

“We Shouldn’t Be Forgotten”:
Korean Military Brides and Koreans in Kansas

By

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Abstract

This dissertation goes beyond the West/East Coast paradigm of Korean immigration to the United States by focusing on the Korean diaspora in Kansas. The dissertation argues that the Korean diaspora in Kansas is unique in a number of respects. Most importantly, Korean women have dominated the makeup of the migrants by gender and continue to play the major role in this expanding diaspora. Not only highly gendered, the Korean diaspora in Kansas is also relatively young and scattered across the state. The dissertation illuminates the dynamics within the Korean diaspora where race, class, gender, and certain Korean attitudes and behaviors have created new Korean/American identities, which are never complete but still in production over time. It explains how and why Koreans ended up in Kansas. It also demonstrates what is unique about the acculturation and community formation of Koreans in Kansas with the involvement of internationally married Korean women and chain migration of their family members to rural parts of Kansas and, later, to larger cities such as Kansas City and Wichita.

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My dissertation is dedicated to my son, Lance, and my parents, Kwan-soo Kim and Hyung-soon Park. Lance will know how much his dad loves him. My parents' love and support goes beyond words. They made me who I am, today. I love you, mom and dad. My brothers, Sang-ki Kim and Sang-joon Kim, and other family members hold a special place here.

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Preface

Since the 1965 Immigration Act, the United States has witnessed a massive migration of Asian immigrants. From 1965 on, a majority of the Korean immigrants now living in the United States came to this country. While the impact of this Korean migration to the United States has been examined and analyzed in urban areas on the East and West Coasts, such as Los Angeles and New York, the impact of “new” immigration, especially Korean immigrants in the Midwest, has rarely been explored, despite the fact that the 2000 Census demonstrates a significant number of Korean migrants who came to the region. For example, scholars such as D. Lee, P. Min, K. Park, and E. Yu, examine the ethnic community development process in Los Angeles, while scholars such as I. Kim, P. Min, and K. Park made a significant contribution to the field of research on Korean immigrants in New York City. Other scholars such as H. Kim and Kwang Kim, and I. Yoon focus on the ethnic Korean community in Chicago but not elsewhere in the Midwest.

My dissertation goes beyond the West/East Coast paradigm of Korean immigration to the United States by focusing on the Korean diaspora in Kansas. Although Korean immigrants have been the second largest Asian immigrant group in Kansas after the Immigration Act of 1965, Korean immigrants’ experiences and settlement patterns in Kansas have rarely caught scholarly attention. This may be because Koreans in Kansas have not formed sizable ethnic enclaves such as those in East and West Coast areas. One other critical reason for Korean migration to Kansas not to have merited serious study is that the Korean presence in Junction City, Leavenworth, and the Kansas City metropolitan area is a relatively recent phenomenon, and the majority of Korean immigrants have settled in the suburbs rather

than in urban centers. Moreover, in major Kansas cities, such as Overland Park and Kansas City where more than 50% of the Korean population resides, residential patterns of Koreans tend to be dispersed rather than grouped into an ethnic enclave as in Los Angeles or New York.

The Korean diaspora in Kansas is unique in a number of respects. Most importantly, Korean women have dominated the makeup of the migrants by gender and continue to play the major role in this expanding diaspora. Not only highly gendered, the Korean diaspora in Kansas is also relatively young and scattered across the state. For this reason, my dissertation on Korean communities in Kansas employs the postmodernist approach to diaspora. The terms diaspora and diasporic communities, today, are increasingly used as a metaphoric definition not only for refugees, expellees, and displaced communities and ethnic minorities, but also voluntary migrants, expatriates, and immigrants.

I hope to illuminate the dynamics within the Korean diaspora where race, class, gender, and certain Korean attitudes and behaviors have created new Korean/American identities, which are never complete but still in production over time. My purpose is to explain how and why Koreans ended up in Kansas. I intend to make them visible as Korean-Americans. I hope to demonstrate that the acculturation and community formation of Koreans in Kansas is unique because of the involvement of internationally married Korean women and chain migration of their family members to rural parts of Kansas and, later, to larger cities such as Kansas City and Wichita.

Introduction

Background

On January 2, 1987, the *Junction City Daily Union* newspaper reported the first baby born during the New Year in the Junction City-Fort Riley area of Kansas. The new-born baby's name was Kimberly Marie Portillo, whose father met her mother, Aesuk Portillo, when he was stationed in South Korea as a serviceman. At the time of Kimberly's birth, her Korean mother had lived in the United States for only nine months. Kimberly's mother is one of the thousands of Korean women who came to Kansas through their marriages to American servicemen. Stories of Korean military brides (KMBs) like Aesuk Portillo would be easily overlooked, just as the Korean presence in Kansas has been.



Figure 1: Green, Brenda. "Portillo first baby of 1987." *Junction City Daily Union* 2 Jan 1987: 1-2. Print.

Most of the newspaper items I introduce here come from the late 80s. During this period, with about one thousand Korean immigrants building their ethnic community and going through an acculturation process in rural America (see appendix: table 2), the Korean presence in the Junction City-Fort Riley area became more visible. This period also coincides with local Americans' backlash against those Korean immigrants, many of whom were allegedly involved with prostitution activities. Gradually, however, Korean immigrants were accepted as a part of the rural American city's diversity and recognized as bringing to the city a taste of something Korean.

The major history of Korean immigration to Kansas began with Korean women who married American servicemen and followed their American husbands when they completed their tour of duty. They came back to places such as Fort Riley and Fort Leavenworth, KS. Thus, to understand Korean diaspora in Kansas, it is important to examine Korean women's exogamy to American men, especially U.S. servicemen stationed in South Korea, and the chain migration of these women's families and relatives to the United States.



Figure 2: "Pak, Ebert wed at Fort Riley." The Sunday Union. *Junction City Daily Union* 29 June 1986: 20. Print.

Dear Journal,

12-3-91 (Tue)

I saw a video tape in ESL class about "first shock when she came first time for America who was not born in an America. Anyway she and I had some common stereotypes about Americans were all a blond, and rich, before I met my husband or I worked at the NCO club at Korea. However I was still thinking as American are very tall and have a cold blood. I was thinking as Americans are not kind, and so many bad people. Right before I came to America, I heard so many bad things and I was so afraid, also. I almost gave up to come to America, but my husband and his family were always calling me and I knew they loved me, and I had to come because I wanted an American. When I was in the USA. I felt very scared, confused, and small with bad things in my mind; it took a while to change, or to open my eyes. It was not bad like what I thought. People were nice (some people were not, but most people were nice), I didn't see the so many gangsters, and just like the woman on video said, Americans are all different, not only beautiful women and men. I cannot tell everything about it, but in my case I am getting better and better. I see the bright side a lot more.

Figure 3: A journal written by a KMB. Courtesy of Lizette Peter

When these Korean women and their relatives came to Kansas, many challenges, including a language barrier, economic hardship, and a new cultural adjustment, were waiting for them.

But, most of them eventually made Kansas their home.

ACS course gives confidence to those trying to learn English

By JULIE FINTEL
Daily Union correspondent
Yun Zito is expecting a baby and her classmates are planning a baby shower for her. They have filled in the correct time and place on the invitations and painstakingly addressed the envelopes. On the day of the party they will bring small gifts, play some simple games and have refreshments.

Yun is one of five foreign-born wives in a basic English class taught by Sue Cranford as part of the Army Community Services' adult education program at Fort Riley. Neither Yun, who is from Korea, nor any other of the women in the class, spoke any English when the class began in mid-September.

