the need to funnel the energy and vitality of his group toward a better-planned and more orderly development. Perhaps, as the immigrants obtain citizenship and participate in the political process, a more sophisticated Koreatown may develop.[27]

Hurh and Kim report that the majority of Koreans employed in non–small-business occupations worked in segregated workplaces under unfavorable conditions.[28] Past skills and education may not be as important as how immigrants are integrated into the workplace and may be indicative of the split labor market facing many nonwhite immigrants. Such a market differentiates between jobs that provide adequate pay and chances for upward mobility and jobs that are lower paying and lead basically nowhere. Minorities are often stuck in the latter positions.[29]

Min, discussing ethnic enterprise, indicates that Korean immigrants possessed the same three factors—hard work and frugality, strong family and kinship ties, and group solidarity—as the earlier Chinese and Japanese immigrants. However, the Koreans may have a more individualistic outlook than the group-oriented Chinese and Japanese. Other factors pushing Koreans to the small-business sector include lack of opportunities in white-collar jobs and the perception that it was easier to start a small business in the United States than in Korea.[30]

Perhaps the greatest change for the newcomers is the ease of female and youth employment. Families that in Korea would never think of wives and children working now find that such opportunities, though low paying, are readily available. In some instances, wives and children find employment more easily than husbands and other male adults. The effect on family dynamics can be stressful. The temptation to make money is difficult to re-

strain, and problems of child care, latchkey children, and obsession with earning a living are difficult to avoid.

LOS ANGELES RIOT OF 1992

The uneasy relationship between Korean small businesses, primarily in southeast Los Angeles, and the surrounding black community exploded when a jury found four police officers not guilty of violating the civil rights of black beating victim Rodney King. The rioting and looting that erupted made Korean stores special targets. The media were especially provocative, repeatedly featuring images of armed Koreans guarding their stores. The impression at times was of armed conflict between Korean shopowners and the surrounding neighborhood. The aftermath of the riot left destruction, despair, feelings of hopelessness, and divisive intergroup tensions.

The effects of the riot were still being felt by the Korean community nearly a year later. More than half of the victims showed symptoms of post-traumatic stress, nearly half felt hopeless about the future, and only three out of ten had reopened their businesses.

Riot victims complained of nightmares, depression, anxiety, and fear. Ulcers, poor appetite, domestic violence, and child abuse were blamed on the riot. The Koreans felt that they had been victimized by the rioters and then again by an insensitive American bureaucracy when they sought government assistance.[31]

The movie *Falling Down* added to the Korean's problems. Jeana Park, executive director of Korean Americans for Justice, commented on the scene in which star Michael Douglas confronts a Korean store owner, accuses the man of taking his money yet lacking the grace to learn English, and then smashes the merchandise with a baseball bat. Particularly galling was the remark of a friend who asked Park whether the outcome would have been different if the store owner had been "an American." Park wanted to scream that the store owner *was* an American and had a rightful place in American society.[32]

Park also mentioned the case of Soon Ja Du, a Korean store owner, who shot and killed Latasha Harlins, a black teenager. The store owner thought that the youngster was leaving her store without paying; the subsequent trial and very light sentence added to the tension between the two communities.

THE CHRISTIAN CHURCHES

One of the unique characteristics of the Korean immigration has been the role of the Christian churches. Catholicism was introduced into Korea through China as early as 1784 but was banned soon after—the ruling class

considered the new religion dangerous because it challenged the Confucian system of loyalties and ancestor worship that underpinned its rule.[33]

American influence began in 1884 when the Presbyterian Board of Missions sent a representative to Korea. During the Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895), missionaries devoted time and effort to alleviating the suffering of people caught in the conflict, and that unselfish devotion endeared them to the natives. Many Koreans adopted the Christian faith.

Adopting Christianity was also a means of identifying with and gaining foreign protection. Later it was also associated with a growing nationalism and an anti-Japanese stance. Even today, political resistance in Korea is often associated with the church communities. American missionaries were influential in persuading the first group of immigrants to go to Hawaii. The proportion of the early immigrants to Hawaii who were Christians or who later converted to the faith was large. One expert estimates that there were thirty-nine churches and 2,800 Christians in the period between 1903 and 1918 when the total Korean population was about 8,000. He hypothesizes several reasons for the strength of the church: It provided a group tie that was lacking in the community; the adherence to Christianity was a means of gaining sympathy from the white community; it served as a social outlet; and there were group pressures to belong.[34]

The churches also played several other roles for the first group of immigrants to Hawaii. They were active in the Korean independence movement and were also important in maintaining cultural traditions. They sponsored language schools, taught Korean history, and served as centers for recreational and social activities. They were pluralistic structures; membership was almost exclusively Korean, even though the religious practices were drawn from Anglo-European theology.

