

***The Socioeconomic Attainments of Korean Americans, Compared to Native-Born Whites and Other Asian Groups, in the NY-NJ-CT CMSA: Generational Differences**

**Pyong Gap Min
Queens College and Graduate Center of
The City University of New York**

**The Research Center for Korean Community
Queens College of CUNY**

Research Report 5

February 27, 2013

*I would like to express thanks to Susan Weber-Stoger, a census data analyst at the Department of Sociology at Queens College, and Chigon Kim, a professor at Wright State University, for analyzing census data. I would also like to acknowledge Se Jung Yim, a research associate at the Center, for making tables for this research report.

Introduction

The history of Korean immigration to the United States is 110 years old. However, a small number of Korean Americans were heavily concentrated in California and Hawaii in the pre-1965 era. Thus Koreans were almost invisible in other areas of the United States. Old-timer Korean immigrants estimate that there were less than a thousand Koreans in the New York-New Jersey area before 1965. But the Korean population in the area increased to 28,531 in 1980, 118,096 in 1990, 179,344 in 2000, and 221,705 in 2010 (Min 2013, p.44; see Table 1). Thus, the Korean community in the NY-NJ-CT CMSA (hereafter referred to as the New York area) is mainly the by-product of the Immigration Act of 1965, which opened the door for immigration to the United States to all countries in the world.

Table 1: The Increase in the Korean Population in the NY-NJ-CT CMSA

Year	1980	1990	2000	2010
Population	28,531	118,096	179,344	221,705

Sources: The U.S. Census Bureau: The 1980, 1990, 2000, and 2001 Census

After about 50 years of enforcement of the new immigration law that propelled the massive immigration of Koreans to the United States, 1.5- and second-generation Koreans have come of age, completing their formal education and entering the labor market. The Korean community in the New York area has a smaller proportion of younger-generation adults who have completed their formal education than those in the West Coast. Nevertheless, as we can see from Table 2, 1.5-generation and native-born Koreans composed about 25% of Korean Americans adults in the 25-64 age group in the New York area during the 2006-2010 period

(2008). Since census data reflect the proportion of younger-generation adults in the area in 2008, they are likely to comprise nearly 30% as of 2013.

Table 2: The Korean Sample in the NY-NJ-CT CMSA 25-64 Years Old by Generation

Generation	Number of Cases	%
First Generation	3,812	75.2
1.5 Generation	753	14.9
U.S.-Born	505	9.9
Total	5,070	100.0

Source: The 2006-2010 American Community Surveys (2008)

When asked why they decided to immigrate to the United States, most Korean immigrants emphasized a great opportunity for their children’s education as the most important reason. The majority of Korean immigrants chose to start their own small businesses involving long hours of work, mainly because of their disadvantages for employment in professional occupations in the general labor market (Min 1988). When asked if they wanted their children to be successful in businesses, only one-fourth of the respondents agreed. Other respondents wanted their children to be successful in professional occupations in the mainstream economy (Min 1988: 61). This finding is not surprising when we consider Korean immigrants’ emphasis on high-status occupations, such as lawyers, medical doctors, accountants, and engineers.

Given Korean immigrants’ emphasis on their children’s education as the main motivation for their immigration to the United States, we expect younger-generation Korean adults to have

received higher levels of education than first-generation Korean immigrants. Given their strong desire to see their children succeed in high-status and high-paying professional and managerial occupations, we also expect younger-generation Koreans to avoid self-employment in businesses and to find high-status occupations in the mainstream economy. A number of studies based on the 2000 PUMS and American Community Surveys have supported our expectations (Min 2006; Oh and Min 2011; Sakamoto et al. 2009; Sakamoto and Xie 2006)

The above-mentioned academically-oriented studies have not shown the generational differences among Korean and other Asian Americans' socioeconomic attainments in a way that lay readers can easily understand. Therefore, I have prepared this research report focusing on the generational and gender differences in socioeconomic attainments among Korean Americans in the NY-NJ-CM area. I plan to present this research report in our Center's regular lecture series and post it on Korean American Data Bank for the subscribers. In discussing statistics, I primarily used cross-tabulation tables without any multivariate tables, so that lay readers can understand them. Many readers may have difficulty in understanding cross-tabulation tables involving two or more independent variables (multiple contingency tables) used in this research report, but I will try to discuss major findings as easily as I can. For data analyses, I have used the 2006-2010 Combined American Community Surveys. Since data were collected between 2006 and 2010, they reflect the socioeconomic attainments of Korean Americans around 2008. To better understand intergenerational transitions in socioeconomic attainments among Korean Americans in the New York area, we need to compare the Korean group with native-born white Americans and three other major Asian groups (Chinese, Indian, and Filipino) in the area.