"My goal," Cranford says, "is to teach them enough English to help them survive."

Maritza Areizaga, another of Cranford's students, was afraid to answer the phone before she took the class. Now she feels confident enough to call Cranford

when she is sick and explain why she will miss class that day.

For the past six weeks, Yun Zito, Maritza Areizaga and about fifty other wives of Fort Riley servicemen have been trying to increase their skills in reading, writing, understanding and speaking English by taking the classes at the post's ACS offices. The classes, which are free, are held twice weekly, and last for two hours.

Before they enter the program the students are given a simple test to determine on which of four levels they belong. Mary Dickerson, chairperson of the program, points out that the students come from many different backgrounds and it's often hard to place them in the right learning situation.

"We run a whole gamut," she says. "Many of them are educated in their own field; some are college educated; a few are illiterate in their native language. But they all need skills in

speaking English on a daily basis."

The Asians usually have the most difficult time learning English because their language is so different from English and because they must also cope with an alphabet which is strange to them.

The course uses a method perfected by a teacher of literacy, the late Dr. Frank Lauback, in which repetition is the key to learning. The lower levels stress conversational English while the students on the higher levels learn the finer points of grammar and correct usage.

The different cultural backgrounds of the students can also be a problem. But Dickerson stresses that the course is designed to teach English, not to try to change the cultural values of the student. In her orientation for teachers, she tries to explain some of the cultural differences they will encounter in their students.

See ACS, Page 3



Photography: Jerry Watson
Sue Cranford looks over Yun Ae Zito's English book as Maria de L. Sanchez, center, Ann M. McCollum and Chong Sun Randall check over lesson.

Figure 4: Fintel, Julie. "ACS course gives confidence to those trying to learn English." *Junction City Daily Union* 13 Nov 1985: 1 & 3. Print.



Photography: Jerry Watson

Being 64 years old doesn't seem to slow down Lim Yun Pii, 424 N. Madison, at all from enjoying a game of badminton as she chases after a shuttlecock to bat it back to her son recently.

Figure 5: "Watching the birdie." *Junction City Daily Union* 8 March 1988: 1. Print.

Just like any Korean mother, most KMBs sacrificed their lives for the betterment of their biracial children and other family members who were able to come to America through the immigration sponsorship of KMBs.

Berry captures county spelling crown again

By LESLIE ALLEN
Daily Union staff writer

The word that stumped one of two contestants in the Geary County Spelling Bee Wednesday afternoon was prominent. Irene Berry then stepped up to the microphone and spelled disapp- point, which allowed her to win the competition for the second year in a row.

The first- and second-place winners were the same as in 1987.

Berry, daughter of Robert and Sunee Whalen, Fort Riley, won first place and Angela Gardner, daughter of Anna and Thomas Gardner, also of Fort Riley, took second. Both girls attend school at Fort Riley Junior High School.

After her win Berry said, "I've got to admit, it does feel great (to win), but I was thinking if I was going to lose to anyone, I would have wanted to lose to Angela."

Berry will now go on to the state spelling competition April 16 at Topeka West High School. She placed ninth in 1987.

Sunee Whalen said her daughter has wanted to win the competition since she first arrived in the United States approximately three years ago. "I said you can do it and she studied hard, that's why she won last year," she said.

On the day of the contest, Whalen said her daughter told her she did not think she was going to win and that her mother did not have to attend. "But I said (to her) I'll be there to root for you."

Gardner, who took second place, said she had been studying for the competition since the beginning of the school year. "I wanted to win, but I figured, just go at it and do the best that I can do."

She said the misspelling of prominent was due mainly to nervousness. "I was sitting there thinking, I know this word," she said. "But it just came out wrong."

The top five spellers, besides the top two, include: Sam Johnson, sixth-grader, Fort Riley Elementary School, third place; Rachel Lasiter, fifth-grader, Custer Hill Elementary School, fourth; and Joanne Jensen, sixth-grader, Ware Elementary, fifth.

Marcia Sol, spelling coach and reading specialist at Fort Riley Junior High School, was the coach for both Berry and Gardner. "I think that's what made it exciting, because I think the girls probably felt a fiercer competition than they ever exhibited," Sol said.

See Spelling, Page 2



Photography: Jerry Watson

Geary County Spelling Bee champion Irene Berry (left) receives a hug from her mother Sunee Whalen after the contest Wednesday.

Figure 6: Allen, Leslie. "Berry captures county spelling crown again." *Junction City Daily Union* 10 Mar 1988: 1 & 2. Print.

Most KMBs accomplished their goals by working on Fort Riley base or in Junction City.

Moreover, some KMBs and their relatives started their own small businesses, which became important in the Junction City-Fort Riley area.

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Figure 7: Junction City Daily Union 14 Jan 1987: 6. Print.



Serving it up hot!
 The cooks at Junction City Junior High School display a tray of their delicious cinnamon rolls (some of more than 1,200 they baked that day). Pictured are (front row from left) Ruth Durkee, Shige Graves, Mary Springs, Michiko Burris and Hyo Sun Mager; (back row from left) Arlene Winter, Yon Hansen, Dody Laue and Joan Ellis. For the story and more photos of the cooking team, see Living. Page 17.

Photography: Jerry Watson

Figure 8: "Serving it hot." Junction City Daily Union 18 January 1987: 1 & 17. Print.

However, the history of Korean immigration to Kansas has been largely unknown, though KMBs built their ethnic community in the Junction City-Fort Riley area in the 60s, and the Korean diaspora has expanded to larger cities, such as the Greater Kansas City and Wichita areas. In particular, despite their contribution to the chain migration of many Koreans to Kansas and the construction of Korean communities in the state, the role of KMBs in the Korean diaspora in Kansas has been invisible and never recognized.



Figure 9: www.citi-data.com/citi/junction-citi-kansas.html

My dissertation is designed to offer a new narrative of KMBs, not as *victims* or stigmatized people, but as human agents utilizing various capitals that they have acquired in their transnational experiences in a constructed silence in Korean diaspora in Kansas.

According to Pierre Bourdieu, society is a social space where people exist in relation to each

other based on their economic capital (money and material resources), cultural capital (stratified lifestyle tastes, preferences, and knowledge), and social capital (networks). Depending on the volume and capacity that an individual possesses, his/her social mobility can change and may dramatically influence other people's mobility as well. In fact, despite all forms of stigma shared by KMBs, their family, and relatives, many KMBs have been the vehicle for their family members and relatives to achieve their path to migrate and to acquire the symbolic capital of the American Dream.

On the one hand, KMBs appear to be *victims*, because although the migration of many Koreans to Kansas can be traced back to a KMB who sponsored their immigration, the discussion of a KMB as the backbone of their participation in the American Dream has rarely been brought up, as if doing so were considered a taboo to so many Korean immigrants. Only Korean elderly immigrants whom I interviewed were willing to talk about their migration as deeply related to the chain migration sparked by KMBs. My interviews with the elderly Korean immigrants imply the familial desire for a chance to realize its American Dream, as well as a shame related to its family member being married to an American GI. On the other hand, KMBs are human agents who made their choice to marry American servicemen and paved the way for their family members and relatives to acquire their symbolic capital of being American citizens and gain access to economic and cultural capitals to make their lives better.

