

Ethnic Identity among Younger-Generation Korean Americans: A Comparison of Earlier and Later Cohorts*

Pyong Gap Min

Department of Sociology
Queens College and the CUNY Graduate Center

Thomas Chung

The Research Center for Korean Community at Queens College

Abstract

This paper compares the ethnic identity of an earlier (1960s-early 1970s) and a later (1980s-early 1990s) cohort of 1.5- and second-generation Korean Americans. It used personal identity essays by younger-generation Korean Americans as the major data source. The following four factors affect the formation of ethnic identity: (1) retention of ethnic culture, (2) participation in ethnic social networks, (3) linkages to the mother country and the latter's global power and influence, and (4) experiences with racial prejudice and discrimination. There were major changes in these four factors affecting ethnic identity between the earlier period and the later period. As a result of the tremendous increase in the Korean population and the number of Korean ethnic organizations in the United States, younger-generation Korean Americans who grew up in the 1980s and early 1990s retained Korean culture and maintained ethnic social networks more successfully than the earlier cohort. They also maintained stronger linkages to their mother country than the earlier cohort, partially because South Korea exercised a greater global influence in the 1980s and 1990s than it did during the 1970s and 1980s, the earlier cohort's formative years. The Korean community and their home country, South Korea, provided the latter cohort with a more favorable environment for forming their ethnic identity than the earlier cohort. Additionally, the latter cohort encountered a lower level of racial rejection than the earlier cohort. The reduction of racial rejection allowed the later cohort of younger-generation Korean Americans to choose their ethnic identity more voluntarily, with less inner struggle than the earlier cohort. Today's younger-generation Korean-American children and adolescents live in an even more favorable environment for voluntarily forming ethnic identity than the 1980s-early 1990s cohort.

*This paper was presented at the Fourth Annual Conference organized by the Research Center for Korean Community and held at Queens College on April 5 and 6. The theme of the conference was "Second-Generation Korean Experiences in North America."

Introduction

Ethnic identity is a very important topic related to second-generation Asian Americans' adaptations to American society. Since ethnic identity is fluid and not fixed, situational and multiple, we cannot fully understand the formation of 1.5- and second-generation Koreans' ethnic identity using survey data. We need qualitative studies to capture the complexities and changing nature of their ethnic identity. Thus, researchers usually utilize audio-taped personal interviews to study younger-generation Korean and other Asian Americans' ethnic and racial identities (Danico 2006; Kibria 2002; Min 2002; Tuan 1999). Yet, even audio-taped interviews may not be ideal for studying identity formation, because informants need ample time (perhaps two to three hours or even longer) to answer complex questions about how their ethnic identity has changed during different stages of life. As opposed to simple survey questions, informants are more likely to answer these questions more effectively by writing personal identity essays. This paper examines the ethnic identity of younger-generation Korean Americans, largely based on personal narratives written by 1.5- and second-generation Korean young adults.

As will be shown in the following section, the nature and strength of younger-generation Koreans' ethnic identity are largely determined by the following four factors: (1) their retention of Korean culture, (2) their participation in Korean ethnic networks vs. non-Korean ethnic networks, (3) their linkages to their mother country (South Korea) and their perception of the mother country's global power and influence, and (4) their experiences with racial prejudice and discrimination in the United States. The earlier cohort of younger-generation Korean Americans who grew up in the 1960s and early 1970s had far more difficulty in forming their ethnic identity than the later cohort who grew up twenty years later, in the 1980s and early 1990s, for the following two major reasons.

First, the earlier cohort experienced far more difficult and unfavorable circumstances regarding the aforementioned first three factors related to the Korean community and South Korea than the later cohort, especially in terms of positive ethnic identity formation. Second, racial prejudice and discrimination in the United States in the first historical period were more severe and overt than they were in the later period. In the first period (1960s-1970s), the Korean ethnic or Asian racial label was more or less imposed on Korean and other Asian Americans, because the dominant society did not accept them as Americans. However, there was far less racial rejection of Korean and other Asian Americans in the second period (1980s-1990s), thus, younger-generation Korean Americans from the later cohort are more likely to have had positive Korean identities throughout their lives. Moreover, they are more likely to have voluntarily chosen their Korean ethnic identity, as opposed to having it imposed on them by the dominant society.

The above summary suggests that comparing the earlier cohort of younger-generation Korean-American adults with the later cohort will help us to understand more clearly the effects of the aforementioned four factors on their ethnic identity formation. This paper intends to compare two cohorts of 1.5- and second-generation Korean Americans in their identity formation. Researchers use cohort analyses to examine the effects of particular time periods. Since internal and external factors contributing to ethnic and racial identities have gone through major changes since 1965, it is important to make a cohort analysis to highlight the effect of the time period on identity formation. However, though many researchers have examined the formation of ethnic and racial identities among children of post-1965 immigrants (Danico 2006; Kibria 2002; Min 2002; Min and Kim 1999; Tuan 1998), no study has used a cohort analysis. Thus, this study

makes a significant contribution to studies of ethnic and racial identities by using the method of a cohort analysis.

Four Major Factors Affecting Ethnic Identity Formation

As previously indicated, the following four major factors affect the formation of ethnic identity among younger-generation Americans' ethnic and racial identities: (1) their retention of ethnic culture, (2) their social networks with ethnic friends and involvement in ethnic organizations, (3) their linkages to the mother country and perception of the mother country's global power and influence, and (4) their experiences with racial prejudice and discrimination. The first three factors are closely related to the size and influence of the ethnic group in the United States and the mother country. Members of a very small ethnic group with few ethnic institutions have difficulties in preserving their cultural traditions and in maintaining ethnic social networks, thus they have disadvantages in holding strong ethnic identity. Additionally, when the home country or mother country has low visibility or a negative image, members of those particular immigrant/ethnic groups will most likely feel ashamed of their ethnic background and try to hide it. While the first three factors have more to do with the home/mother country of immigrant groups, the last factor is closely related to the host society (in this case, the United States) and its level of racial discrimination and rejection against minority groups.

Retention of Ethnic Culture

Ethnic culture and ethnic social networks, along with ethnic identity, are three major components of ethnicity (Gordon 1964; Yinger 1994: 304). As such, they influence each other.

However, the influence of ethnic culture on ethnic identity seems to be more salient than the reverse. Ethnicity differs from race, class, and gender, in that it is characterized mainly by cultural distinctions—language, dress, food, holidays, customs, values, and beliefs. As Richard Alba (1990: 76) points out, “ethnic groups generally define their uniqueness to other ethnic groups largely through the medium of culture.”

Language is the central component of culture, and as such, it has the strongest effect on integrating members into a particular ethnic group. Yet language is also the first element of the immigrant culture to disappear over generations (Alba 1990: 4; Waters 1990: 116). In Alba’s survey study conducted in the late 1980s, only 16% of his native-born white respondents said that “they actively use a mother tongue, either as a language for conversation or an ethnic garnish when speaking English” (Alba 1990: 94). By virtue of immigrants’ strong transnational ties to their home countries and the U.S. government’s active multicultural policy, children of post-1965 immigrants have more advantages in retaining their mother tongue than earlier white immigrant groups. According to the 2005-2007 American Community Surveys, 34% of native-born Asian Americans were found to use another language (most likely their mother tongue) at home (Kim and Min 2010: 240).

Research shows that ethnic food and ethnic holidays are much easier to maintain over generations than language. Studies show that even intermarriage does not do much to hinder the preservation of ethnic cuisines (Alba 1990: 91). Gans (1979) coined the term *symbolic ethnicity* to indicate the tendency of third- and fourth-generation white ethnic groups to maintain ethnicity without practicing much ethnic culture or participating in ethnic networks. According to him, by the 1970s, most third- and fourth-generation Jewish and Catholic white ethnics had achieved high levels of acculturation and social assimilation, losing much of their ancestral cultures and

moving into non-ethnic primary groups. However, they continued to perceive themselves as ethnics and maintained their ethnic identity mainly through ethnic food and festivals—symbols that required little effort, and rarely interfered with other aspects of their lives.