Before discussing their socioeconomic attainments, I will provide census data showing their total population sizes. As shown in Table 3, the 2006-2010 American Surveys estimated

that approximately 210,000 Korean Americans were living in the New York area, which is only slightly smaller than the Korean-American population counted by the 2010 Census (221,705). Korean Americans composed less than 1% of the total population in the New York area in the given years. We can see from the table that Chinese and Indian Americans respectively outnumbered Korean Americans by 3.2 times and 2.6 times. When focusing on New York City, the Chinese population is about five times as large as the Korean population. Although Filipino Americans are not very visible in the New York area, their population size is close to the Korean population size, which will likely come as a surprise to many readers. Korean immigrants are far more visible than Filipino immigrants because of their active commercial activities. Many Filipino immigrants hold professional jobs and work inside offices, thus they are much less visible than Korean immigrants. Moreover, the Korean community in the New York area is much more tightly organized than the Filipino community. Consequently, their community activities, including several major cultural festivals, have attracted much media and public attention in the area.

Table 3: Single-Race Asian Populations in the NY-NJ-CT CMSA in 2006-2010

Total Population	21,899,798
Korean	209,225
Filipino	205,914
Chinese	665,335
Indian	578,942
White	10,197,425

Source: The 2006-2010 American Community Surveys

Generational and Gender Differences in Educational Attainment

Table 4 shows the generational and gender differences in the educational attainments of Korean Americans in the 25 to 64 age group in the New York area, compared to other groups. For the total sample, 63% of Korean Americans completed four years of college education. As expected, Korean Americans had a higher college graduation rate than native-born white Americans (50%). Both Korean and white Americans in the New York area have substantially higher educational levels than their respective national samples, but Korean Americans had a lower college graduation rate than Filipino and Indian Americans in the New York area. Chinese Americans had a substantially lower college graduation rate than Korean Americans and a much lower rate than Filipino and Indian Americans. Moreover, a large proportion of Chinese Americans (22%) did not complete high school. As seen in Table 4, all of the other four groups, including Korean Americans, have very low rates in the less-than-high-school-education category.

The educational levels of Korean and other Asian groups as a whole without considering generational differences are not very meaningful because 1.5- and second-generation Asians have substantially higher educational levels than first-generation immigrants. Also, when looking at the generational differences in education, we also need to consider the gender effect, because first-generation Asian immigrant men usually have substantially higher educational levels than women.

In taking a closer look at education statistics for first-generation immigrants in Table 4, we can see that 59% of Korean immigrants completed their college education, with only 5% having not completed high school. When focusing on first-generation immigrants, the

educational level of Koreans is much lower than the Filipino and Indian groups. Also, Chinese immigrants' class polarization looms larger when we focus on immigrants. While 41% of Chinese immigrants graduated from college, 28% of them did not complete a high-school education. As several studies (Kwong 1997; Liang 21) have shown, a large number of undocumented Chinese immigrants have annually moved from Fujian to New York City since the early 1980s. The majority of these undocumented Chinese immigrants seem not to have completed a high-school education. As Kwong (1997) has documented in detail, most of these lower-class Chinese undocumented immigrants have found jobs in Chinese-owned businesses, with many of them subjected to severe exploitation.

The last two panels of the table provide statistics for 1.5- and native-born (second or higher) generations. Seventy-five percent of 1.5-generation Koreans and 81% of U.S.-born Korean adults completed four years of college education, compared to 63% of first-generation Koreans. As expected, younger-generation Koreans had much higher college graduation rates than Korean immigrants. They also had the highest high-school graduation rates among all four Asian groups. However, when we look at gender differences in education, these statistics on intergenerational differences in educational level are more meaningful. The intergenerational mobility rate in college education for Korean American men was from 62% for immigrants to 72% and 81% for 1.5-generation and native-born Koreans, respectively. Considering that younger people tend to have much higher educational levels than older people and that 1.5-generation and U.S.-born Koreans are much younger than first-generation Korean immigrants, younger-generation Korean male adults improved their education only moderately. By contrast, the intergenerational mobility rate for Korean women was from 56% for immigrants to 77% for

1.5-generation Koreans and 82% for native-born Koreans, respectively. For 1.5-generation Koreans, women had a higher college graduate rate than men. Based on these findings, we can

Table 4: Educational Attainment of Korean Americans 25-64 Years Old, Compared to Other Asian Groups and Native-Born Whites, by Generation and Gender

Generation Ethnic Group	Total			Male			Female			
	Total	Less than High School	High School Graduate	College Graduate	Less than High School	High School Graduate	College Graduate	Less than High School	High School Graduate	College Graduate
Total										
Korean	5,070	4.1	95.9	63.2	3.0	97.0	65.6	5.0	95.0	61.3
Filipino	5,831	2.5	97.5	71.1	2.2	97.8	65.8	2.8	97.2	74.8
Chinese	17,071	22.2	77.8	48.1	21.5	78.5	49.4	22.8	77.2	46.9
Indian	14,847	9.5	90.5	66.4	7.8	92.2	69.3	11.2	88.8	63.3
N-B White	277,094	3.5	96.5	50.2	4.2	95.8	49.8	2.9	97.1	50.6
First Generation										
Korean	3,812	5.0	95.0	58.5	3.7	96.3	62.2	5.9	94.1	55.7
Filipino	4,710	2.4	97.6	72.3	1.7	98.3	67.3	2.9	97.1	75.5
Chinese	13,031	27.8	72.2	40.6	27.1	72.9	42.6	28.3	71.7	39.0
Indian	12,788	10.4	89.6	64.9	8.5	91.5	68.5	12.5	87.5	61.2
1.5 Generation										
Korean	753	1.5	98.5	74.6	0.6	99.4	71.8	2.1	97.9	76.8
Filipino	510	2.2	97.8	62.2	2.7	97.3	55.5	1.6	98.4	69.2
Chinese	1,800	5.6	94.4	65.7	7.3	92.7	61.7	3.8	96.2	69.7
Indian	1,069	3.8	96.2	72.3	5.1	94.9	69.3	2.5	97.5	75.5
Native/U.S.-Born										
Korean	505	1.8	98.2	81.2	1.7	98.3	80.8	1.8	98.2	81.5
Filipino	611	3.6	96.4	69.6	4.9	95.1	65.4	2.5	97.5	73.2
Chinese	2,240	3.1	96.9	77.3	3.4	96.6	74.9	2.8	97.2	79.7
Indian	990	2.8	97.2	78.9	2.5	97.5	79.6	3.2	96.8	78.1