Academic students honored

By JEANETTE ERICHSEN
Daily Union living editor

Twenty-four area students, grades nine through 12 were honored Thursday afternoon for their achievements in academics. The annual scholarship luncheon was co-sponsored by the Ladies' Reading Club and the First National Bank. Approximately 80 students, parents, and members attended the function at the JC Country Club. This was the first year the First National Bank co-sponsored the luncheon, it previously had been co-sponsored by the Central National Bank for many years.

Elfriede Sanders, president of the Ladies' Reading Club introduced the head table, which included: Marvin Darrah, principal of the Fort Riley Junior High; Kenneth Shandy, principal of the Junction City Junior High; Father Louis Mattas of St. Xavier Church; Irene Jefferies, guest speaker; Larry Coburn, president of the First National Bank; Jane Schaffer, acting principal of St. Xavier High School; John Kimbrel, principal of Junction City High School and Max Heim, superintendent of USD 475.

Following a few words by Coburn, the students were pre-



The Ladies Reading Club recognized these area students for academic excellence. They are, front row, (left to right), Kristina Edmonson, Sharon Kelley, Charlene Henney, Chong Holeman, Christie Bancroft. Second row, Sam Sul, Brett Henderson, Malisha Small, Angela Welch. Third row, Susan

Eversole, Dana Eddy, Brian Bancroft. Fourth row, Delbert Johnson, Nank-yong Kim (hidden), Ronald Moon, Vickie Lichtenhan, Lori McInnis, Cecilia Moloney. Fifth row, Rachel Meseke, Marcy Neal, Deanna Saunders. Sixth row, Gregg Holcomb, Garrett Duarte, Darrin Clouse.

faith and love linking those characteristics metaphorically to the aspects of a hand.

"Choices, values they're all hooked together just like the hand," she said.

"The adults are handing you a mixed up world," she said.

"We honor you today, we're proud of you. The future will be what you make it," she con-

Moloney, juniors at St. Xavier; Brian Bancroft, Dana Eddy, Susan Eversole and Sam Sul, sophomores at Junction City Senior High. Malisha Small and Brett Henderson, sophomores at St. Xavier; Charlene Henney and Sharon

Figure 10: Erichsen, Jeanette. "Academic students honored." *Junction City Daily Union* 2 May 1986: 1. Print.



Scholarship winner

Photography: Jerry Watson

Rocky Master (left), manager of the Junction City Wal-Mart store, presents Sam Sul, a senior at Junction City High School, with the 1988 \$1,000 Wal-Mart Foundation Scholarship from the local store. Michael Hellinger (at right) was one of the judges along with Steve Locke and Father Keith Weber.

Figure 11: "Scholarship winner." *Junction Daily Union* 18 March 1988. Print.



Figure 12: "Sign of the times." *Junction City Daily Union* 14 Feb 1986: 1. Print.

In the period from the 1950s to the present, the presence of American servicemen in South Korea brought Korean women from the country into the path of marriage migration to the United States, so that KMBs became one of the primary sources of the Korean American population in America. In fact, in many parts of the Midwest and Southwest, one can witness a heavy concentration of Koreans in military areas such as Fort Dodge (Webster City, IA), Fort Leavenworth (Leavenworth, KS), Fort Riley (Junction City, KS), Fort Knox (Radcliff, KY), Fort Leopardwood (Saint Robert, MO), Fort Sil (Lawton, OK), Fort Hood (Killeen, TX), and Fort Bliss (El Paso, TX). Many Koreans in many parts of the Midwest and Southwest in America are Korean women who migrated to the regions through exogamy to U.S. servicemen.

It is important to note that the U.S. immigration laws made marriage a precondition for non-U.S. citizens to gain legal, long-term entry into the United States in the pre-and post-1965 period. While the sentiment of antimiscegenation was still prevalent in the 1950s and 60s within the U.S. territory, exceptions were made to the extra-territorial sexual contacts between American men and Asian women in places such as U.S. military bases and treaty ports in Asia. Masculine power and the seeming sexual license afforded to American men coincided with many local women whose lack of economic, cultural, and social capitals enabled them to utilize their sexual capitals to gain entry to the United States (Koshy).¹ For example, the War Bride Act of 1945 was enacted to permit the U.S. servicemen to bring their foreign brides to the United States, while the Immigration Act of 1946 enabled the Asian spouses of U.S. citizens to bypass the restrictive quotas on Asian immigrants and enter as “non-quota immigrants.”

Moreover, the Immigration Act of 1965, known as the Hart-Celler Act, set a series of preferences by giving spouses of U.S. residents’ second preference. In particular, spouses of U.S. citizens received an entry to the country outside the preference system altogether. From 1951 to 1964, “6,423 Korean wives of U.S. servicemen and 5, 348 war orphans” entered the United States. Korean wives of G.I.’s entered the United States not as “war brides,” but as “non-quota immigrants--i.e., spouses of U.S. citizens--under the terms of the 1952 McCarran Walter Act.” The average number of Korean wives of G.I.’s immigration to the United States was “about 1,500 a year in the 1960s, and about 2, 300 in the 1970s” (H. Kim). Thus, for Koreans, marriage to American citizens and residents was one primary path for migration to

¹ According to Koshy, sexual capital explains the female sexual agency or mobility to improve an individual life-chances and opportunities by utilizing the “desirability within the field of romantic or marital relationships in a given culture.” See Koshy.

the United States, with exceptions for adoptees and a few study-abroad Korean students, especially in the pre-1965 period.

Situating themselves in direct contact with natives, KMBs' assimilation and acculturation processes have met with a number of challenges. For example, within the Korean and American communities, the identity of KMBs has been constantly defined and redefined, or understood and misunderstood, where issues such as race, class, and gender are deeply contested. Moreover, these women's questionable femininity from "sexually licentious" to "domestically feminine" has constantly been questioned, stigmatized, and even exploited by both Koreans and Americans in South Korea and the United States (Koshy 12).

Moreover, there have been several factors that diminish or promote the organization of an integral Korean diaspora community. For example, interaction is constrained by dispersal of KMBs across the state and their conditions of marital status and marrying non-Koreans. In particular, certain Korean attitudes and behaviors toward KMBs within the Korean diaspora fragment the community, along with race, class, gender, and stereotype lines.

My dissertation characterizes KMBs as the foundation of Korean American communities in Kansas. Contrary to the Korean ethnic development in East and West coast areas, the Fort Riley-Junction City area of Kansas has been known to have an exceptionally large number of military brides from South Korea, Germany, Japan, the Philippines, and Vietnam. Antimiscegenation laws were still upheld in many states until the Supreme Court finally struck down all laws forbidding interracial marriage in 1967. Given the serious racial climate in the 1950s, the Department of the Army designated Fort Riley as one of the "compassionate bases" that the Army believed would provide interracial couples with a much "safer social terrain" (Herbison and Shultz 5).

In fact, a major history of Korean immigration to Kansas began with the influx of KMBs into Junction City from the 1960s though Korean immigrants have been erased in the 1950-70 figures because they were counted as “others” (see Appendix). That is why I have selected so much newspaper material from the 1980s when Korean presence in Kansas became more visible. Through the 1990s, the continuing migration of these women and massive chain-migrations of their immediate family members and relatives has made the construction of Korean American communities possible. My interviews and fieldwork found that more than seventy percent of Korean immigrants in Kansas migrated to Kansas through chain migration made possible by KMBs. Not all Korean migration to Kansas traces back to KMBs. Many recent Korean migrants in Kansas include professionals with a U.S. degree and their spouses, a significant number of Korean nurses with their families, and a large number of Korean adoptees. Yet, it is hard to deny that a vast number of Koreans came to Kansas through chain migration, in which KMBs played a significant role.