Religion usually has stronger effects on ethnicity than the home-country culture. But it can have a positive or a negative effect on ethnicity depending upon the level of the association between ethnic culture/identity and religious rituals. When a religion is inseparably linked to the ethnic culture and history, as it is in the case of Judaism for Jews, it can help an ethnic group to sustain their ethnic culture and ethnic identity over many generations (Hammond and Warner 1993; Huntington 1998). Among contemporary immigrant groups, Indian Hindus become another salient example in which religious rituals are inseparably linked to ethnic cultural elements, such as language, food, festivals, and music/dance. Thus, Indian Hindu immigrants in the United States have advantages in preserving their ethnicity through religion (Min 2010). By sharp contrast, Korean Protestantism has not incorporated many Korean cultural elements, such as food, festivals, and other elements of Korean folk culture. Accordingly, Korean Protestant immigrants have difficulty in transmitting their cultural traditions and ethnic identity to the younger generations, though they themselves can enjoy practicing Korean culture in Korean immigrant churches (Min 2010).

Ethnic Social Networks and Participation in Ethnic Organizations

As already pointed out, ethnic social ties and ethnic identity mutually influence each other. Those who maintain close social ties with many co-ethnic members are likely to hold stronger ethnic identity than those who maintain weak social ties. Alternatively, those who preserve strong ethnic identity are more likely to choose co-ethnic members as close friends or

dating partners than those who preserve weak ethnic identity. But the effect of ethnic social ties on ethnic identity is likely to be more common and stronger than the effect of ethnic identity on ethnic social ties. For example, second-generation Koreans who live in Flushing, Queens, a Korean enclave in New York City, are likely to have many close Korean friends. Their strong Korean friendship networks, in turn, are likely to strengthen their ethnic identity. We can consider an opposite situation. A second-generation Korean student attending a predominantly white high school in the South with few Koreans may develop strong Korean ethnic identity partly because of his/her parents' emphasis on his/her Korean background and active practices of Korean culture at home. Additionally, in this hypothetical example of a second-generation Korean living in the southern United States, racial rejection by white students can also contribute to a strong Korean ethnic identity. Nevertheless, the strong Korean ethnic identity is not likely to enhance his/her ethnic friendship networks.

As is clear from the above examples, both group size and the ethnic composition of the neighborhood of one's residence have significant effects on one's ethnic social ties. Second-generation Koreans today have huge advantages over their counterparts in the 1960s and early 1970s for ethnic social networks by virtue of the presence of many potential younger-generation Korean friends in their neighborhoods, churches, schools, and workplaces. Those second-generation Koreans who live in large Korean population centers, like the New York-New Jersey area or parts of southern California, also have advantages for ethnic social networks over those who live in an area with a small number of Korean Americans. Moreover, younger-generation Koreans can maintain ethnic networks through participation in ethnic organizations. Large Korean communities in the United States, such as Los Angeles and New York, have many ethnic organizations in which younger-generation Koreans can participate as staff members, board

members, volunteers, or simply as members of social and religious organizations. The mere participation of younger-generation Koreans in Korean ethnic organizations is likely to strengthen their ethnic identity. But their participation will also have a positive effect on their ethnic identity because it helps them to maintain social networks with other co-ethnic members of particular organizations.

The Linkages to the Homeland and the Latter's Global Power and Influence

The linkage of immigrants and their children to their homeland or “mother country,” and the latter's global influence, closely related to their ethnic culture, also strongly affects the formation of their ethnic identity. The dispersed peoples who live in diasporas against their will always have yearnings to return to their homelands (Tweed 1997). But even the voluntary migrants who left their home countries as adults are usually nostalgic about them. European immigrants in the United States in the early 1900s had difficulty in visiting their homes across the Atlantic Ocean. However, contemporary immigrants in the United States have strong transnational ties to their home countries by virtue of advanced technologies (Glick Schiller et al. 1992; Itzigsohn et al. 1999; Levitt 2001). In terms of the physical proximity to their homelands, Korean and other Asian immigrants have disadvantages for transnational ties to their homelands compared to Latino and Caribbean immigrants. However, they have advantages for transnational ties over Latino and Caribbean immigrants by virtue of having greater class-based resources for using high-tech equipment for communication, such as smart phones, computers, e-mail, and online chatting.

The children of immigrants who were born or grew up in the United States maintain much weaker transnational ties to their motherland than their immigrant parents (Levitt and

Waters 2002). However, they also maintain ties to Korea through different channels. First of all, the vast majority of 1.5- and second-generation Koreans have visited their mother country (South Korea) once or more, with a significant proportion of them having visited three times or more (Min 2012). During their childhood or adolescence, they may have visited Korea accompanied by their parents or through various roots education programs in the Korean community. Also, a significant proportion of them communicate with their relatives and/or friends in Korea frequently without physically visiting Korea, using advanced technologies. Moreover, most younger-generation Korean Americans maintain strong emotional and cultural ties to Korea through watching transnational Korean media. These ties to Korea undoubtedly have positive effects on their Korean ethnic identity.

The power and influence of the home country, separate from their linkages to it, also has a strong effect on the ethnic identity formation of younger-generation Americans. However, researchers who have studied ethnic and racial identities seem to have neglected to pay attention to its importance. When the mother country is perceived as weak and/or invisible, younger-generation children of contemporary immigrants are unlikely to feel proud of it and thus have weak ethnic identity. Alternatively, when their mother country exercises a powerful economic, political, and cultural influence globally, younger-generation children are likely to feel very proud of it and hold stronger ethnic identity. The effect of the global power and influence of the mother country on younger-generation ethnic members is an important issue, especially for younger-generation Koreans, because there has been a remarkable change in the global influence of South Korea over the past two decades.

Racial Prejudice and Discrimination in the Host Society

If retention of ethnic culture and linkages to the homeland are the only sources of ethnic identity, it is likely that most people's ethnic identity will wither away with their inevitable progressive acculturation to American society over generations. Yet African Americans still have strong racial and ethnic identities, although they have lived in the United States for several generations and have lost most of their African cultural repertoire. Patterns of post-migrant adjustment to the host society—especially levels of residential and occupational segregation and experience with prejudice and discrimination—have effects on the development of a particular group's ethnicity as well (Despres 1975; Olzak and Nagel 1986; Yancy et al. 1976). For highly acculturated multigenerational white ethnics who are accepted as authentic Americans, ethnic identity is a matter of personal choice to meet their psychological need to belong to a community (Waters 1990). However, for members of racial minority groups in the United States, no matter how acculturated they are, ethnic and racial identities are imposed on them by societal expectations or social perceptions.

African Americans, in particular, have endured more severe forms of prejudice and discrimination than other minority groups in the United States. Their ethnic and racial identities have been generated almost entirely by structural factors—their settlement in inner-city slums, their concentration in low-paying occupations, and their experiences with racial prejudice and discrimination. As a result, although they have lived in the United States for many generations, African Americans have strong ethnic and racial identities. Ronald Taylor uses the term *ethnogenesis* to refer to African-American ethnicity generated by the structural conditions under which most African Americans have struggled for survival in American cities in the twentieth century.

Asian immigrants in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries encountered many legal barriers and racial violence (Chan 1991; Hing 1993; Takaki 1989). Although Asian Americans are now treated far more favorably than they were fifty years ago, as people of color, they still encounter moderate levels of prejudice and discrimination. Despite the prevalence of the positive image of Asian Americans (Hurh and Kim 1989), many Americans still tend to view them, regardless of their level of acculturation to American society and generation, as “foreigners” or “aliens” who cannot be fully assimilated (Espiritu 1994). Third- and fourth-generation Asian Americans, like multigenerational white Americans, are thoroughly acculturated to American society, far removed from their Asian cultural heritage. Yet, these multigenerational Asian ethnics were forced to accept their ethnic and racial identities because they were not accepted as full American citizens by the dominant society (Tuan 1998).