Source: The 2006-2010 American Community Surveys

conclude that most 1.5- and second-generation Korean women have much higher educational levels than their mothers, but their male counterparts have only slightly higher educational levels

than their immigrant fathers. Considering that both Korea and the Korean community in the United States have made significant progress in terms of intergenerational mobility in education, the intergenerational educational mobility of younger-generation Korean men is insignificant, in comparison.

Statistics in Table 4 reveal that younger-generation Chinese Americans in the New York area achieved the highest intergenerational mobility among the four Asian groups. We noted above that 28% of Chinese immigrants did not complete high school, a much higher rate than the other three Asian immigrant groups. However, in looking at 1.5-generation and U.S.-born Chinese Americans, the rates of those who completed less than a high school education were very low, comparable to those of their other Asian counterparts. In terms of the rate of college graduation, they have also achieved a high intergenerational mobility rate. Sixty-seven percent of 1.5-generation and 77% of U.S.-born Chinese Americans completed college, compared to only 41% of Chinese immigrants. These findings support the claim by Kasinitz and his colleagues that younger-generation Chinese Americans achieved a very high level of mobility in education regardless of their family background (Kasinitz 2008: 145). Chinese Americans have achieved the highest level of intergenerational mobility in education among all Asian groups.

Surprising to many readers, Filipinos in the New York area, contrary to the other Asian groups, experienced a somewhat downward intergenerational mobility in education. While 72% of Filipino immigrants completed a college education, only 62% of 1.5-generation and 70% of native-born Filipino Americans finished college. In looking at the differences in the intergenerational college graduation rates of Filipinos, we can see that there was as much as a 10% decrease from the first-generation Filipino immigrants to 1.5-generation Filipino Americans. Looking at the national data, native U.S.-born Filipino Americans have a

significantly lower level of education than Filipino immigrants (Min 2006: 82). There may be a number of different explanations for the Filipino intergenerational mobility anomaly in education. I would like to suggest that younger-generation Filipino Americans' over-assimilation is one of the factors that have contributed to their downward intergenerational mobility in education. A number of studies have shown that, for children of immigrants, retaining their ethnic language and identity is a major contributing factor to their school performance (Gibson 1988; Ruben 1995; Zhou and Bankston III 1998). Data show that younger-generation Filipino Americans are far more culturally assimilated to American culture than other Asian groups (Portest and Rumbaut 2001: 129).

I previously noted that 1.5-generation Korean women had a higher college graduation rate than their male counterparts, which is a reverse gender-gap trend for Korean immigrants. We can see the same reversal of the gender gap in education for other Asian 1.5 generations, not only in the college graduation rate but also in the high-school graduation rate. For example, 1.5-generation Chinese Americans' college graduation rates for men and women were 62% and 70%, respectively, and their less-than-high-school-education rates were 7.3% and 3.8%, respectively. I suggest that Asian boys who came to the United States at early ages accompanied by their parents have more adjustment problems than their female counterparts, which is why more of them cannot complete high school and why so many have problems in completing college compared to their female counterparts.

Generational Differences in Occupations

The second component of socioeconomic attainments is occupations. I have prepared two tables to show the generational differences in Korean Americans' occupational adaptations. Korean immigrants have been highly concentrated in small businesses mainly because they cannot find professional occupations commensurate with their educational levels due to their language barrier (Min 1988, 2008). But we expect U.S.-educated 1.5-generation and native-born Koreans with no language barriers to avoid labor-intensive small businesses and to move into the mainstream economy. To illustrate a radical reduction in the self-employment rates of younger-generation Koreans, I provide a table showing the generational differences in Korean Americans' occupation classifications using three categories: (1) employment in private firms or non-profit organizations, (2) employment in the government, and (3) self-employed, which includes individual proprietorship, partnership, and corporations. We also expect younger-generation Korean Americans, along with other Asian groups, to hold high-status and high-paying occupations. For this, I provide another table showing proportions of Korean Americans in professional and managerial occupations, the two highest categories of occupations in the standard occupational classification.