Despite their significant contribution to the construction of ethnic Korean communities, as well as their role in the expansion of the Korean diaspora in Kansas, KMBs have been excluded in the history of Korean immigration to the United States. To both the Korean American community and mainstream American society, these women were considered neither *Korean* nor *American* enough. For example, within Korean American communities, KMBs have been treated as *yanggongju*, or western whores living in the middle of nowhere. Some local Americans called them “dog-eaters” from the poor third world Asian country. Other fellow Koreans and American males exploited them sexually. Many Koreans considered these women as bad examples against Koreans’ pursuit of being “a Model Minority.” To a lot of Americans KMBs were seemingly permanent *others*

evidenced by their looks, language, and way of life which white Midwestern values² found hard to embrace. In short, these women have been marginalized by both the Korean and American communities: many members of the Korean communities in Kansas regard these women as former “prostitutes,” while many Americans in the surrounding communities see them and their families as immigrant *others*.

Then, why do so many Korean immigrants, especially first generation ones, often call these fellow Korean immigrant women *yanggongju* in a very derogatory manner? How were the negative images of these women constructed? What are issues that many Koreans have about these interracial married women? When I asked a number of Korean Americans about KMBs, why did they seem to be reluctant, hesitant, and silent? Are KMBs not *Korean/American* enough? Then, who are they? Moreover, why could I hardly find any information about the people, though according to some available sources, there have been more than 100,000 Korean women migrating to the U.S. as military brides?³ What role did these women play in the construction of Korean communities in Kansas? I have met many KMBs in Junction City and Leavenworth, KS; Waynesville, MO; San Antonio and Killeen, TX. What does their settlement in these locations tell us about the unique aspect of Korean migration to the western part of the Midwest and the Southwest? Trying to answer each of the questions that I raised above, I will examine the lived experiences of KMBs and Korean communities in Kansas in terms of transnationalism, capital, assimilation, community, and diaspora. The goal of my dissertation is to uncover the unrecognized history of Korean

² In *The American Midwest: An Interpretive Encyclopedia*, Thomas Averill explains the popular culture role that Kansas and the rest of the Midwest play. The idea of the Midwest as the “Heartland” influences many Americans to believe that “somewhere people are innocent...close to God, living out the values of an older America-the ‘family values’ . 19-21.

³See Daniel Boo-Duck Lee, “Korean Women Married to Servicemen” in *Korean American Women Living in Two Cultures*, Young In Song and Ailee Moon, eds. (Los Angeles: Academia Koreana, Keimyung-Baylor University Press, 1997), 94–123. The quoted statistic is on page 97.

migration to Kansas in what appears to be a constructed official history of Korean diaspora in Kansas.⁴

My research on KMBs and the Korean diaspora in Kansas builds on previous scholarship aimed at making KMBs visible as agents. This emerging Asian American scholarship wishes to unearth and reinterpret the past and thereby reconstruct history from the “bottom up” history so that voices from the margins can assert their identity as a coherent group. Two books specifically treat KMBs: Ji-yeon Yuh’s *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown* and Grace M. Cho’s *Haunting the Korean Diaspora*. Yuh’s book examines the historical and sociological context in which camptowns around U.S. military bases grew and Korean women worked and served American servicemen in the shadow of Korean society and Korean people. Some of those women ended up marrying American GIs in the gendered relationship between Korea and the United States. Based on a number of oral history interviews that she conducted with KMBs, Yuh suggests that KMBs are not the victims of their choice to marry American servicemen. Rather, the testimonies of these women reveal the “agency and dignity with skill and compassion” that they utilize in their negotiation and adaptation to their life in the United States. On the other hand, Cho’s book looks into the origins and the complicated role of *yanggongju*, who are considered as shameful, yet at the same time, have been responsible for bringing hundreds of thousands of other Koreans to the United States through chain migration. Using the concept of “transgenerational haunting,” Cho identifies the collective amnesia about KMBs as *yanggongju* that still seeps into the hearts and minds of many Koreans in the U.S. Korean diaspora.

⁴ See Korean American History Museum, KAHM (<http://kahistorymuseum.org>). In Kansas part of “Koreans in America” category of its website, names four prominent Korean immigrants from Kansas are listed. They are all men who came to Kansas in the mid-70s and early 80s. All of them held important positions in Korean ethnic various organizations such as Korean American Society or Korean Senior Society in Kansas (<http://kahistorymuseum.org/public/index.asp?CurrentCatID=C512043811432718410>).

Woo-jung Jeong's Master's thesis, *Korean Military Wives in Leavenworth, KS*, deals with the lives of KMBs in Leavenworth, KS. Jeong examines the stigma and stereotype with which many KMBs deal and demonstrates how they attempt to overcome them by strategically forming supportive networks of their own. Her thesis goes beyond studies that focus on the hardships and pains of acculturation that KMBs have faced in their lives in the United States. Similarly, Haesun Juliana Kim's "Voices from the Shadows" argues that Korean women married to American servicemen should be seen as survivors, not "unlike earlier Korean immigrants who utilized their intelligence, compassion, and strength to raise their families, work, and even to support parents and siblings in Korea." She argues that these women deserve recognition on their own terms, as a vital part of Korean and American communities. Kim speaks against the "unspoken caste system" that brands these women as "war brides" caught in the "shadows" between the Korean and American communities. She argues that they would probably never receive an invitation from the ranks of "Korean American" society: they were stigmatized and oppressed as outsiders. They were not "American," not "Korean," in the ethnic sense, because they had broken away from the traditional homogeneous Korean community.

While I recognize the significant contribution that these scholars have made to assure the visibility of KMBs in the historiography of Korean immigration to the United States, my dissertation differs from their works in that it examines Korean communities in Kansas and shows the significant role that KMBs and their family members have played in its construction. Examining different venues, I attempt to illuminate (1) KMBs as human agents, (2) their place in Korean immigration history to the United States (2nd and 3rd wave) and chain migration factor by KMBs, (3) the construction of the Korean community in the

Junction City-Fort Riley that offers unique community formation and acculturation embraced by the local community, (4) a larger Korean community where issues such as stigma, silence, rejection, denial, admission of the presence of KMBs in the ethnic Korean community is deeply contested.

My dissertation consists of five chapters. In Chapter 1, I offer a new way of understanding KMBs as agents who have accumulated and utilize various forms of capital in their day-to-day experiences with people of different races in the United States. I also stress and discuss the importance of major issues pertaining to oral history as a methodology and how it led me to conduct an ethnographical research on KMBs and Korean communities in Kansas. Chapter 2 is designed to examine the context in which the mechanism of marriage and chain migration by KMBs operated in terms of the economic, cultural, social, and sexual capitals⁵ in both Korean and American societies where sexual contacts across racial boundaries were policed, scrutinized, and stigmatized.

Chapter 3 focuses on the dynamic community-building process of KMBs and other Korean immigrants in the Junction City-Fort Riley area. I would like to illuminate how the Korean community built by KMBs had been a part of the larger Junction City and Fort Riley community, despite the negative reception and treatment that Korean immigrants, especially KMBs had to endure. I also pay a special attention to the Korean cultural values that KMBs have transmitted to their children and the local community.