Typology of Ethnic and Racial Identities

The first three factors reviewed above—retention of ethnic culture, involvement in ethnic social networks, and linkages to the homeland—are contributing factors to ethnic identity that have much to do with particular immigrant and ethnic minority groups, although they are also affected by the policies of the host society and the level of technological advances. By contrast, racial prejudice and discrimination are mainly dependent upon race relations and minority policies in the host society. Accordingly, for the convenience of discussion in this introductory chapter, we will refer to the first three contributing factors to ethnic identity as internal factors; we will refer to racial prejudice and discrimination as external factors. Depending upon a combination of high or low internal and external factors, we can consider four types of ethnic

identity among children of immigrants in the United States. We provide a typology summarizing four types of ethnic/racial identities with examples in Table 1.

Table 1: Typology of Ethnic Identity Depending upon Combination of Low or High Internal and External Factors to Ethnic Identity

Internal	External	Type of Identity	Example
Very Low	Very Low/ None	Symbolic	Multigenerational White Americans
Low	High	Acting White Ashamed of Ethnic Background	Pre-1970 Asian groups
High	Very Low/ None	Hyphenated American	Jews
High	High	Separated National Identity	Black Nationalists

One hypothetical situation for identity formation is when descendants of immigrants maintain very low levels of ethnic retention and ethnic social networks, but they are well accepted by members of the dominant group. This means that they are likely to have a very low level of attachment to their ancestors' homeland and a high rate of intermarriage to white Americans. Most likely, these individuals hold a low level of ethnic identity in the form of symbolic ethnicity (Gans 1979; Waters 1990). They are not forced to accept their ethnic identity, but choose it simply to belong to their ethnic community psychologically, without holding ethnic content. Multigenerational white Americans hold this type of ethnic identity.

Another contrasting situation is when descendants of immigrants have low levels of cultural and social ethnic attachments and linkages to the homeland, but are racially rejected by white Americans. When small numbers of Asian immigrants settled in the United States in the West Coast in the first half of the twentieth century, they had difficulties in retaining their ethnic cultural traditions, partly because of their small population and community sizes and partly because of the U.S. government's strong assimilation policy. They did not have strong linkages with their Asian home countries, nor did they feel particularly proud of them. Thus, the internal factors pushed them toward assimilation to American society. However, they were not accepted as Americans by members of the dominant groups. Most second- and even third-generation Asian Americans pretended to be white, but they realized they could not hide their physical differences because they were rejected by white Americans based on their physical characteristics. Consequently, most of them went through serious psychological problems in the process of their identity formation. They initially had to accept the Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, and/or Asian label more as racial categories rather than ethnic option, and gradually restored their ethnic identity in combination with learning their ethnic language and culture. The experiences of the earlier cohort of younger-generation Korean Americans who grew up in the 1960s and early 1970s is a good example of this type of struggle for ethnic identity.

We can consider two opposite situations: (1) A case in which high levels of internal factors (ethnic retention, ethnic social networks, and linkages to the homeland) are combined with very low levels of the external factor (racial discrimination/prejudice), and (2) a case in which high levels of internal factors are combined with high levels of the external factor. When members of an ethnic group maintain high levels of ethnic cultural traditions and ethnic social networks, but are well accepted as American, they are mostly likely to maintain a hyphenated

American (e.g. Korean- American, Japanese-American, or Polish-American) identity. Since they are fully accepted as American, they are likely to hold an American identity, but since they also have close cultural and social ethnic ties to their ancestral homeland, they are likely to voluntarily add an ethnic component to their identity label. When they have strong linkages to their homeland and feel proud of it, the ethnic component of their identity is even more important. This type of hyphenated American identity is different from symbolic ethnicity held by multigenerational white Americans, who use ethnic identity to symbolically belong to the ethnic community without the ethnic content, as discussed by Herbert Gans (1979). As pointed out above, most of today's multigenerational white Americans have not preserved many (if any) ethnic traditions and do not belong to ethnic networks. Thus, they are thoroughly assimilated to American society.

If we single out one white ethnic group whose experiences are closest to the hyphenated American ethnic identity type, it is the Jewish group. The inseparable connection between their religion and ethnic history/culture, their heavy residential concentration in several major metropolitan areas, and their rich community organizations have helped even multigenerational Jewish Americans to preserve their ethnic culture and social networks. Moreover, Jewish Americans maintain stronger ties to their homeland than any other white ethnic group in the United States. On the one hand, these high internal factors are likely to lead most Jewish Americans to hold strong ethnic identity. On the other hand, prejudice and discrimination against Jews in the United States, which were strong in the 1920s and 1930s, have been gradually reduced in the post-war period. Jews, like members of other white ethnic groups, are now accepted as full American citizens. This change, along with their strong ethnic attachment, has

led most Jews in the United States to hold Jewish-American identity, with equal weight on the ethnic and American sides of their identity.

As already pointed out above, younger-generation children of contemporary Asian immigrants, including younger-generation Koreans, have advantages over their counterparts in the pre-1970 period in retaining their ethnic cultural traditions and maintaining ethnic social networks. They seem to be both culturally and socially more ethnic than contemporary multigenerational Jewish Americans. Anti-Asian prejudice and discrimination, the external factor that affects the formation of ethnic identity, has also been much reduced. No doubt, lower-class Asian immigrant workers with strong Asian accents still encounter racial discrimination (Lan 2012). However, 1.5-generation and U.S.-born Asian-American children growing up in large metropolitan areas like the New York-New Jersey area seem to experience far less uncomfortable incidents deriving from racial prejudice and discrimination. As a result, they are likely to voluntarily develop a positive and concrete form of ethnic identity, similar to the one held by multigenerational Jewish Americans. In terms of both the internal and external factors, the cohort of younger-generation Korean Americans who grew up in the 1980s and early 1990s had disadvantages for smoothly developing a hyphenated American ethnic identity compared to contemporary younger-generation Korean Americans. However, we expect to find that they had advantages compared to the earlier cohort.

Going back to the typology, the fourth type of ethnic or racial identity can be developed when children of immigrants or minority members have strong internal forces affecting their ethnic identity but continue to encounter racial rejection from the dominant society. In this situation, they are likely to develop a separatist national identity with little to no American identity component. There is no minority group in the United States that fits well with this type

of identity formation. But we can consider Black Nationalists, who were most influential between the 1920s and 1960s. They seem to be the closest example to this type of racial identity. Black Nationalists did not believe they could achieve racial equality by changing laws because anti-black racism was so deeply embedded into American social institutions. Thus, they argued that blacks should maintain separate institutions in education, economy, politics, and other fields (Carmichael and Hamilton 1967). African Americans lost their African cultural repertoires during the slavery period, but Black Nationalists tried to restore some of the African cultural traditions and emphasized black racial and cultural pride.

Data Sources

For the earlier cohort, I have used two data sources: (1) three personal essays written by 1.5- and second-generation Korean Americans who spent their childhood and adolescence in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and (2) Linda Park's recently published book chapter (Park 2013) based on 16 audio-taped personal interviews with second-generation Koreans who grew up during the same period. For the later cohort, I have used ten personal-identity essays written by 1.5- and second-generation Korean Americans. The three identity essays from the earlier cohort were included in the 1999 book I co-edited with Rose Kim (Min and Kim 1999). The book includes fifteen personal identity essays by first-, 1.5- and second-generation Asian-American young professionals. I asked them to write personal narratives on their ethnic and racial identities by discussing (1) their parents' immigration and settlement experiences, (2) their retention of Korean culture, (3) patterns of their friendship and dating with ethnic members vs. non-ethnic members, (4) their experiences with racial prejudice and discrimination, and (5) their struggles for ethnic identity. Three of the fifteen essays were written by 1.5- and second-generation Korean

Americans. Since these three essays do not provide enough data, I have also used Linda Park's book chapter focusing on native-born Korean Americans' ethnic identity (Park 2013). For her study, she personally interviewed sixteen informants who grew up in the 1960s and early 1970s.

I started a similar edited book project in 2011, this time focusing specifically on younger-generation Korean Americans. I arranged for fourteen 1.5- and second-generation young Korean Americans to write personal essays focusing on their ethnic and racial identities. I asked them to write their essays by discussing similar issues covered in the 1999 book project given above. I asked the recent cohort to address how the increasing power and influence of South Korea has affected their ethnic identity in a positive direction. However, I had not asked this question to the earlier cohort. Ten of the fourteen Korean Americans agreed to participate in my book project and revised their essays for an edited volume that will be published. The ten authors of the essays spent their childhoods and adolescent years in the late 1980s and early 1990s. There was twenty-year average difference in age between this cohort and the group from the earlier period.