Since the data on Korean American workers as a whole do not mean much, I will begin the discussion directly by looking at the generational differences in the self-employment rate. Thirty-three percent of Korean immigrant full-time male workers in the New York area were self-employed in 2008, compared to only 16% of their white male counterparts. Korean immigrant women also show a much higher self-employment rate (21%) than their native-born white counterparts (9%). Among Asian immigrant groups in the area, Korean immigrants show

the highest self-employment rate. The 1990 U.S. Census data showed that Korean immigrants had the second highest self-employment rate next to the Greeks among all immigrant groups in the United States (Min and Bozorgmehr 2003: 21). Since many self-employed Korean immigrants did not report their self-employed status to the Census survey,¹ their actual self-

Table 5: The Self-Employment Rate (%) of Korean Americans aged 25-64, Compared to Other Groups, by Generation

Generation Ethnic Group	Number	Total	Men	Women
Total				
Korean	4,285	24.3	27.9	20.8
Filipino	5,330	5.6	6.4	5.0
Chinese	14,850	10.4	12.1	8.8
Indian	12,681	10.4	13.0	7.3
White	248,045	12.5	16.0	8.9
First Generation				
Korean	3,126	29.1	32.7	25.7
Filipino	4,292	5.2	6.4	4.5
Chinese	11,090	11.5	13.2	9.9
Indian	10,797	10.7	13.0	7.5
1.5 Generation				
Korean	691	12.0	15.0	9.6
Filipino	472	7.0	7.1	6.9
Chinese	1,671	7.3	10.7	7.7
Indian	988	9.2	10.5	7.7
Native/U.S.-Born (mostly 2nd-Generarion)				
Korean	468	10.0	13.7	6.9
Filipino	566	6.4	6.0	6.7
Chinese	2,089	8.3	9.1	5.6
Indian	896	8.1	10.0	7.1

Source: The 2006-2010 American Community Surveys

¹ Often, a Korean immigrant husband and a wife run businesses together, but only one partner reports his/her self-employed status to the Internal Revenue and the interviewers. This is the main reason why census data have underestimated the self-employment rate of Korean immigrants. Another factor contributing to the underreport of their self-employment rate is the fact that many Korean immigrants who have both employed jobs and their own businesses report only their employed jobs without reporting their part-time business activities.

employment rate is much higher than what census data indicate. For example, a survey of Korean immigrants in New York City showed that 41% of Korean immigrant full-time workers were self-employed (Min 2008: 32).

For the purposes of this study, we are more interested in the self-employment rates of 1.5-generation and U.S.-born Koreans. Table 5 shows that the self-employment rates of 1.5-generation and U.S.-born Koreans were respectively 12% and 10%, a huge drop from 29%—the self-employment rate of Korean immigrants. Both 1.5-generation and U.S.-born Koreans in the New York area had substantially higher self-employment rates than their respective Asian American counterparts, which seems to be due mainly to the fact that a fraction of younger-generation Koreans inherited businesses from their retiring parents. The intergenerational difference in Korean Americans' self-employment rates is far more significant than the Korean-non-Korean difference among younger-generation Asian Americans. Moreover, we also need to remember that younger-generation Koreans run different types of businesses. While Korean immigrants are heavily concentrated in several types of labor-intensive retail and service businesses (Min 1996 and 2008), younger-generation Korean business owners are heavily represented in professional and less labor-intensive service businesses.

The radical intergenerational reduction in the tendency to start one's own businesses among Korean Americans sharply contrasts with Jewish Americans, who have transmitted their entrepreneurial spirit over many generations (Goldscheider and Kobrin 1980; Goldscheider and Zuckerman 1984; Light and Roach 1996). For example, Ivan Light and Elizabeth Roach's analysis of PUMS of the 1990 Census revealed that native-born whites of Russian ancestry, who were presumed to be mostly multigenerational Jewish Americans, in the Los Angeles-Riverside-Orange Counties CMSA, had a much higher self-employment rate (25%) than other native-born

white Americans (13%) (Light and Roach 1996: 199). How can we explain the differences between these two groups in the level of intergenerational transmission of immigrant entrepreneurship?

I suggest that two factors have contributed to the Jewish-Korean intergroup difference in the degree of inheriting entrepreneurship. First, under the impact of Confucian cultural traditions, Korean immigrants push their children to pursue high-status, high-paying professional and managerial occupations in medical, legal, engineering, and managerial fields (D. Kim 2004; E. Y. Kim 1993; Min 1998: 71-72). Thus few of them want their children to run businesses. For example, results of a survey of business owners in New York City in the late 1980s show that only 3.8% of Korean immigrant respondents wanted their children to go into business, compared to 20% of white business owners and 22% of Latino immigrant business owners (Waldinger 1989: 67). By contrast, a few studies have documented that many contemporary Jewish émigrés from the former Soviet Union want to pass their entrepreneurship to their children (Gold 1992: 85; Gold 1995: 35).