Then, Chapter 4 looks into the Korean community in the Greater Kansas City (GKC) area. It is the ethnic community built mainly by those who immigrated to Kansas through gendered chain migration that can trace back to KMBs. There are two opposing narratives

⁵ Koshy coins the term “sexual capitals” to explain “the female sexual agency” on mobility to improve an individual’s life-chances and opportunities by utilizing the “desirability within the field of romantic or marital relationships in a given culture.”

about how Koreans ended up in the GKC area: one that neglects to acknowledge the role of the KMBs in bringing so many Koreans to Kansas and the other that recognizes the women as the backbone of Korean migration to Kansas. Only elderly Korean immigrants, “waiting for their turn to go to heaven,” spoke openly about their chain migration process to the United States.

In addition, one important thing I would like to note in my dissertation is the assimilation process of KMBs in the United States. The transnational experiences of KMBs pose a problem for the traditional assimilation model of immigrant adaptation proposed by social scientists. In Milton M. Gordon’s assimilation model of immigrant adaptation, members of immigrant groups arrive in the new country and come in contact with natives while adopting cultural characteristics of the natives. Then, their offspring get structurally assimilated, mixing in with neighbors and finding jobs of the natives. Gordon states that the final stage of assimilation is marriage which eventually blurs group boundaries. However, migration through exogamy by Korean women to American servicemen does not fit into Gordon’s stages for immigrant assimilation. Marriage took place first in the non-host country, and the KMBs moved to the host country, settling in the neighborhoods and getting jobs that were readily available to these women. Some elements of cultural assimilation already took place in the original homeland, while most of the cultural assimilation occurred after their marriage to American servicemen.

My efforts to look at Korean communities in Kansas are intended to overcome the limits of the existing studies that have situated these Korean women at the margins of the Korean communities and American society. Rather, KMBs have utilized certain strategies including the social, cultural, and sexual capitals to improve their life-chances and overcome

the social and cultural tensions that their transnational situation creates. My dissertation also explores how the women's skills of flexibility, improvisation, and negotiation enable them to adjust readily to new situations. My dissertation on Koreans in Kansas and KMB hopes to reveal some of the unique characteristics such as race, class, gender in the process of construction of Korean American communities where ideas such as imperialism, US militarization, masculinity, transnationalism are contested. It is also designed to examine how the Korean diaspora in Kansas is deeply gendered. I hope that my dissertation will be a new addition to not only Korean American history but also the history of Kansas that looks to be almost white, but sometimes black.

Transnationalism and Transnational body

Transnationalism is not just a new word for an old phenomenon; it emphasizes the dynamic process of transmigration across nations and states, privileging neither native nor adopted country, and collapsing time and space into a single social field. When Korean women migrate, they move across nations and have to transform themselves based on the new surroundings in a new nation-state boundary. Until recently, the transnational dimension of these women's migration within which they construct their multiple identities and cultural practices has gained little scholarly attention: what strategies they use to migrate and adapt to the new society and culture, and how they are represented in the host country and how they, in turn, respond to these representations.

Ruba Salih contends that in the past scholars on international migration have examined the migrants within the context of their lives in their home country or their diasporic experiences where they are caught 'between two cultures' (4). Yet, recent

scholarship has taken on this approach by situating migrant communities that ‘have [a] collective home away from home’ (Clifford 308). Similarly, Glick Schiller et al. offer a concept of transnationalism as a new approach to understand migrants’ social, cultural, and economic experiences across the countries:

Our earlier conceptions of immigrants no longer suffice... Now, a new kind of migrating population is emerging, composed of those whose networks, activities and patterns of life encompass both their host and home societies. Their lives cut across national boundaries and bring two societies into a single field.... We argue that a new conceptualization is needed in order to come to terms with the experience and consciousness of this new migrant population. We call this new conceptualization ‘transnationalism’, and describe the new type of migrants as transmigrants (1).

The discussion of women in a transnational context began to emerge in the 1980s with Brettel and Simon’s *International Migration: The Female Experience*. Brettel and Simon argue that female subjects have been missing in the scholarship of migration, although female migrants outnumbered their male counterparts in many parts of the world. Since the 1980s, attention has been paid to the issue of gender and women in transnational migration. Several scholars began to examine how gender, ethnicity, class and culture affect women’s decisions to migrate.⁶

In particular, Korean American scholars such as Elaine Kim, Jiyeon Yuh, Nadia Kim, and Grace M. Cho have examined the gendered aspect of transnational Korean migration process to the United States. For example, Yuh argues that gendered patriarchal South Korean hegemony has influenced many Koreans, including KMBs, to cross the nation-state boundary. South Korean socio-cultural gender ideology demands its women to maintain chastity followed by good motherhood. The disciplining power of the upper-and middle class

⁶ See Anthias 1992; Lutz et al. 1995; Bujsis 1993; Brah 1993.

in Korean patriarchy imposes the ideology of “chastity” to wield patriarchal control on and disciplining power over Korean women’s bodies as “uncontaminated” and “uninterrupted” gender identity (C. Choi 13). Those women who cross the moral boundary of chastity were severely condemned as social outcasts, while, in reality, a small number of women who are mostly from the lower social echelon were sexually exploited to serve men including foreigners in the rigid patriarchal social system demanding them to maintain filial piety and sexual chastity (C. Choi 172). A marriage to a non-Korean, no matter these women’s socio-economic background, would give these women the stigma of being a camptown prostitute. A military bride is a *yanggongjo* because she does not “keep her respectable Korean femininity and bona fide Koreaness (Yuh 4). Yuh suggests that many Korean camptown women chose marriages to American servicemen as a way to reconstitute their stigmatized identity and look for their chances in the American Dream.

Coupled with the disciplining power of *shame* and *yanggongju*, colonialism constructs the discourse of a sexualized nation and gendered nationalism within the context of the Japanese (1909 to 1945) and American military dominance (since 1945 to the present) over South Korea. In the gendered construction of the colonial relationship, anti-colonialist Korean nationalism not only demands its women for reproduction, but also moral wholesomeness. At its core lies an attempt to reclaim the belittled and weakened masculine Korean nation. Any attempts from women that seemingly undermine masculine authority were discouraged as they were deemed to disrupt the national struggle against the colonizers. If that threat comes from women, these women are demoted to the status of whores. (C. Choi 24-25). Within this context, many Koreans view the sexual or physical contacts between Korean women and foreigners as a violation of their nation and possibly masculinity. In

particular, biracial children in South Korea, fathered by American GIs and Korean women, have had to endure stereotype, discrimination, and stigma of being *tuigi* or mixed creatures in Korean society. The society viewed them as the symbol of the one-blooded nation violated by a powerful foreign nation and a moral disruption of the Korean Confucianist patriarchal system. In a way, the presence of *tuigi* challenged Korean masculinity, and the masculinity in question has had to be reasserted constantly by making physical contacts between *yanggongju* and American GIs as well as *tuigi* invisible. The goal is for Korean society to maintain its moral boundary and nationalistic masculinity.

Due to this gendered system of nationalism, it has not been easy for Korean women to assert their subjectivity; patriarchal Korean nationalism demands moral purity of women and represses their ambivalent desire with no room to negotiate. C. Choi contends that Korean women are denied the opportunity to wash away the remnants of the colonial oppression and decolonize their spirit. Instead, women materialized their postcolonial feminine subjectivity in a variety of cultural fields: “rejection and longing, denial and conformity, resistance and complicity” (25). In this process, unexpressed resentment breeds. The nationalism in postcolonial Korea systematically suppresses women’s subjectivity to support the masculine subject of the nation. In particular, Nadia Kim suggests that because of this type of everyday gender oppression in Korea, some Korean women choose exogamy to American men who they believe possess gender equality and more powerful hegemonic masculinity than the Korean patriarchy (5). For example, one of my informants said that her mother married an African serviceman in South Korea in the 60s not just because of her economic hardships but also because of her desire for more freedom and gender equality by living in the United States. There was just “nothing a woman could do in Korea.”