Major Findings about the Cohort Differences

Retention of Ethnic Culture

The sixteen informants in Linda Park's study (2013) are all U.S.-born Koreans who grew up in the 1960s and early 1970s. There were less than 70,000 Korean Americans in the United States in 1970. Almost all of the informants lived in middle- and upper middle-class white neighborhoods. A predominant majority of their parents came to the United States as international students (W. Kim 1971: 26; Park 2013). At that time, younger-generation Koreans had great difficulties in retaining their language and culture, partly because of the small, limited Korean-American population and partly because of the U.S. government's strong assimilation

policy. Park's chapter did not address the informants' Korean-language fluency or familiarity with Korean culture. However, she informed me that all of the informants, with the exception of one, could not speak Korean even moderately. The only one who could speak Korean moderately grew up in Koreatown in Los Angeles. Mostly professionals, most other participants lived in suburban neighborhoods in small cities with few Asian Americans.

Even if their parents tried to teach them the Korean language and Korean customs at home, it was very difficult for their children to learn and retain them because there were few Koreans or even Asians in their neighborhoods and schools. Moreover, her interviews with the informants revealed that the social and historical contexts in the 1960s and 1970s put so much emphasis on assimilation that teachers advised their parents to focus on teaching and speaking English at home (Park 2013). Thus, a few of her informants reported that while their parents usually spoke Korean amongst themselves, they would stop speaking Korean and would immediately switch to English when talking with their children. Like other Americans, they believed that their children should assimilate to America as quickly as possible to achieve social mobility, and that teaching their children the mother tongue (in this case, Korean) would prevent them from learning English.

Among the three authors of the identity essays included in Min and Kim's edited book (1999), Alex Jeong came to New York City at the age of nine, in 1976. Growing up in Korean enclaves (Elmhurst and Flushing) in Queens and, for all intents and purposes, forced to speak Korean at home, he seems to have been fluent in Korean. But Rose Kim, a U.S.-born Korean American who grew up in a suburban white neighborhood in Los Angeles, was thoroughly assimilated and knew only a little Korean from speaking with her grandmother, who lived in her household. The third informant, Ruth Chung, came to Los Angeles at the age of eight, but she,

like Kim, spent her childhood and adolescence in a suburban white neighborhood, and consequently, she was not fluent in Korean. Moreover, these two younger-generation Korean women's pressure to fit in with white peers did not motivate them to learn Korean culture. I will come back to this issue in the next subsection when discussing younger-generation Korean Americans' social networks.

The three younger-generation essayists from the 1960s-1970s cohort embraced some Korean values as positive. Rose Kim said that she resented her parents' prohibition on her watching television on school nights, but indicated that she would impose the same restrictions on her own children (Kim 1999). Jeong, an assistant district attorney, said that the strong work ethic he inherited from his father (a deeply-embedded Confucianist characteristic of Korean culture) gave him an edge over his peers, most of whom were white Americans, at the Brooklyn District Attorney's office (Jeong 1999).

However, overall, they were more critical than proud of Korean culture. All three of these younger-generation Korean authors provided poignant critiques of some elements of Korean culture. Rose Kim was very critical of some Korean patriarchal traditions that she witnessed at home. She (Kim 1999: 50) commented:

Some of my earliest memories are of suffering the degradation of being female, and for a long time I could not help but associate Korean culture with the oppression of women. I believe that my reaction was inevitable in a culture where women primarily held domestic, nonpublic roles as housekeepers, mothers, wives, and prostitutes.

She said that when her parents invited guests to her home, she and her sister were "shuttled into the kitchen and forced to assist in preparing food for the guests" while her brothers "were allowed to sit with the adults in the living room" (Kim 1999: 50). Ruth Chung also commented that during her adolescence, she was attracted more to white men than to Korean men, partly

because of her resentment of what she considered to be “oppressive patriarchy within Korean culture” (Chung 1999: 63).

Jeong became partially paralyzed in a car accident in his second year of law school. He presented a bitter critique of how Koreans viewed the disabled. He commented: “In all societies, the physically handicapped are subject to some prejudices and discrimination. Yet the bigoted attitudes I have encountered in the Korean community far exceed anything I have encountered in American society at large” (Jeong 1999: 69).

The sixteen informants in Park’s study criticized Korean immigrants and Koreans in Korea for not accepting them as “Korean” because of their inability to speak Korean. All of them had very uncomfortable experiences in Korea due to their language barriers. One male informant was even attacked by a man in Korea for not speaking Korean. They were very critical of the *danilminjok* ideology of Koreans that rejects U.S.-born Koreans based on their cultural differences. Their experiences of rejection by Koreans due to their language barrier hurt them greatly. As will be shown later, they were not accepted as American in the U.S., and to add insult to injury, due to their cultural differences, they were also not accepted as Korean in Korea.

The later cohort consists of eleven essayists who grew up in the United States in the 1980s and early 1990s. The Korean-American population increased from about 69,000 in 1970 to nearly 800,000 in 1990 (Min 2013a: 36). Only two metropolitan areas, Los Angeles and Honolulu, had sizeable Korean populations in 1970. By contrast, each of the following eight metropolitan areas—Los Angeles, New York-New Jersey, San Francisco, Baltimore-DC-Northern Virginia, Chicago, Philadelphia, Honolulu, and Seattle—had 25,000 or more Korean Americans in 1990 (Min 2013: 48). To provide a breakdown of the later cohort as a whole, seven

of the informants grew up in the New York-New Jersey metropolitan area, two in Atlanta, GA, one in Los Angeles, CA, and one in Hong Kong.

Among the ten essayists from the 1980s-1990s cohort, two of them were fluent in Korean. Alexandra Noh, a 1.5-generation Korean who moved to the United States at the age of two, mastered both spoken and written Korean through her Korean-language education before she began attending an American public school in Queens, NY. Additionally, she honed her Korean-language skills by living with her grandmother and by attending a Korean church. Five essayists in the later cohort were able to speak Korean at the intermediate level, while the other three could speak Korean only at the most basic, beginner level.

A few women essayists in this cohort provided a similar critique of Korean patriarchal traditions. Helene Lee was vocal in exposing unfair treatment she received from her parents at home and from others in the Korean community, compared to her older brother. She wrote:

My parents were always referenced in relation to my older brother. They were “Sang’s mom” or “Sang’s dad,” and it was me who was chastised if I didn’t call him “*oppa*” (big brother) even though he could boss me around by my given name. I protested against the unfair division of reproductive labor at home, of my doing the dishes and helping out with the cooking or cleaning on a daily basis, while my brother was left alone. Later on, the challenges of being a Korean-American teenager came down to separating the “good” Korean girls from the “bad” ones.

She said she dismissed Korean Americans as potential dating partners because of her fear that they “would come up with the demanding mothers who would not approve of me as a ‘good Korean wife,’ given my career ambitions and my divorced parents.”

Social Relations with Korean vs. Non-Korean Friends

The earlier-cohort informants in Park's book chapter reported that, growing up, they knew they were Koreans, partly because that was what their parents emphasized at home and partly because they had physical differences from the white children and white students around them. However, they grew up mostly interacting with white friends, with little contact with Korean or other Asian friends. The 1960s-1970s cohort had little opportunity to interact with other Koreans during their pre-college years because of the lack of Korean Americans in their neighborhoods or schools.

However, upon entering high school and college in the late 1970s, the earlier-cohort informants had more opportunities to meet co-ethnic students, mostly Korean immigrants. However, many of them intentionally distanced themselves from Korean immigrants to "blend in" with white peers or to "act white." As one informant said, "We still hung out but you could tell that they were the weird ones and I guess there was that term called FOB, 'fresh off the boat.' I didn't want to look like that. I wanted to look like my blond-headed American friends and do what they do" (Park 2013: 178). Many of the Korean Americans from the earlier cohort also experienced some difficulties interacting with 1.5-generation Korean co-ethnic students, partly because they felt excluded by the latter due to their lack of Korean-language fluency. As one informant said, "So I didn't totally identify with them because they all had grown up in Korea, at least through some significant period of time. Korean was their first language and I didn't speak Korean and I didn't feel like I fit in with that group" (Park 2013: 185).