Second, and more importantly, by virtue of many professional and managerial occupations created by the contemporary postindustrial economy in the United States, second-generation Korean and other Asian Americans with high educational levels do exceptionally well socioeconomically in the mainstream economy. Studies show that 1.5-generation and native-born Korean Americans do not have disadvantages compared to native-born white Americans in translating their education and other human capital investments into earnings (Kim and Sakamoto 2010; Sakamoto et al. 2009). Thus they have little incentive for getting into businesses. By contrast, there were few professional jobs available when second-generation Jews were emerging in the beginning of the twentieth century. Moreover, they encountered more

discrimination in the general labor market at that time than native-born Asian Americans do now (Gold 2002: 261-264). Many second-generation Jews inherited businesses from their parents because they felt that they could better control their destinies in their own businesses than in the general labor market.

By virtue of their high education obtained in the United States and fluency in English, most younger-generation Korean Americans are expected to hold high-status and high-paying professional and managerial occupations in the mainstream economy. Table 6 provides data on proportions of workers in managerial and professional occupations. The findings support our expectations about younger-generation Korean Americans' advantages for these high-status occupations over Korean immigrants.

According to the 2006-2010 American Community Survey, 23% of Korean immigrants are engaged in professional occupations. This is a higher proportion than in the 1990 and 2000 census data, which indicates that recent Korean immigrants are more successful in finding professional occupations in the United States by virtue of their higher education and greater fluency in English. However, they are underrepresented in professional occupations compared to Indian and Filipino immigrants with similar levels of education, due to their language barrier in comparison to the other two groups. Korean immigrants are also well represented in managerial, business-related, and financial occupations, comparable to white Americans and Chinese and Indian immigrants, due to their high level of business involvement.

The last two panels in Table 6 show proportions of younger-generation Koreans engaged in managerial and professional occupations. More than two-thirds of 1.5-generation and U.S.-born Koreans held these two types of high-status and high-paying occupational categories,

compared to less than half (44%) of Korean immigrants. In looking at the differences in the job categories of different generations of Koreans in the United States, we can see a significant rate of intergenerational mobility in occupational status. In terms of their occupational patterns, 1.5-generation Koreans are far more similar to U.S.-born Koreans than to first-generation Koreans. One major occupational difference between the two groups is that a substantially higher proportion of 1.5-generation Koreans (36%) are involved in managerial/business/financial

Table 6: Proportions of Korean-American Full-Time Workers 25-64 Years Old in Professional and Managerial Occupations, Compared to Other Asian Groups, by Generation

Generation Ethnic Group	N	Managerial Business Finance	Professional Specialty	All Other Occupations
Total				
Korean	3,001	22.9	27.4	49.7
Filipino	4,104	14.8	48.1	37.1
Chinese	10,668	21.4	29.9	48.7
Indian	9,568	23.3	38.8	37.9
Native-Born White	175,791	24.3	29.2	46.6
First Generation				
Korean	2,165	20.6	23.0	56.4
Filipino	3,317	12.4	49.0	38.6
Chinese	7,767	18.1	27.9	53.9
Indian	8,164	21.7	38.4	39.9
1.5 Generation				
Korean	502	31.6	36.3	32.1
Filipino	369	26.6	40.7	32.8
Chinese	1,320	30.0	31.8	38.2
Indian	739	31.4	41.8	26.8
Native/U.S.-Born (mostly 2nd Generation)				
Korean	334	24.0	42.8	33.2
Filipino	418	23.9	47.6	28.5
Chinese	1,581	30.4	38.2	31.4
Indian	665	32.8	40.9	26.3

Source: The 2006-2010 American Community Surveys

occupations than U.S.-born Koreans (24%). This difference seems to be due mainly to the fact that many 1.5-generation Koreans have advantages in obtaining managerial positions because they are bilingual. By virtue of their bilingual ability and bicultural orientations, they may be able to find managerial occupations both in the mainstream economy and in the Korean ethnic economy. We have found that younger-generation Filipino and Indian Americans held slightly higher proportions of professional and managerial occupations than either their Korean or Chinese counterparts.

Generational Differences in Economic Conditions

The third component of Korean Americans' socioeconomic attainments is their economic conditions. Census data have three indicators of economic conditions: (1) median household income, (2) median income, and (3) poverty rate. Table 7 offers statistics on each of these indicators for Korean Americans, compared to other groups, with a focus on generational differences.

The median household income of Korean immigrants in 2008 was about \$61,000, much lower than those of Filipino (about \$103,000) and Indian (\$99,000) immigrants. Although Korean immigrants had an overall higher educational level, they had much lower median household earnings than native-born white Americans (\$85,537). Korean immigrants are also behind native-born whites and Filipino immigrants in terms of full-time workers' median earnings. The lower household and individual median earnings of Korean immigrants are partly due to labor market disadvantages related to their language barrier. On the whole, Filipino and Indian immigrants not only have higher educational levels but also speak English much better

than Korean immigrants. But I would also like to suggest that self-employed households usually underreport their earnings and that, due to their much higher self-employment rate, Korean immigrant households underreported their earnings to a greater extent than other Asian groups. A much larger proportion of Korean immigrants also work in Korean-owned businesses compared to Filipino or Indian immigrants (Min 2008: 45). These co-ethnic employees' earnings are also underreported because many Korean owners do not report their Korean employees' earnings.