Intersection of Gender, Masculinity, Whiteness, and Race

The transnational aspect of gendered migration of KMBs is hard to analyze in theories focusing on macrostructural transformation, also referred to as a “push-pull” analysis, because these theories are not sufficient to address the various routes of social distinction. For example, they often neglect the social context of an individual or a household. Rather, the “push-pull” model merely regards migration as an individual response to unwanted “push” and desirable “pull” factors in the host country (E. Lee; Todaro). This perspective posits the individual immigrant as an economic agent, who migrates for better economic gains. What is missing here is that when an individual makes a decision to migrate, he/she also considers socio-cultural factors that motivate the movement from one place to another. Immigrants are heterogeneous in terms of race, class, gender, and sexuality, and they respond to social conditions in many different ways. For example, gender relations in families influence the migration options and decisions (Hondoagneu-Sotelo).

Likewise, in order to understand why and how the KMBs decided to migrate to the United States, it is very important to understand the socio-economic characteristics that influenced the women’s options and decisions to marry and migrate within which issues such as gender, masculinity, whiteness, and race are deeply contested. Given that transnational social networks created by KMBs also affect migration options for their families and relatives, my dissertation examines the gender-based characteristics of immigrant social networks in order to understand the role of KMBs in Korean American immigration history, especially their role in chain migration of Korean immigrants to Kansas.

Following the notion of social constructionists, Evelyn Nakano Glenn contends that race and gender are “relational concepts whose construction involves representation and

material relation and in which power is a constitutive element.” In addition, she argues that “race and gender categories are positioned, and therefore gain meaning in relation to each other” (12-3). In other words, racial groups might be gendered differently. For instance, Asian women in the United States are often represented as sexual whereas Asian men are often represented as feminized men in relation to white American men.

As a matter of fact, race has been introduced into the masculinity field by Robert W. Connell’s studies about hegemonic masculinities. Masculinity has been hegemonic insofar as it lies under the reality of most men, such as heterosexual, upper class, strong, heroic, athletic, WASP, and/or attractive. According to Connell, “large numbers of men are motivated to support the ideals of the Bogarts and Stallones.” Connell also argues that a hegemonic masculinity is “always constructed in relation to various subordinated masculinities as well as in relation to women” (183-6).

Connell reinforces this argument in a way that a hegemonic masculinity has globalized as part of a “world gender order,” which is a process beginning with “the economic and political expansion of European states from the fifteenth century on and by the creation of colonial empires” (39). More specifically, Connell has focused more on heterosexual and upper class hegemonic masculinities in Western societies, and he has empirically researched the whiteness of the imperialistic global masculinities. Connell’s examination of the western man’s global masculinities explains western men’s intimate sexual relationship with subordinate women in the East who are the targets of western men’s sexual conquests.

In fact, Connell has examined how imperialist white men have defined their masculinity as superior and more virile than the masculinity of the subordinated. For example,

Said argues that U.S. imperialist and European projects in Asia have taken for granted that Asian men are weak, asexual, and traditional (40). Similarly, Chandra Mohanty contends that imperialist white men used their relations with white women to fashion their identities as “self-disciplined protector(s) of women and morals” (16-7). From this historical perspective, white men have been considered better than third world men with the emergent ideologies, like soft, sensitive, and gender egalitarian “new man as ideological class icon” in the United States (Hondagneu-Sotelo, Pierrette and Messner).

Thus, the literature on globalized masculinity calls attention not only to colonialism, imperialism and capitalism, but also to the flows of culture and ideas. In the same vein, Connell takes American mass media as globally disseminating north Atlantic hegemonic gender orders and masculinities. For instance, Yuh found that many KMBs married white American soldiers not only to escape poverty or prostitution but also because these women had idealized American servicemen in uniforms as ideal romantic mates or “white prince charmings” (39).

While white men’s masculinity was culturally constructed and disseminated to mark its superiority, Asian women’s femininity was subject to negative stereotypes. For example, Aki Uchida argues that the stereotype of the Oriental woman as exotic, submissive, and subservient, or sinister, treacherous, and lecherous still predominates in the western men’s imagination “as if the century of life experiences of Asian women in the United States has had little impact.” She contends that an Asian woman that is orientalized is also objectified as “foreign, not a full citizen, not a Christian, and less moral, less liberated, and less equal to men.” Additionally, the notion that white women are superior to Oriental women enables white men to reason that “the power difference between them and Oriental women is even

greater than between them and white women, providing them the rationale for expecting a greater degree of subordinate behavior from Asian women” (171). For instance, my research on KMBs reveals that these Korean women had been subject to more subservient gender roles and expectations from their American husbands and the host community.

The relationship between South Korea and the United States itself is deeply gendered. With glorified white masculinity, the U.S. represented itself as human rescuers in the Korean peninsula and saviors of the country’s postwar economic development like the heroes in the Hollywood movies. As a matter of fact, at the end of World War II, the Korean peninsula was divided into two parts: the North by the former Soviet Union and the South by the United States. Many South Koreans have had dual views of American GIs. Some saw them as human rescuers with power, while others saw them as imperialist invaders. The South Korean state has long supported a positive view of U.S. soldiers as human rescuers and perpetuated the white hegemonic masculinity in glorified representations of General Douglas MacArthur, Humphrey Bogart, and Sylvester Stallone, which the U.S. media has brought to South Korea. For example, South Korea has become one of Hollywood’s largest and most interested markets outside the United States (Groves), and one of its most pervasive symbolic tropes of white romantic and heroic masculinity is disseminated to the Koreans’ psyche. Likewise, most of South Korea’s box-office hits include U.S. films, such as *Ghost*, *Titanic*, *Gladiator* and so on, which show romantic/heroic white male protagonists.

By contrast, South Korea also has a long-standing tradition of anti-Americanism, in which the U.S. soldiers are seen as low-class imperialist GIs and abusers of Korean women. In fact, South Korean women have been exploited in hegemonic as well as counter-hegemonic notions of white American masculinity within the context of Korean Confucian

patriarchy, which was first adopted by the *Chosun* dynasty (AD 1392-1910). Chosun doctrine required women to keep the “rule of three obediences”: subordination to her father before marriage, her husband after marriage, and her son(s) once she is widowed (H. Cho 13). South Korean scholars and feminists have challenged this Confucian patriarchy and its structural doctrines, including the mother-in-law tradition, which ensures a woman’s subordination to her husband. This tradition requires women to be scorned apprentices and domestic servants and to sacrifice their needs to their husbands as well as to their mothers-in-law with perpetual perseverance. Korean women acquire their membership in the husband’s family only through subservience because the majority of South Korean women believe that subservience is important for successful motherhood and wifedom in a woman’s career (H. Kim 522-4).

Thus, many Koreans have mixed feelings about America; America as a powerful country, a land of opportunity, and a producer of exciting popular cultural materials, while it is also viewed as an abuser of military power and a sexual violator of Korean women. Many Korean women have chosen to marry American servicemen in South Korea and moved to the United State to escape the oppressive gendered patriarchy in Korea and participate in the American Dream. Most of them were viewed as *yanggongju* because they did not follow the proper societal norms and practices. Moreover, it hit a nerve in Korean masculinity. In the meantime, the social stigma on the women’s bodies and shame related to it had to remain secret in the realm of a family because these women’s marriages to American GIs were considered “family shame.” Yet, the reality of the family shame created an opportunity for the family members and relatives to come to America, a country of dreams and chances for a better life. I argue that Korean immigration to Kansas took place in this specific context of

gendered chain migration sparked by KMBs who have been invisible in a constructed silence of shame and stigma of *yanggongju*.