Only two younger-generation informants in the earlier cohort had significant numbers of Korean friends. Both of them were 1.5-generation Koreans who learned the Korean language prior to their migration to the United States and grew up in large Korean communities. One of

them, Ruth Chung, came to the United States at the age of eight and spent her early years in Los Angeles. During her college years, she lived in two segregated social worlds, one with Korean friends and the other with white friends. She tried to maintain a balance between the two worlds in her friendship patterns and tried to integrate them (Chung 1999: 61-62). The other informant was Alex Jeong, who arrived in Flushing, New York in 1976, at the age of nine. Flushing, the major Korean enclave in New York City, had a substantial number of Korean immigrants and children, even in the latter half of the 1970s. In addition, Jeong said that his father made him always speak Korean at home.

Having grown up in the 1980s and early 1990s, the ten essayists comprising the later cohort had far more active interactions with co-ethnic friends than the informants in the earlier cohort. This is particularly true for six of the ten essayists who spent their childhood and adolescent years in Korean enclaves or multiethnic neighborhoods, mostly in the New York-New Jersey area. Three of the essayists grew up in predominantly white neighborhoods: Katherine Yungmee Kim, who grew up in New Jersey, and Thomas Chung and Brenda Chung Arsenault, who are siblings who spent their early and formative years in Atlanta, GA. Hyein Lee is the lone essayist from the later cohort who did not grow up in the United States. She spent most of her formative years in Hong Kong, and a few in Korea, mostly attending English-language international schools.

More importantly, by the early 1980s, the number of Korean immigrant churches, which provided fellowship and co-ethnic social networks for Korean immigrants (Hurh and Kim 1990; Min 1992), had grown exponentially in major Korean communities. A predominant majority of young Korean children (about 75%) regularly participated in Korean immigrant churches in the 1980s and 1990s, accompanied by their parents (Hurh and Kim 1990). Among the nine essayists

who grew up in the United States, eight participated in Korean churches during their childhood, at least for a few years, with seven of them attending Korean Protestant churches and only one attending a Catholic church.

Korean immigrant churches are known to provide ethnic education and strong co-ethnic friendship ties for second-generation Korean Americans (Min 1992, 2010). Yet, only three of the nine essayists who participated in Korean Protestant churches during their childhood seem to have enjoyed their participation and have continued as adults. Even the three essayists who have continued attending Korean churches as adults have not turned into ardent evangelical Christians like many other second-generation Korean Christians. None of them have talked much about their Korean church friends or the importance of their religious faith for their identity. The other six, including Sun K. Park, the son of a Korean pastor, experienced more alienation from other church members during their childhood. Four of them stopped going to church during their adolescence, while Sun K. Park still seems to reluctantly attend church, mainly to satisfy his father.

Sun K. Park was never particularly religious, but as the son of a devout pastor, he was forced to attend his father's church. Moreover, as the son of a pastor, other church participants expected him to be fluent in Korean, but he could not speak Korean. This language barrier, his lack of other Korean cultural elements, and Korean immigrants' exclusive focus on children's academic performances in the church made him extremely uncomfortable attending it. This uncomfortable experience in his father's Korean church seems to have led him to feel negatively about Korean ethnicity. His lack of Korean-language fluency and the corresponding expectations of Korean immigrant students continued to bother and marginalize him throughout his high school and college years, particularly because he grew up in areas of Queens, NY with heavy

concentrations of Koreans. Two essayists, Thomas Chung and Brenda Chung Arsenault, are siblings who grew up in Atlanta in the 1980s and early 1990s. Both of them attended a Korean church as children, but they stopped going to church within a few years because they were harassed and marginalized by other Korean and Korean-American members of the Sunday school. Thomas Chung wrote: “My bad experiences with the church were some of the most significant factors that led to my subsequent (albeit subconscious) rejection of my Korean identity.”

We previously noted that the informants in the earlier cohort had social interactions primarily with white friends. By contrast, most essayists in the later cohort have close friendship and dating networks with members of different racial groups, including co-ethnic Korean Americans, other East Asians, other racial minorities, and whites. Sun K. Park and Helene Lee seem to feel more comfortable with white friends and dating partners. They worry about Korean immigrants’ rejection of them due to their barrier in the Korean language and cultural differences when interacting with them. Dave Hahn, Hyein Lee, and Alexandra Noh seem to prefer East Asian friendship networks, including Korean friends. Bora Lee has many close friends who are East Asian and Latino. Sung S. Park’s close friends consist mainly of whites and African Americans.

Linkages to the Homeland (South Korea)

Five or six of the sixteen informants in Linda Park’s book chapter have visited Korea, all during their college or post-college years, while only one of the three Korean-American essayists (Ruth Chung) in Min and Kim’s 1999 book have visited, at least at the time of the book’s publication. At present, the children of Korean immigrants usually visit Korea during their

childhood and/or adolescence. A small proportion of the informants from the earlier cohort visited Korea during their college or post-college years, in the 1980s, when South Korea had started to achieve high economic development. Their parents were not prone to sending their children to their homeland during the informants' elementary or secondary school years, partially because Korea had a low global profile in the 1970s, which was not very appealing to the parents or to their children.

However, these selected informants who visited Korea also had negative experiences during their homeland trips that may have weakened rather than strengthened their Korean identity. All of them experienced a strong sense of rejection as Koreans because of their inability to speak Korean and because they were culturally different in other ways. One informant commented on the language issue:

I remember once when we went to Korea, it was post-college and I remember a taxi cab driver was lecturing me because I couldn't speak Korean and it was like, he has a point—I look Korean, why can't I speak? (Park 2013: 184)

Another male informant reported that he even encountered an incidence of physical violence for speaking English during his summer school trip to Korea:

Actually in Korea, in summer school walking back one night, I was with one of the Korean American girls speaking English down an alleyway when a drunken Korean man came out. And he was like “Why are you not speaking Korean?” and then he attacked me and we fought too. I tried not to fight but it ended up that he was very aggressive. It was a short battle pretty much. She dragged me away and he was throwing bottles around. Yea, it was crazy! (Park 2013: 184).

Younger-generation Koreans' experiences of being treated as foreigner in Korea for not speaking Korean and not following Korean customs have been documented in other studies (E. Kim 2010:

188-192; N. Kim 2009; Lee 2013). Because of their experiences of being treated as foreigners, their homeland trips only strengthened their American identity.

The vast majority (eight) of the ten later-cohort essayists have visited South Korea at least once. Two of them spent many years in Korea. One of them, Hyein Lee, completed kindergarten and elementary school at an international school in Hong Kong and attended junior and senior high school at an international school in Korea. She completed her undergraduate college studies at NYU in New York City and has been working on a Ph.D. at the CUNY-Graduate Center, also in New York City. Thus, she has a strong transnational Korean identity. The other informant, Katherine Yungmee Kim, was born and raised in a suburban neighborhood in New Jersey. However, in her essay, she reported that she had visited Korea twelve times, and that each visit lasted from two weeks to eighteen months. She completed third grade in Korea and returned to Korea after college to work for eighteen months. Therefore, she has strong attachments to both South Korea and the United States. She characterizes her identity as “Korean and American,” not “Korean American.” These two cases are representative of many people living in multiple national locations in this global age.