1.5-generation and native-born Korean Americans had much higher median household and full-time workers' earnings than Korean immigrants, although they are much younger. As already pointed out above, Korean immigrants' earnings seem to be substantially higher than the statistics in Table 7 indicate because, whether employed or self-employed, their earnings have been underestimated. However, there is no question that younger-generation Korean Americans have substantially higher earnings than first-generation Korean immigrants. Native-born Koreans also do much better than Korean immigrants in their earnings, although they do not do as well as 1.5-generation Koreans (which will be explained later).

To explain the major contributing factors to younger-generation Koreans' labor market advantages over the immigrant generation, we need a multivariate analysis. However, I would like to offer my common-sense speculations without using statistics for Korean immigrant and other lay readers. Younger-generation groups had much higher earnings partly because of their higher educational levels, as already noted in Table 4. But more important contributing factors to their higher earnings seem to be their effective communication skills in English, social networks with white and other Asian American employees in corporations, and the value of degrees earned in the United States. Korean immigrants' barrier in English seems to be the most significant factor in their disadvantages in earnings and in the labor market.

Surprisingly, 1.5-generation Koreans had higher median earnings than U.S.-born Koreans, although they had a substantially lower college graduation rate (see Table 4). We already noted in Table 6 that 1.5-generation Koreans had a higher self-employment rate and were more highly represented in managerial occupations than U.S.-born Koreans. Since self-employed 1.5-generation and U.S.-born Koreans mostly run professional and finance-related businesses,

Table 7: Indicators of Korean Americans' Economic Conditions, Compared to Other Groups, by Generation, Aged 25-64

Generation Ethnic Group	Median Household Earnings	Median Earnings of Full-time workers			% Below Poverty by Age Group		
		All	Male	Female	*0-17	25-64	*65+
Total							
Korean	\$68,474	\$51,564,	\$53,461	\$49,501	6.3%	6.2%	21.9%
Filipino	\$102,146	\$60,457	\$53,461	\$66,039	2.7%	2.7%	5.2%
Chinese	\$67,988	\$50,799	\$53,461	\$49,072	13.6%	9.8%	22.1%
Indian	\$99,608	\$64,153	\$70,534	\$54,917	8.9%	5.2%	7.9%
White	\$85,537	\$66,291	\$76,316	\$55,599	6.3%	3.5%	4.6%
First Generation							
Korean	\$60,959	\$45,343	\$50,079	\$40,305	-----	6.8%	21.8%
Filipino	\$102,199	\$60,457	\$51,564	\$66,039	-----	2.7%	4.8%
Chinese	\$59,876	\$43,934	\$45,754	\$42,205	-----	11.6%	23.1%
Indian	\$98,898	\$62,605	\$69,499	\$52,831	-----	5.5%	7.9%
1.5 Generation							
Korean	\$101,598	\$70,826	\$73,766	\$66,165	-----	21.8%	-----
Filipino	\$109,834	\$60,457	\$60,200	\$60,959	-----	2.4%	-----
Chinese	\$98,368	\$60,959	\$65,901	\$56,895	-----	23.1%	7.7%
Indian	\$117,565	\$71,392	\$73,682	\$67,033	-----	7.9%	-----
Native/U.S.-Born							
Korean	\$87,546	\$66,901	\$72,189	\$63,704	-----	5.7%	-----
Filipino	\$98,368	\$60,959	\$56,159	\$64,153	-----	2.3%	-----
Chinese	\$95,724	\$66,291	\$71,119	\$62,243	-----	3.6%	8.3%
Indian	\$93,396	\$67,055	\$79,164	\$59,876	-----	4.0%	-----

Source: The 2006-2010 American Community Surveys

*Since most Koreans 0-17 years old belong to the 1.5-generation and native.-born groups, they are not divided into three generations. The elderly (65+) and the junior (1-17 years old) age groups in the 1.5 generation and native-born categories for Korean and other immigrants groups, with the exception of the Chinese, had such small numbers of cases that their poverty rates could not be assessed.

they are likely to have higher earnings than self-employed Korean immigrants. Thus 1.5-generation Koreans' higher self-employment rate and higher representation in managerial occupations than native-born Koreans seem to give the former advantages for earnings over the latter. 1.5-generation Koreans seem to have advantages over U.S.-born Koreans in business and managerial jobs due to their bilingual ability. For example, I know many 1.5-generation Korean medical doctors fluent in both Korean and English who serve both Korean and non-Korean customers effectively. They seem to have advantages over Korean immigrant and U.S.-born Korean medical doctors. Also, many American companies, including banks, finance companies, and social-service agencies, have recruited fluently bilingual Koreans to reach out to Korean clients.

The third and final indicator of economic conditions is poverty rate. When using the college graduation rate and proportions of managerial and professional occupations as indicators of Korean Americans' socioeconomic status, we tend to look at the more successful people at the top end of the spectrum. These indicators are very useful for Korean- and other Asian-American groups because they have exceptionally high socioeconomic statuses, substantially higher than white Americans, who, in turn, have higher statuses than other disadvantaged minority groups (blacks, Latinos, Hispanics, and Pacific Islanders). But not all Korean and Asian Americans have high socioeconomic statuses. There is a significant proportion of Korean and other Asian Americans who are at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder. One good indicator of those who belong to the bottom of the ladder is poverty rate (the proportion of poor people or households).