The Christian church continues to play an active role in the presentday Korean community. In southern California the number of Korean churches increased from 11 in 1965 to 215 in 1979. The results of a survey of religion indicated that 10 percent of Koreans were Catholic and the rest Protestant. Presbyterians were by far the most numerous denomination. The number of Buddhists was too small to be analyzed.[35]

Many of the reasons for the continued strength of the Christian churches in the Korean community have not changed. They provide for many needs—religious involvement, identity, and a resource for newly arrived immigrants. They also serve as a place for meeting people, obtaining peace of mind, and achieving self-improvement. But there are also some negatives—too much gossip, self-interest, schisms and conflict, and the constant solicitation of money.[36]

The Korean churches are central to the Korean community. It will be interesting to follow their development as acculturation and new opportunities arise. Will they remain separated from the dominant community, or will there be integration, especially as housing and other patterns of the ethnic community change?

The experience of the Japanese Christian churches in America may be instructive. The Japanese churches began as exclusively ethnic—services were held in Japanese in all Issei congregations. English-speaking services were introduced as the American-born generations began to take part—the church remained ethnic but served both Japanese and English groups.

Questions about the viability of the ethnic church are now being heard, with issues of integration and pluralism as focal points of discussion. But constant replenishment from the old country has not been a factor for Japanese Americans, so the outcomes for the Korean community may be different.

Also important will be the mobility of the ministry of the ethnic church. Will Korean clergy rise to positions of power and serve on the decision-making bodies of the host churches, or will they remain auxiliaries, outside the mainstream?

FAMILY AND KINSHIP TIES

Korean immigrant groups have always featured family, extended family, and other kinship ties. It is not unusual for former elementary school children in Korea to be reunited with schoolmates several decades later in Los Angeles, just as aunts, uncles, nephews, and nieces form extended family units in the new country.

The Koreans come from a "traditional culture," where tasks and roles were clearly defined. Wives were expected to stay at home and to bear responsibility for household tasks, while the husband served as the breadwinner. The husband was the final authority and had the power to enforce his decisions. Children were expected to be obedient and to defer to parental wishes.

Hurh and Kim studied family role expectations in Korean American families and found that even though many wives worked, the great majority of both wives and husbands adhered to the traditional role patterns brought over from the old country.[37] A substantial proportion of husbands did not perform household chores, even if their wives were employed. Explanations for the persistence of the traditional division of household tasks included past strong socialization to male-female roles, the relative isolation of most Koreans to American influences, the continued strong influences of traditional families, the long work hours of Korean husbands, and financial pressures. The authors concluded that given the present-day realities of most Korean families, the traditional roles of males and females have not been drastically altered. However, in interracial marriages, one common re-

sponse of Korean females, as well as other Asian females, was that they did not wish to marry males who expected them to behave in traditional female pattern. They expected more egalitarian roles and had to look outside of the Asian community for such partners.

The most visible changes in family life center around children. The younger the child, the more likely he or she is to be influenced by the American culture. Going to an American school leads to acculturation, especially if the child attends an integrated school, where his or her ethnic group is in the minority, as has been the case for Korean children in America.

Bok-Lim Kim studied the adjustment of Korean schoolchildren to American schools in Chicago and Los Angeles and found a surprising amount of similarity between the two sites. The children reported a variety of difficulties in school, including reading, spelling, and mathematics, but almost 20 percent indicated that American schools were easy. Some children had encountered racial discrimination, which in part came from their inability to handle the English language. They showed a relatively strong identification with facets of the Korean culture; Korean food and a desire to visit the ancestral homeland were popular.[38]

Acculturation, especially if rapid, can lead to conflict with parents. Dress and hairstyles, music, dancing, movies, and other seemingly superficial aspects of a culture can lead to misunderstandings, raised voices, and a gulf between parent and child. Issues involving differences in values, clashing norms, and changing family roles remain as deeper problems.

A study conducted by the United Way in Los Angeles addressed some of the problems and social service needs of the Korean community.[39] It noted that Western-based value systems, based on individuality, autonomy, and competition, were in conflict with the old Korean ways of family-centeredness, interdependence, and harmony. Underemployment and intergenerational problems were also causes of concern.