Among the other six essayists from the 1980s-1990s cohort who have visited Korea at least once, Helene Lee, spent a year and a half in Seoul conducting her dissertation research in 2004 and 2005. Her dissertation research focused on the experiences of young 1.5- and second-generation Korean American and multigenerational Korean Chinese during their homeland trips to Korea (Lee 2013). Her dissertation research and the accompanying prolonged stay in Korea were intertwined with some of her own personal identity issues as a second-generation Korean American. Upon seeing many people who looked like her, she initially felt re-connected with her Korean identity, which was vague and ambiguous prior to her extended visit. However, she said

that this honeymoon period soon ended as she began to experience rejection as a Korean. Although she speaks and understands Korean at a basic to intermediate level, she felt rejected and alienated because of her lack of total Korean-language fluency and other “un-Korean” behaviors. The following paragraph captures this sense of rejection and marginalization:

My numerous blunders in mundane, everyday interactions were a constant source of embarrassment because I “looked” Korean but did not behave as such. Usually after a surprised pause, I got the “Oh, you’re an American” remark, dripping with condescension, from the checker at the grocery store, the teller at the bank, the taxi driver or even the bus driver when I awkwardly tried to ask whether I was going the right way. As long as I kept my mouth shut, I felt I could “pass” as Korean in a complete reversal from my childhood, when I deliberately talked in unaccented English to prove that I was a “real” American. The overwhelming feeling that I felt more American in Seoul complicated the connection I felt with South Korea. This feeling was echoed by Korean-American friends who also felt that they were trapped in a permanent, liminal state—in the U.S., they were seen as Korean, in South Korea, they were seen as American.

We noted above that the earlier-cohort informants who visited Korea in the 1980s had similar experiences of being rejected as Korean due to their inability to speak fluent Korean in public with strangers. Many of the 1960s-1970s cohort experienced overt rejection from Korean taxi drivers and Korean college students in the 1980s because they were Koreans who were not speaking Korean. However, over the past three decades, there have been some positive changes South Korea in terms of accepting foreigners and overseas Koreans in South Korea. Helene Lee encountered a more subtle form of rejection in her everyday interactions with Koreans in South Korea in the mid-2000s. But, as we can see from her essay, their perception of her as an “American” based on her difficulties with the Korean language and her unnatural Korean behaviors has weakened the Korean side of her identity.

Two of the other four informants who had visited Korea at least once mentioned that their homeland tours helped to forge their Korean-American identity. Thomas Chung participated in an educational overseas Korean summer camp held at Seoul National University between his

sophomore and junior year in high school in the early 1990s. It was his second trip to Korea; he had made his first trip during his childhood. Although he felt somewhat alienated from other participating overseas Korean students, he reported, he improved his Korean-language skills drastically during the tour by spending time with his extended family members and wandering around various parts of South Korea. He said, “I also felt closer to my Korean roots, and it strengthened my desire to explore and cultivate that part of me.” He made his third visit to Korea at the age of 25 to watch the 2002 World Cup soccer tournament, which was co-hosted by South Korea and Japan. He said that watching the World Cup soccer games played in various cities in Korea and joining other Koreans in cheering for the South Korean national team really kindled his Korean identity. I cite here the last four sentences from a paragraph in which he discussed his participation in the World Cup soccer games:

I was surprised at how readily I adopted South Korea as my team. Although I had lived my entire life in the States, I even rooted for Korea when they played the U.S. On my last night in Korea, we attended the South Korea vs. Portugal match. The Reds upset the powerhouse Portuguese, which advanced the team to the next round. Pandemonium swept the entire nation that night. People paraded, chanted, and wept with joy. I felt like I was walking in a dream world. As I marched and chanted alongside the countrymen of my parents and ancestors, I truly felt proud to be Korean.

The other informant, Dave Hahn, made his second and third tours to Korea as a teenager. He participated in a summer roots education program for overseas Koreans, which was sponsored by the Korean government. He made this noteworthy comment regarding his ethnic education tours and his acceptance by Koreans: “I have never felt rejected by Koreans anywhere, either in the United States or in Korea. There’s always been encouragement from every Korean person I meet to immerse myself in more Korean culture and to tie myself more into the community at large.” As noted in the previous two subsections, many earlier-cohort informants complained about having been rejected by both Korean immigrants in the United States and by

Koreans in Korea for not being culturally Korean. In his personal essay, Dave Hahn also mentions that he feels prouder of his Korean background because of the increasing popularity of Korean culture, the rise of Korean economic development, and the increase in quality and use of Korean-made cars and electronic products in the United States in the 2000s. No doubt, the popularity of Korean-brand cars and electronics and Korean culture in the United States must have boosted the Korean identity of most other later-cohort informants.

Experiences with Racial Prejudice and Discrimination

There were not many Asians in the United States in the 1960s and early 1970s. Moreover, Asian countries were seen either as enemy countries to the United States in terms of political ideology or poor countries with little to no global visibility during the Cold-War era. Thus, there were high levels of racial prejudice and discrimination against Asian Americans during the period.

Linda Park's book chapter, based on personal interviews with sixteen younger-generation Korean Americans from the 1960s-1970s cohort, includes plenty of comments that illustrate their experiences with racial prejudice and discrimination. For example, a second-generation woman bitterly recounted her experiences with dating due to racial discrimination:

It was very blatant. First of all, I can't date the white people. This is a small city in Texas. I was always considered "Oriental," so it wasn't considered that I could date the white people. It's hard to explain. It's just, that's just the way it was. (Park 2013: 180)

A female informant recalled a particular incident that occurred to her younger sister:

I remember when my sister ran for student council in Ohio and she was like class president and all that, but someone scrawled on her campaign posters "Remember Pearl Harbor." I don't think the community viewed it racist even though I think it probably was extremely so. (Park 2013: 180).

At that time, native-born Asian Americans were perceived as foreigners and frequently asked “where they were from,” “what they are,” and “when they plan to go back home.” Another informant who spent her childhood in the East Coast and the Midwest commented:

Oh clearly there were a lot of questions like “what are you?” I’m not sure if that was being discriminating against [...] I’ve been told I speak English very well and asked “when are you going to go back?” [...] More people were just ignorant and I came to appreciate that later. Obviously it was becoming burdensome to have to continuously explain who you were. (Park 2013: 182)

The later cohort of younger-generation Korean Americans did not experience the overt, blatant forms of racism that the earlier cohort encountered. However, all of the essayists from the later cohort discussed their experiences with subtle forms of racism or racial stereotypes, which they encountered in schools, residential neighborhoods, and at their workplaces. Dave Hahn, who works for a communication company in Atlanta, Georgia, devoted three or four pages of his essay to discussing how often he heard people making stereotypical statements about him. For example, a security guard at his work asked him on a hot summer day, “Where’s your hat? I thought your people always wore hats in this weather?” He told the security guard that he did not need one. Walking away, he realized that the man was referring to a rice farmer’s hat, the kind that was visible in old Asian villages, and an image that was a pejorative Western stereotype of Third World Asians. However, he was most “annoyed at the American media’s portrayal of Asian men as being not sexually virile.” Many essayists were annoyed and sometimes hurt because they were often called “Chinese,” “chink,” “Chinaman,” etc. Alexandra Noh wrote that when she was passing a stranger he approached her, saying, “You look like a China doll! But since you’re Chinese, I guess that just means you look like a doll.” These two essayists from the later cohort also expressed their concerns about “positive” stereotypes of Korean Americans as hard-working and successful.

Three essayists from the later cohort encountered more serious forms of prejudice and/or discrimination. Two Korean-American siblings, Thomas Chung and Brenda Chung Arsenault, grew up in the suburbs of Atlanta, GA in the 1980s and 1990s. They were among the only Asian kids in their largely middle-class white elementary school. Brenda complained that the students in her class would ask her why she closed her “slanted eyes” when she laughed. She recollected that she would come home crying over her being singled out in school due to something she could not change. When she got older, she encountered other types of racist remarks by white students, such as “My daddy killed a bunch of you guys in the war.” The white student meant to indicate the Vietnam War, which shows his ignorance of Asian peoples (inability to separate Koreans from Vietnamese). However, Brenda was more hurt by his malicious intent than by his ignorance. Her brother, Thomas, also encountered similar prejudice during his elementary, high school, and college years. Both Brenda and Thomas also discussed their parents’ experiences with racial rejection and racial taunts by black customers in their retail store. Thomas said he often heard black customers calling his parents “Chinese and ching chong” and screaming “Go back to your country” when arguing with his parents about their refund/return policy and other aspects of business transactions.