The three last columns of Table 7 show the poverty rates of three different age groups: (1) 0-17, (2) 25-64 (economically active people), and (3) 65 + (elderly people). For poverty rate, I have divided the population into these three groups because elderly people and minors/children

usually have higher poverty rates than young and middle-aged people who are economically active. The youngest age group (0-17) is not divided into three generations because most belong to the U.S.-born and 1.5 generation.

About 7% of Korean immigrants 25-64 years old were classified as poor. This figure is higher than that of native-born white Americans (3.5%) and Filipino immigrants (2.7%). However, Korean immigrants for this age group had a much lower poverty rate than Chinese immigrants (11.6%). We previously noted that many Chinese immigrants did not complete high school and also that many of them are undocumented residents, and that these disadvantaged Chinese workers were subjected to severe exploitation by Chinese business owners. Given their lower educational levels and concentration in employment in the Chinese ethnic economy, it is not surprising that such a high proportion of Chinese immigrants earned wages below the poverty line.

Since the Korean, Filipino, and Indian groups do not have enough cases for the 1.5 and native-born generations, we cannot assess their poverty rates, but we have data on the three groups for the immigrant generation. A very high proportion (22%) of Korean elderly immigrants was defined as poor. This is a much higher proportion than those of native-born white Americans (3.5%) and two other Asian groups, the Filipino (4.8%) and Indian elderly (7.8%). This is an important issue for Korean community leaders, social workers, and policy makers. I believe the main reason why the Korean elderly have a high poverty rate is their high self-employment rate during their young and middle-aged years. Many Korean immigrant small business owners have turned into owners of big businesses, such as supermarkets and major real estate companies, in their middle or elderly years. However, many others have been forced to

close their stores during the recession period. These former unsuccessful business owners have neither pensions nor bank savings.

I would also like to suggest that the census-based poverty rate as an indicator of the welfare of the Korean elderly is somewhat inaccurate. The poverty rate of the Korean elderly may have been overestimated because many elderly Koreans who engage in economic activities do not report their earnings. Many elderly Koreans make money from part-time or full-time jobs, as babysitters, housemaids, or helpers in senior centers (Min 1998: 95), but they are not likely to report their earnings. Those who receive money for taking care of their own grandchildren are especially unlikely to report their earnings. According to a survey that I conducted in 1993, more elderly Korean women engaged in economic activities than elderly men, partly because many Korean businesses offered female jobs and partly because they could more effectively take care of grandchildren (1998).

Generational Differences in Home-ownership and Health Insurance

Socioeconomic attainments or statuses include education, occupations, and economic conditions, the three components we have already examined. But since socioeconomic statuses have much to do with the welfare of people, it may be useful to examine the rates of Korean Americans' home-ownership and health insurance coverage. We need to look at these two elements of welfare, especially because Korean Americans are known to be behind other Asian groups in terms of home-ownership and health insurance coverage.

Table 8 provides the intergenerational differences in percentages of Korean-Americans who own their homes, compared to other groups, based on census data. All four Asian immigrant

groups have lower rates of home-ownership than native-born white Americans (69%). This finding is not surprising at all given that new immigrants need to live in the United States for many years before they can afford to purchase their own homes. In looking at the table, I found that Korean immigrants have a much lower rate of home-ownership than the other three Asian groups, which is noteworthy. While only 41% of Korean immigrants in the New York-New Jersey metropolitan area own their homes, 52%-58% of the other three Asian groups own their

Table 8: Percentage of Home-Ownership among Korean-American Householders, Aged 25-64, Compared to Other Groups, by Generation, in the New York-New Jersey CMSA

Generation Ethnic Group	Number of the Housing Unit	Percentage of the Housing Unit Owned by Inhabitants
Total		
Korean	59,283	40.5
Filipino	50,574	56.0
Chinese	164,007	57.8
Indian	142,015	51.7
Native-Born White	2,026,041	68.6
First Generation		
Korean	45,416	40.5
Filipino	41,199	58.2
Chinese	123,999	55.9
Indian	123,356	52.0
1.5 Generation		
Korean	7,866	48.7
Filipino	4,212	46.9
Chinese	17,622	68.6
Indian	9,668	58.6
Native/U.S.-Born (mostly 2nd-Generarion)		
Korean	6,001	29.1
Filipino	5,163	47.4
Chinese	22,386	59.9
Indian	8,991	40.4

Source: The 2006-2010 American Community Surveys

Note: American Community Survey classifies all housing units into three main categories: households, group quarters, or vacant units. Group quarters include correctional facilities, mental hospitals, military barracks, and rooming houses. The figure in the table include only households headed by Korean Americans and other selected group members.

homes. We previously noted that Chinese immigrants have a lower educational level and lower earnings than Korean immigrants. Moreover, they are far more highly concentrated in the New York central city than Korean immigrants. Residents in the central city have a much lower rate of home-ownership than those in suburban areas. Many people say that Chinese immigrants purchase their homes as investments before they purchase businesses, but that Korean immigrants purchase their businesses before purchasing their homes. Chinese kin members often put money together to purchase houses to live together. Also, many Chinese immigrants rent their rooms to private tenants.