The most pressing problem was language. Other common concerns were unemployment, health, services for youth, and the lack of adequate social services to meet the needs of newly arrived immigrants.

GEOGRAPHIC ADAPTATION

Although the majority of Koreans have settled in urban areas such as Chicago, New York City, and especially Los Angeles, they are, after the Asian Indians, the most dispersed Asian group in terms of geographic distribution. Part of the spread is related to job opportunities—at academic meetings, it is not unusual to run into Korean colleagues who are teaching in Iowa, Virginia, Georgia, and other states that have small Asian populations. Many of them are Korean-born and of the first generation, for whom matters of acceptance, isolation, ethnic concerns, and the socialization of

their children have yet to be studied. The general wisdom is that Korean living outside of popular ethnic settlements will acculturate and integrate at a faster rate than those with many ethnic neighbors.

Michael Seipel studied the social integration patterns of Koreans in upstate New York. He noted that although they belonged to the Korean church and other ethnic organizations, they also belonged to a large number of nonethnic organizations. Most of these outside organizations were job-related; Koreans were absent in civic, political, and labor organizations. Most significant, none of the respondents held membership in organizations that represented leadership or power. Therefore, he concluded that although there is an impressive participation of Koreans in both ethnic and nonethnic organizations, the data can be misleading in that they are affiliated with organizations with only marginal community influence.[40]

One facet of Korean immigration is that although Los Angeles remains the biggest draw, Koreans have spread to other parts of the country. For example, Pan and Pae write about how the Korean immigrant community has flourished in Annandale, close to Washington, DC. There is a Koryo Bakery, a video store with Korean movies; there is the Jin Sung Garden Korean Barbecue restaurant, and a teenage group hunting for a Korean rap group's newest release. One immigrant responded that it was just like Korea—one could survive without a single word of English.[41] Similar remarks can be heard in Korean communities as far apart as Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York.

Koreans have developed the greengrocer image in New York City. Marketing fresh fruits and vegetables in an attractive fashion means long hours and the use of family labor in order to make a decent living. Park describes the business as a fresh breeze for single New Yorkers who do not have to travel to supermarkets for their fresh produce.[42]

The Washington, DC area's first Koreatown, called *hanin-town* by Koreans, is in Fairfax County. It is the home of dozens of Korean American lawyers, doctors, computer programmers, and other professionals; there are also twenty-seven Korean restaurants, nineteen Korean churches, sixteen beauty salons, ten weekly newspapers, nine acupuncturists, as well as clothing stores, cafes, and karaoke clubs. The Korean population in 1999 in the Fairfax County area was over 100,000, which made it the second most populous immigrant community after the Salvadorans. It was noted that area also has a large Chinese community as well as Asian Indians, Vietnamese, and Filipinos.[43]

Longtime white residents have mixed views about the demographic changes. Some welcome the new burst of economic opportunity, but others grumble about the changes, claiming that Korean businesses aren't doing enough to serve non-Koreans. This again is a familiar refrain in Los Angeles and other areas where Koreans, as well as other minorities, have gathered. But previous Asian groups have gone through similar experiences and time,

acculturation, accommodation, and hard work have tended to result towards relatively peaceful resolutions.

CURRENT ISSUES

There are a number of issues facing the Korean population. Culture conflict between the old and new is a problem for most immigrant groups, especially in terms of male and female roles. The Confucian model is vertically structured with males on top, and the exposure to modern feminism can strain the traditional male-female roles, which may often erupt in domestic violence.

The Korean small business structure can be viewed from a middleman perspective. The businesses are caught in the middle between the white power structure and black customers. It is difficult to survive under the conflicting demands of both groups, and it is easy to become the target of scapegoating from all sides, including young Asian American activists.

Kim emphasizes that Koreans should be studied in a variety of locations in order to identify similarities and differences, or to put it into modern vernacular, Koreans in their own "hood." The young Korean growing up in New York will probably reflect the East Coast ambience compared to his peer growing up in Fresno, San Francisco, or Los Angeles. The family who first immigrated to South America will certainly bring a different experience from those who came to the United States directly.[44]

There is an interesting story concerning white-collar, middle-class Koreans, desperate to immigrate to the United States, paying as much as $30,000 each to work in chicken plants on the Eastern shore. If they are hired, they receive permanent U.S. residency for themselves and their families under a federal program designed to fill unskilled jobs. For some, it is the only legal means of coming to the United States. It is interesting to note that during World War II, Japanese Americans found jobs outside the concentration camps as chick sexers because of their ability to identify male and female chicks. Chickens have apparently played an important role for these two Asian groups.