Sung Shim Park gave specific examples of how she was unfairly treated at her workplace in Baltimore. She felt that she was assigned more work than her white co-workers yet did not receive raises, bonuses, or promotions while she watched her white peers get promoted. She also complained that her co-workers confused her name with a Vietnamese-American woman’s name. She and her Vietnamese-American colleague corrected people time and time again, but she said they continued to make the same mistake. She told the manager about the problem, without ever

actually mentioning race or racism. She reported that he dismissed it, saying “there was no bad will or harmful intent” by calling them the wrong names.

Inner Struggle for Ethnic Identity

Growing up, the informants in the earlier cohort were very conscious of their Korean backgrounds, not only because of their parents’ emphasis on it, but also because the dominant white society emphasized this ascribed racial characteristic to identify them (Park 2013: 179). However, they often felt ashamed of their Korean background and thus tried to hide it as much as possible. As noted in some of the informants’ previously cited comments, they “acted white” publicly and tried to keep their Korean sides private. Ruth Chung, a 1.5-generation Korean woman, grew up in a suburban white middle-class neighborhood in Los Angeles in the 1970s. She commented on her effort to hide her Korean side in her early high school years:

I was ashamed of my Koreanness and anything that hinted at my difference. I believed that I had to reject my culture and deny who I was if I wanted to be accepted by my friends and American society... By being virtue of non-white, I was excluded from society’s perceptions of beauty and value. And yet I tried desperately to be white and actually came to believe that I was successful... (Chung 1999: 60)

When minorities absorb the racist messages in a white dominant society, they come to replicate the negative messages in their own minds, believing that members of their ethnic or racial groups are actually inferior to white Americans in intelligence, beauty, and other characteristics. This symptom or tendency is referred to as “internalized racism.” Rose Kim reports that when she transferred to a high school in a predominantly Hispanic and Asian neighborhood, she tried to minimize her interactions with minority students. She recognized that her thinking that minorities were inferior to whites in her high-school years was a kind of

internalized racism:

Somehow I had developed the notion that white students were superior, and felt disdainful toward my classmates. I never participated in school events, spent lunches in the school library... Many years later, I recognized these feelings as being the possible result of living in a society where Asian Americans are not recognized as members of the mainstream. When I read about the concept of internalized racism, the replication of racist prototypes within one's own mind, I finally was able to come to terms with my past, conflicted feelings.

(Kim 1999: 52)

“Acting white” out in public and acting as a Korean inside the home were possible during childhood, particularly for the essayists from the earlier cohort. However, it became increasingly difficult as they reached adolescence and adulthood. They realized that, culturally, they could act like perfect Americans; however, they could never hide their non-white physical differences. This realization led them to undergo many psychological struggles. To resolve these inner struggles, younger-generation Korean-Americans, like many other younger-generation American children of immigrants, tried to accept their ethnic sides later in their lives, in late adolescence or young adulthood. They usually began their ethnic journeys when a particular incident at a particular moment led them to visually recognize their physical differences from whites. Ruth Chung recognized her physical difference from other white students at a specific moment in her high school senior year. The following paragraph from her essay vividly captures how she felt when she recognized this difference:

I was walking down the mirror-paneled hallway of my high school, talking and laughing with a group of friends. For a brief moment as we walked past the mirrors, I caught my reflection in the midst of my friends. What struck me at that moment was how visibly different I was from them. Because most of the faces that I saw around me were white, I had come to believe that mine was too. In that devastating moment of truth, I was confronted with the reality that no matter how much I tried to deny it, I was inevitably who I was and that it was useless and foolish to ignore that fact. I recognized that in my desire to belong and fit in, I had

been deluding myself to the point of thinking that I was actually white. (Chung 1999: 61)

Once they accepted the ethnic components of their identity, younger-generation Korean Americans began to resolve their inner struggles and began to recover and cultivate some self-confidence. They came to realize that their holding of both Korean and American cultures and identities was not a conflict, but a blessing. The following paragraph from Ruth Chung's essay, along with the quotation in the previous paragraph, again delivers the main point:

This incident served as a catalyst for painful soul-searching marked the beginning of an inner journey toward greater self-acceptance. Until that point, my struggle with ethnic identity and the denial of my Koreanness had been largely unconscious, but I began to see that the cost of my denial was too high a price to pay. I accepted the reality of my biculturality, that I was inevitably both Korean and American, and that I had a unique opportunity to learn from both cultures, rather than rejecting one for the other. For the first time since that moment in the second grade when I wished I was a blond-haired girl with the last name Smith, I began to see my bicultural experience as a blessing and an opportunity rather than a curse. (Chung 1999: 61).

However, many other younger-generation Koreans did not start searching for their ethnic roots until they were in college.

We expect the experiences of the essayists composing the later cohort to be more conducive to the formation of their Korean ethnic identity than the earlier cohort. As already noted, only three of the nine essayists (remember that Hyein Lee lived in Hong Kong in her early years) grew up in suburban white neighborhoods. The others grew up in Korean enclaves or multiracial neighborhoods with active or moderate interactions with Korean immigrants. Moreover, all of them had access to Korean Protestant or Catholic churches, which helped Korean immigrants and their children with ethnic fellowship and cultural retention. We already noted that the later cohort experienced subtle forms of prejudice and racial stereotypes in

comparison to the more blatant forms of racial discrimination encountered by the earlier cohort. Accordingly, the later cohort are unlikely to have tried to hide their ethnic background due to being scared by the dominance of white society, thus, they are also unlikely to have lived with much racism-induced inner struggle.

We have found that only two of the ten essays indicate that the authors tried to not publicly display their ethnic side to avoid racial rejection. Read the following paragraph from Helene Lee's essay:

From an early age, I learned that being too ethnic came at a social cost, because popular kids were never FOBs [Fresh Off the Boat]. Public displays of Koreanness were to be avoided at all costs. During my teenage years, when image meant everything, I started to feel like expressions of ethnicity were safe only within the private realm of the home and the family.

Helene Lee's attitude reflected in the above paragraph is similar to the phenomenon of "acting white," which is associated with the earlier cohort. The following paragraph in Brenda Chung Arsenault's essay also suggests the author's reluctance to identify herself as Korean to other people:

There were many more instances of discrimination, both at school and at the store. Sadly, there are too many to list or even to remember. What I do recall is that I grew up with a reluctance to bring any undue attention to my ethnicity. It's not that I was ashamed to be Korean, but rather that calling myself Korean seemed to invite negative interactions. It is said that people determine their self worth based on the reactions of others.

Most of the other essayists from the later cohort did not mention hiding or even having the desire to hide their ethnic background in their early years. However, they may have still experienced inner struggles over how to maintain a balance between their Korean and American identities, or how to integrate them, especially as they grew older and more aware. However, unlike the earlier-cohort informants, none of them seem to have felt scared by the absence of

Korean/Asian culture and/or the limited size of the Korean/Asian population. Most later-cohort essayists took issues with Koreans' rejection of second-generation Korean Americans for their loss of the Korean language and culture; they also resented the Korean communities in South Korea and the United States for treating women as second-class citizens. Interestingly, none of the later-cohort essayists seem to have felt ashamed of their Korean background in their earlier years or at the time of writing their essays.

Summary and Conclusion

As expected, the study participants from the later cohort learned the Korean language and Korean culture much better than those from the earlier cohort. The larger Korean population and a more multicultural policy in schools helped them to learn their ethnic language and culture. Moreover, the later-cohort essayists were also more involved in co-ethnic friendship and dating networks. Additionally, more of them visited their mother country, with some of them having positive experiences for their ethnic identity. The advantages in these three contributing factors helped them to maintain stronger and more positive ethnic identity than the study participants in the earlier cohort.

As expected, the essayists from the later cohort experienced subtle and less serious forms of racial prejudice and discrimination, while the study participants from the earlier cohort encountered more serious and blatant forms of racism. As a result, they were able to accept their Korean ethnic identity more as a choice, compared to the participants from the earlier cohort, who were forced to accept the Korean or Asian racial category. The participants from the earlier cohort, ashamed of accepting Korean identity because of negative connotations and images, "acted white" (tried to behave like white people). However, they realized they could not hide

their non-white physical characteristics. This dilemma put a great deal of psychological pressure on them until they began their ethnic journeys. However, the essayists from the later cohort, helped by strong internal factors, generally embraced their ethnic identity from their early years. They also held Korean-American identity as an option, as they were better accepted as Americans by the dominant society. Accordingly, the essayists from the later cohort experienced far less inner psychological conflicts over identity issues.