A higher proportion of 1.5-generation Koreans (48%) own their homes than Korean immigrants. This finding is not surprising considering that 1.5-generation Koreans have higher educational, occupational, and economic statuses than Korean immigrant householders. But 1.5-generation Koreans are far behind their Chinese and Indian counterparts in terms of home-ownership. Surprisingly, a much lower proportion (29%) of U.S.-born Koreans are home-owners compared to Korean immigrants. All of the other U.S.-born Asian groups have much higher rates of home-ownership than U.S.-born Koreans. Most of the native-born Korean home-owners seem to be unmarried Koreans who live alone. Thus, in this case, an unusually low home-ownership rate among native-born Koreans does not reflect their poor economic conditions.

We now turn to the rate of Korean Americans' health insurance coverage, the final indicator of their welfare status. Some local survey data have shown that a high proportion of Korean immigrants do not have health insurance coverage (Kim and Yoo 2009; Ryu et al. 2001). Census data for Korean immigrants in the New York-New Jersey area support the findings that a high rate of Korean immigrants have no insurance coverage. Only 61% of Korean immigrants at the economically-active ages (25-64) in the New York-New Jersey area have insurance

coverage, which means that nearly 40% of them are not covered by health insurance. We have found that much higher proportions of other Asian immigrant groups, including the Chinese, are covered by health insurance than Korean immigrants. Since the Chinese have much lower self-employment rates than Korean immigrants, naturally they have much higher rates of health insurance coverage. As we noted in Table 5, Filipino immigrants in particular have an exceptionally low self-employment rate (5%), which means that almost all Filipino immigrants work for private firms, non-profit organizations, or the government. That is why they have the highest rate of health insurance coverage (87%) among the four Asian groups

Table 9: Percentage of Health Insurance Coverage among Korean Americans, Aged 25-64, Compared to Other Groups, by Generation and Gender

Generation Ethnic Group	Number	Total	Men	Women
Total				
Korean	125,702	65.7	64.6	66.6
Filipino	116,386	87.4	86.5	88.0
Chinese	386,316	81.6	79.5	83.4
Indian	320,374	83.6	81.9	85.5
White	3,810,281	92.9	91.5	94.2
First Generation				
Korean	93,293	60.6	59.4	61.5
Filipino	90,446	87.6	88.1	87.3
Chinese	296,222	79.6	77.4	81.5
Indian	270,962	83.3	81.7	85.0
1.5 Generation				
Korean	19,842	81.2	80.0	82.1
Filipino	12,662	86.5	81.2	91.9
Chinese	39,902	87.1	85.1	89.3
Indian	25,839	81.7	77.7	86.5
Native/U.S.-Born (mostly 2nd-Generarion)				
Korean	12,567	79.5	77.4	81.2
Filipino	13,278	86.3	83.2	89.5
Chinese	50,192	88.8	86.4	91.3
Indian	23,573	89.6	88.5	90.9

Source: The 2008-2010 American Community Surveys

Note: American Community Survey has asked questions about health insurance coverage since 2008.

No doubt, the main reason why Korean immigrants have such a low rate of health insurance coverage is the prevalence of their participation in the ethnic economy, either as business owners or as employees of co-ethnic businesses. As pointed out previously, about 80% of Korean immigrant workers are involved in the Korean ethnic economy (Min 2008: 32). Most Korean-owned businesses are small retail or service businesses with a few, several, or in some cases, no employees. Neither Korean owners nor Korean employees working for these small businesses have health insurance coverage through their businesses. Successful business owners privately purchase health insurance, but most of them are not likely to spend money to cover their employees' health insurance. Only Korean-owned corporations, such as medical, legal, and accounting firms, are likely to cover health insurance for themselves and their employees.

The fact that many Korean immigrant households are not covered by health insurance is an important policy issue for social service agencies in the Korean community and local governments. However, I would like to point out that the health coverage rates of Korean immigrants may be better than these statistics suggest. Many Korean immigrants regularly use Korean herbal medicine and acupuncture services for their healthcare. Moreover, many Korean social service agencies and churches provide free or cheap clinics for Korean immigrants. Also, more and more Korean immigrants have taken health tours to Korea for basic tests, dental care, and other medical treatments. Most Korean business owners cannot purchase expensive American health insurance, but many of them seem to be able to spend money on alternative medical care, such as herbal remedies and acupuncture. Regardless, Korean immigrants will be major beneficiaries of President Obama's universal health insurance plan when it is enforced later this year.

Younger-generation Koreans have much higher rates (80% or higher) of health insurance coverage than Korean immigrants. This finding is not surprising because a predominant majority of them work in the general economy. However, their health insurance coverage rates are slightly lower than their counterparts in other Asian groups. I suggest that their slightly lower rates are mainly due to their higher self-employment rates, as we noted in Table 5. Some self-employed younger-generation Koreans seem to have inherited retail businesses from their parents, and many of these business owners may not have health insurance coverage. Most of the other younger-generation Korean Americans are likely to engage in professional businesses, such as graphic design and online sales. Some of these professional business owners may not have health insurance coverage either.

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