Korean Communities in Kansas as a Cultural Community

If the shared values and social networks are what define an inherent sense of ‘a community,’ it is important to examine ‘cultural community theory’ as a social mechanism to maintain a particular community, as it will be the key concept for my dissertation on the community in which KMBs have lived. Huping Ling introduces a concept of cultural community as a model for a research on an Asian immigrant community without a tangible ethnic enclave. Through her research on the St. Louis Chinese community, Ling illuminates St. Louis Chinese community’s transformation from “Hop Alley” to a “cultural community.” Ling notes that its shift has been due to the growing number of professional and self-employed Chinese population from Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, as well as other parts of the U.S. in the post civil rights era. According to Ling, the cultural community model “serve(s) to explain why new suburban Chinese communities have emerged, have scattered, and have blended with other ethnic groups” (12) as they may be short of a tangible ethnic population and physical boundaries but are perceived by their coming cultural practices and beliefs that their members attempt to maintain and transmit to others, especially their children.

Ling argues that two factors have contributed to the materialization of this cultural community: “social and economic integration, and the preservation of ethnic identity.” Social and economic integration “naturally dissolves an ethnic physical community and in doing so makes room for different forms of community.” The reason for the construction of the cultural community is that immigrant groups in general have had to endure socioeconomic

discrimination against them. Thus, the groups must utilize the self-serving physical and commercial as well as residential community in order to survive economically (234). More specifically, the cultural community is a social space or boundary where the Chinese American community is not defined by shared physical boundaries but by the people's common practices of their culture and beliefs such as their ethnic language schools, religious institutions, and community organizations, cultural agencies, and political organizations. Ling argues that this cultural community approach is useful when it comes to examining those immigrant groups that have not formed the ethnic enclaves but still maintained a sense of community through various cultural practices and religious beliefs such as annual ethnic festivities, various ethnic organizations, and ethnic churches.

The cultural community model is helpful for my dissertation on Korean communities in Kansas in three ways. First, the idea of cultural community can help us understand why immigrants have assimilated into mainstream culture without losing their ethnic identities. For example, while many Koreans in the Midwest are scattered across the region without ethnic enclaves, they still form an ethnic community based on their shared (imagined) similarities as immigrants from Korea. More specifically, Koreans in the greater Kansas City area and Junction City, Kansas are scattered and without their own ethnic community. Both communities are maintained through social networks of eighteen ethnic Korean churches, the Korean American Society, the Korean Senior Society, and the Korean Language Institute. Moreover, people go to ethnic church not only to worship, but also to exchange business information with other fellow Koreans, form personal/ethnic financial networks called, "Kye," and establish the business connection to other Koreans.

Second, the cultural community model helps us understand the meanings of cultural identity. According to Ling, the cultural community is not designed to support ethnic immigrants with their economic needs, such as mutual economic aides, but rather to meet their psychological needs for cultural and ethnic identity (14). Therefore, their sense of attachment to their community could vary based on these characteristics. Through the sense of cultural community, ethnic groups may reach a certain level of assimilation and acculturation. Ling suggests that immigrants go through three identifiable phases in their immigration: “physical concentration for economic survival; cultural congregation for ethnic identity; and political participation or coalition for a sense of democracy and justice”⁷ (14).

Yet, while I mostly agree with her definition of cultural community, I believe that Ling fails to examine the degree to which one constructs the sense of cultural community of his/hers. Members of the cultural communities are heterogeneous in terms of race, class, gender, sexuality, etc. Therefore, their sense of attachment to their community could vary based on these characteristics. Moreover, I disagree with Ling’s the cultural community model that it is “especially applicable to communities in which the members of ethnic minority groups are overwhelmingly professionals” (Ling 236). Ling’s argument is based on her assumption that a cultural community develops largely due to a group’s assimilation into the mainstream through its members’ economic progress. Ling does not acknowledge the differences among the members in terms of class, gender, nationalities (in the case of Chinese nationals), and sexualities. For example, Asian immigrants are comprised of not only professionals such as doctors, nurses or engineers but also of students, manual labors, political refugees and those who come to the United States through intermarriages. Asian

⁷ Examples of supporting such a pattern could be found in ample works. See, for example, Handlin, *Adventure in Freedom*; Berthoff; Birchall; Cardoso, Clark; Daniels, *A History of Indian Immigration*.

immigrants in the Midwest reflect the similar composition of people from various class and gender backgrounds. Moreover, one's sense of ethnic attachment to his/her ethnic community varies depending on gender. For example, ethnic social organizations are formed and controlled by men, and women have been traditionally precluded from holding prominent positions in these ethnic organizations.

Moreover, Chinese immigrants are made up of the Chinese immigrants from mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and those from other parts of the world. Because of the difference, a Chinese immigrant's ethnic loyalty toward the Chinese American cultural community could be different. I will go beyond Ling's limited concept of the cultural community model by discussing the differences among members in the Korean cultural community. In addition, given most Asians in the Midwest are the first generation immigrants who came after the Immigration Act of 1965, it is important to examine how ethnic members' sense of belonging to their ethnic community is maintained through their direct tie to their mother country. For example, my previous research on Koreans in Kansas City reveals that most Korean American households watch Korean TV programs through satellite service and that the Korean consulate in Chicago assists Kansas City Korean Americans organizations financially, which is why I believe it is important to examine 'community' in the context of transnationalism. Additionally, the transnational diasporic homelands politics by Korean ethnic institutions in the Greater Kansas City area have played a role in cementing the existing homeland hierarchies of class and gender, rendering it harder for Korean immigrant women such as KMBs to participate fully in community politics. Korean ethnic churches and various ethnic organizations such as the Korean American

Society, the Korean Senior Society, and the Korean Language School, play their roles as agents of cementing those hierarchies.

Migrants and Community

There are three ways in which migrants are characterized. First, multicultural policies are likely to characterize migrants by the ways in which they fit in with “communities.” This perspective suggests that migrants are essentially elements of non-heterogeneous groups who are assumed to share a similar, fixed, and shared ethnic culture. Representations of this shared culture are exercised in a collective way by all the members who, as Yuval-Davis argues, are assumed to ‘speak with a unified cultural voice’ (627).

However, these assumptions of the migrants’ homogeneity have been widely criticized (Al-Azmeh 1993; Rattansi 1992; Bhabha 1994; Yalcin-Heckman 1997). These scholars argue that culture is flexible, negotiable, and not one dimensional (Gupta and Ferguson 1997a, 1997b). Moreover, the meaning of ‘community’ is not a “normative and conceptual ideal” because that leaves out those who do not share those qualities thought to define the community as such (Salih 119). Feminist political scholars such as Iris Marion Young contend that the concept of ‘community’ is problematic both because it restrains the differences, and because, “it denies difference within and among subjects” (Young 1990a: 305; see also McDowell 100). Another problem with characterizing migrants in terms of ‘community’ is that bodies and behaviors of women become essential in the explanation of culture and community (Anthia and Yuval-Davis). For example, Ziba suggests that women eventually assume responsibility for the education of their children and are pushed to comply with heavy-handed expectations about their behavior. In addition, this also explains why an

issue of women is at the center of debates on cultural and religious difference within plural societies (Salih 119).