However, the two groups of study participants show some interesting similarities, albeit with moderate differences in terms of the degree. The majority of the study participants from both cohorts are women. Some of the women participants from both cohorts are very critical of patriarchal customs they experienced their parents' homes, Korean communities, and Korea. Because of their language barrier and unfamiliarity with Korean customs, most informants from the earlier cohort encountered rejection as Koreans by people in Korea during their homeland tours, which weakened their Korean identity. One female essayist from the later cohort (Helene Lee) also reported that she had similarly uncomfortable experiences of being recognized as "American" due to her inadequate Korean language skills and lack of Korean culture. A few informants from both cohorts also reported that their sense of rejection due to their language barriers led them to minimize interactions with Korean immigrants or church members, which subsequently led to weakening their Korean ethnic identity.

This study contributes to understanding the formation of ethnic identity among Korean and other Asian Americans by showing the significant differences in younger-generation Korean Americans' ethnic identity formation between the two cohorts, influenced by the four contributing factors. This study also theoretically contributes to studies of ethnic identity in general by creating a typology of four different forms of ethnic identity in the four different

contexts made by the cross-classification of three internal and one external factors and connecting two Korean cohorts' different identity formations with the two of the four contexts.

References

- Alba, Richard. 1990. *Ethnic Identity: The Transformation of White America*. John Wiley.
- Carmichael, Stokely, and Charles V. Hamilton. 1967. *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Chan, Sucheng. 1991. *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History*. Boston: Twayne Publishers.
- Chung, Ruth. 1999. "Reflection on a Korean American Journey." Pp.59-68 in *Struggle for Ethnic Identity: Narratives by Asian American Professionals*, edited by Pyong Gap Min and Rose Kim. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press.
- Danico, Mary Yu. 2004. *The 1.5 Generation: Becoming Korean American in Hawaii*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Despres, Leo. 1975. *Ethnicity and Resource Competition in Plural Societies*. The Hague, Netherlands: Mouton Publishers.
- Espiritu, Yen Le. 1994. "The Intersection of Race, Ethnicity, and Class: The Multiple Identities of Second-Generation Filipinos." *Identities* 1: 234-273.
- Gans, Herbert. 1979. "Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups and Cultures in America." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 2: 1-20.
- Glick Schiller, Nina, Linda Basch, and Cristina Szanton Blanc (eds.). 1992. *Towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration: Race, Ethnicity, Class and Nationalism Reconsidered*. New York: New York Academy of Science.
- Gordon, Milton. 1964. *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origin*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hammond, Philip E., and Kee Warner. 1993. "Religion and Ethnicity in Late-Twentieth Century America." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 527: 55-66.
- Hing, Bill Ong. 1993. *Making and Remaking Asian America through Immigration Policy, 1850-1990*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Huntington, Gertrude Enders. 1998. "The Amish Family." Pp.450-479 in *Ethnic Families in America: Patterns and Variations*, edited by Charles H. Mindel, Robert W. Habenstein, and Roosevelt Wright Jr. Prentice Hall: Upper Saddle River, NJ.
- Hurh, Won Moo, and Kwang Chung Kim. 1989. "The 'Success Image' of Asian Americans: Its Validity and Its Practical and Theoretical Implications." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 12: 512-537.

- Hurh, Won Moo, and Kwang Chung Kim. 1990. "Religious Participation of Korean Immigrants in the United States." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 29: 19-34.
- Itzigsohn, Jose, Carlos Dore Cabral, Esther Hernandez Medline, and Obed Vasquez. 1999. "Mapping Dominican Transnationalism: Narrow and Broad Transnational Practices." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22: 316-339.
- Jeong, Alex. 1999. "A Handicapped Korean in America." Pp.69-74 in *Struggle for Ethnic Identity: Narratives by Asian American Professionals*, edited by Pyong Gap Min and Rose Kim. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press.
- Jo, Moon H. 1999. *Korean Immigrants and the Challenge of Adjustment*. Westport, CT.: Greenwood Press.
- Kibria, Nazli. 2002. *Becoming Asian American: Second-Generation Chinese and Korean Identities*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Kim, Chigon, and Pyong Gap Min. 2010. "Marital Patterns and Use of Mother Tongue at Home among Native-Born Asian Americans." *Social Forces* 88: 233-256.
- Kim, Eleana. 2010. *Adopted Territory: Transnational Korean Adoptees and Politics of Belonging*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Kim, Nadia. 2009. "Finding Our Way Home: Korean Americans, 'Homeland' Trips, and Cultural Foreignness." In *Diasporic Homecomings: Ethnic Return Migration in Comparative Perspective*, edited by Takeyuki Tsusada, pp.409-430. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Kim, Rose. 1999. "My Trek." Pp.49-58 in *Struggle for Ethnic Identity: Narratives by Asian American Professionals*, edited by Pyong Gap Min and Rose Kim. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press.
- Kim, Warren. 1971. *Koreans in America*. Seoul: Po Chin Chai.
- Lan, Shanshan. 2012. *Diaspora and Class Consciousness: Chinese Immigrant Workers in Multiracial Chicago*. New York: Routledge.
- Lee, Helene. 2013. "Transnationalism and 'Third Culture Kids': A Comparative Analysis of Korean American and Korean Chinese Identity Construction." In *Koreans in North America: Their Twenty-First Century Experiences*, edited by Pyong Gap Min, pp.157-172.
- Levitt, Peggy. 2001. *The Transnational Villagers*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press..

- Levitt, Peggy, and Mary Waters. *The Changing Face of Home: The Transnational Lives of the Second Generation*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Min, Pyong Gap. 1992. "The Structure and Social Functions of Korean Immigrant Churches in the United States." *International Migration Review* 26: 1370-94.
- _____. (ed.). 2002. *The New Second Generation: Ethnic Identity among Second-Generation Asian American Professionals*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- _____. 2010. *Preserving Ethnicity through Religion in America: Korean Protestants and Indian Hindus across Generations*. New York: New York University Press.
- _____. 2012. "Korean-American Residents in Korea: Transnational Lives between the United States and Their Homeland." Paper Presented at the Conference on Foreign Residents in Korea organized by the International Organization for Immigration. Seoul, Korea.
- _____. 2013. "Growth and Settlement Patterns of Korean Americans." In Pyong Gap Min (ed.), *Koreans in North America: Their Twenty-First Century Experiences*, pp.35-56. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Min, Pyong Gap, and Chigon Kim. 2009. Patterns of Intermarriages and Cross-Generational In-marriages among Native-Born Asian Americans." *International Migration Review*
- Min, Pyong Gap, and Rose Kim (eds.). 1999. *Struggle for Ethnic Identity: Personal Narratives by Asian American Professionals*. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press.
- Olzak, Susan, and Joane Nagel (eds). 1986. *Competitive Ethnic Relations*. New York: Academic Press.
- Park, Linda. 2013. "Authenticity Dilemma among Pre-1965 Native-Born Koreans." In Pyong Gap Min (ed.), *Koreans in North America: Their Twenty-First Century Experiences*, pp.35-56 . Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Taylor, Ronald. 1979. "The Black Ethnicity and Persistence of Ethnogenesis," *American Journal of Sociology* 84: 1401-1424.
- Takaki, Ronald. 1989. *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Tuan, Mia. 1999. *Forever Foreigners or Honorary White? The Asian Ethnic Experience Today*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Tweed, Thomas. 1997. *Our Lady of Exile: Diasporic Religion at a Cuban Catholic Shrine in Miami*. Cambridge: Oxford University Press.
- Waters, Mary. 1990. *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Yancy, William, Eugene Ericksen, and Richard Juliani, 1976, "Emergent Ethnicity: A Review and Reformulation," *American Sociological Review* 76 (1976): 391-403.

Yinger, J. Milton. 1994. *Ethnicity: Sources of Strength? Sources of Conflict?* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.