A study by Miller, Sung, and Seligman studied the relationship of beliefs and Korean immigrant success. The findings indicate that success as defined as educational and financial attainment is associated with "work optimism," the belief that in the United States reward is proportional to choice and the ability to improve.[45] The idea that hard work, dedication, and effort reminds us of old-fashioned, traditional values and it will be interesting to see how long these values will remain in the 1.5 and future generations of Korean Americans.

One problem is that of Korean gang members robbing new immigrants. A newspaper report indicates that gang members are terrorizing

Korean business owners and residents in New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut. Authorities speculate that the bandits had carefully chosen their targets, deciding on houses occupied by Korean immigrants who spoke little English, and were isolated from neighbors.[46]

At the present time, the Koreans represent one of the more unusual groups in terms of marital assimilation. We will present data in Chapter 12; while Koreans are very low in marital assimilation, some Asian groups are assimilating at a higher rate.

SUMMARY

The three waves of Korean immigrants entered America with different motivations, populations, and resources, and the reception they received from the American society was likewise different. The first wave was numerically small—mostly single males, brought to work on Hawaiian plantations. They lived segregated existences, enforced by the American and Hawaiian oligarchy; they developed their own organizations, especially the Christian church. Expectations of returning to their homelands evaporated when the Japanese took over their country in 1910. The immigrants then turned their time, money, and energy toward the day when they could reconquer their homeland. They experienced little acculturation or integration into the Hawaiian society. The importation of "picture brides" meant the start of family life for some.

Their children and the following generations paint a more familiar immigrant picture. These Korean Americans moved away from the plantation. Many were not interested in freeing Korea; more pressing goals were acculturation, education, and job mobility. The boundaries between Hawaii's various ethnic and racial groups were open; in the absence of the social control and enforcement of a strong ethnic community, acculturation, integration, and intermarriage took place.

It is interesting to meet some of the descendants of the first wave. One such man has a Korean surname but an Anglo first name. He is a Los Angeles lawyer, the graduate of a prestigious mainland university, and can trace his background to the early arrivals. He is married to a Japanese American from Hawaii and, much to the astonishment of Koreans making up the third wave, has little knowledge of the Korean language or culture. Although his story is a rather typical American story—immigration, acculturation, integration, assimilation—it seems surprising to some people because it involves an Asian family rather than a European one.

Little evidence is available about the second wave. These immigrants came one by one—brides and students—so their experiences were much more individual. Some war-bride marriages failed; other such unions turned out successfully. Their children, mostly of mixed blood, have not

come to public attention, so it can be presumed that they have quietly moved into the American mainstream through the usual route of acculturation, integration, and assimilation.

The third wave is the largest, and the migration continues. Although it is too early to make a final judgment, Hurh and Kim postulate an "adhesive adjustment."[47] The term reflects the immigrants' strong and persistent sense of attachment to the Korean culture while adopting some of the ways of the new culture. Bok-Lim Kim makes a similar assessment, using a bilingual, bicultural model.[48] She indicates that Korean parents have no intention of discarding the Korean language and their culture ways, yet at the same time they have a strong sense and positive orientation toward the majority culture. They want their children to learn English, to excel in school, and to become part of the American mainstream. The existence of these two cultural ways can lead to a healthy biculturality; however, it can also lead to marginality, conflict, and alienation.

The most optimistic sign is the America that the migrants of the third wave have entered. They came at a time when immigration laws did not single out Asians as "undesirables," when there was an emphasis on family reunification, equal opportunity, affirmative action, and small-business loans. Legal discrimination has disappeared; establishment of the rights of minorities and the popularity of ethnic pluralism have created a solid base from which to interact with the mainstream.

But as is common with other Asian American groups, there are reminders that life in the United States is not utopia. The Los Angeles riot of 1992 sent a particularly fearsome message—that unresolved economic and racial tensions could translate into violence and destruction. That disastrous event has awakened Korean Americans to the fact that understanding and working with the surrounding communities should have high priority. Eui-Young Yu argues that, in spite of the stresses, strains, problems, and successes, the Koreans of the Los Angeles area appear to be at the stage of community development that is typical of first-generation immigrants.[49]

NOTES

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