These critiques of studies that conceptualize ethnic communities as homogenous have paved the way for a new paradigm. Literature written from postmodern perspectives breaks down the essentialized notions of culture. Postmodern scholars identify migrants as symbolizing their hybridity as resistance. Migrants, exiles, and dislocated people, “as a people who have been recipients of a colonial cultural experience--displace some of the great metropolitan narratives of progress and law and order, and question the authority and authenticity of those narratives” (Bhabha; Anzaldua). According to Bhabha, “hybridity” is not the by-product of a third part that comes from the blending of two different original cultural elements. Rather, it is a ‘third space’ that facilitates other positions to come forward. This third space dislocates the histories that comprise the hybridity, and it offers new structures of authority, new political initiative” (211).

Yet another perception illuminates the experience of dislocation in regard to diaspora. Migrants are diasporic entities who are the embodiment of the disjuncture between identity, place and culture. According to Paul Gilroy, diaspora is “an alternative to the metaphysics of ‘race,’ nation and bounded culture coded into the body” (quoted in Anthias 1). Brah characterizes diaspora as a space occupied not only by migrants but also by natives. To him, the concept of diaspora “places the discourse of ‘home’ and ‘dispersion’ in creative tension, inscribing a homing desire while simultaneously critiquing discourses of fixed origins” (Brah 193; emphasis in original). Clifford suggests that life in a diaspora entails an experience that is drastically different from the experience of dislocation resulting from migration. Although immigrant communities may be assimilable in a way that they can constitute “a new home in

a new place,” a diasporic culture “mediates, in a lived tension, the experiences of separation and entanglement, of living here and remembering/desiring another place” (307).

Methodological Approach

H. J. Kim and Puri (2005) suggest that a part of the transnational feminist sociology emphasizes empirical research underscoring the necessity to ground analyses of sexuality and gender to strategically combine different empirical methodologies, and to correct the overemphasis on singular attention to texts and discourses. In fact, the empirical research within the framework of transnational feminist cultural studies tends to be textual, and it also notes discomfort with how interviews and surveys, the main component of sociological methods, are considered as true representations. In other words, the explanations by way of personal interviews and surveys as the form of questionnaires represent how meaning is constructed within the context of research, not implying such explanations are false or less than real. Instead, these explanations indicate how subjects make meaning about social relations and practices (149-50). What I found problematic with the existing scholarship’s discussion of the KMBs is that it fails to address the agency and subjectivities of the women in spite of the stigma and derision of those women. My dissertation will argue that one must be open to hearing (and incorporating) the perspectives of those for whom the events we discuss. It is because the history of KMBs in the existing studies has always reflected one dimensional aspect; that is, KMBs’ being marginalized in the context of Korean and American history. As I discussed above, the lives and experiences of the military brides are used primarily as research material for theoretical discussions or conceptual analysis.

My position is that I see KMBs as illumination of the hegemonic nation-states and gender roles that motivate and form the women's transnational movement between South Korea and the United States. My aim is to explore the dialectical process within the gendered discourse surrounding the lives of the KMBs and their response to it. I attempt to do so by drawing attention to the complex process of the lived experiences of these women where issues such as identity, agency, and subjectivities are deeply contested.

Methodology

I conducted more than fifty in-depth interviews with KMBs, biracial children of KMBs, Korean adolescents and adults, and respective ethnic community members. Fifteen of these interviews were with KMBs and thirty five with biracial children of KMBs, Korean adult immigrants, and the Korean elderly who are parents of KMBs. Their age ranged from 16 to 85 years old. The initial interviews were conducted face-to-face or on the telephone and lasted one to three hours. Follow up interviews that ranged from thirty minutes to six hours were conducted as needed. Interviews have been conducted between 2001 and 2010 in the Greater Kansas City area, Lawrence, Leavenworth, and Junction City, KS.

In addition to the in-depth interviews, focus groups and participant observation were used. I have incorporated various research methods--in-depth interviews, focus groups, and participant observation using both snow ball and random sampling--to make sure that I did not fall into the pitfall of generating assumptions about groups based solely on the interviews with a few individuals. For analysis purpose, I tape recorded each of the interviews with respondent's permission. And, each tape was transcribed for content analysis. I initially had considerable difficulty with language and meaning when I went through the process of

interpretation and translation, since most of my interviewees narrated their stories in Korean, and I had to reinterpret them into English. This was the most challenging task. The problem was how to negotiate subjectivity in my interpretation with each of the words the interviewee expressed. Therefore, I closely examined and corrected each of the translated sentences with three different Korean dictionaries. As for idiomatic Korean expressions to be translated, I looked up the Korean-English dictionary that was published in Korea. I also referred to some of the important books that deal with “war brides” issues, and books and essays that talk about the historical background of women’s roles in Korea specifically in terms of gender.

I would like to explain how my subjectivity and relationships with my subjects affected my perceptions and behavior and my ethical choices about what to include in or exclude from the dissertation. I believe I can summarize with reference to an extended anecdote about one couple. There was a time when one of my KMB informants showed up for our meeting with one of her eyes severely bruised. It was a sign of routine domestic violence that kept happening to her by her Korean husband. The couple had been married for two years when I first got to know them. The husband, middle-aged, college-educated and a devout Christian, had lived undocumented in Kansas until a matchmaker introduced my informant to him. It was his first marriage. My informant, on the other hand, had had previous marriages to American GIs that did not work out. My informant told me that she was attracted to her new Korean husband because, unlike her American ex-husbands, she liked the fact that “he was a gentle churchgoer.” He got his green card because of his marriage to her. Whenever I met him, we spent some time talking about Korean politics and history. He seemed to be a knowledgeable person who cared about his wife; no matter how

busy his work schedule was, he always tried to make sure that he drove his wife to work back and forth. Every week, they went to church together.

I wondered what caused the couple seemingly endless marital conflict. My informant said, “We fight because my mother-in-law complained that I’m not a rich woman as she thought that I was.” I just listened to her *sinsetaryong* or telling of grievances about her hard life and new marriage. After the interview, her husband came to pick her up as always. Looking dejected and sorry, he greeted me and drove her home. It happened quite a few times. Both of them seemed to suffer a lot from the marriage because even the husband was dealing with a stigma of being the husband of a KMB. They were both fighting against the stereotype, which was the primary source of conflict. The marital conflict is an example of narratives that seemed too personal to include in my dissertation. Part of the reason is that if the stories were revealed publicly, it would be damaging to the images of my informants and their families, who already battled stigma and stereotype in their lives.

One other example is some of what my biracial informants said in the interviews. They grew up watching their Korean mothers ridiculed and shunned by Americans and fellow Korean immigrants. As my relationship with them grew, some of them expressed their extreme anger toward Koreans who never accepted them as Koreans. It has taken them many years to come to terms with how Koreans treated them and their mothers. It is my ethical choice not to include their stories of personal anger and resentment because it is too personal and I would like to respect their privacy and part of their family history that I believe need to be protected in a place that is too small that “everyone knows one another.”

My key KMB informants are Ms. Park from Junction City and Ms. Choi from Kansas, whose stories illuminate the process of adaptation, negotiation, overcoming stigma, and

utilizing capitals that they have accumulated in different stages of their lives as KMBs. They play a significant role in my dissertation. Ms. Park is one of the first three KMB settlers in the Junction City-Fort Riley area, who came in the 60s through her marriage to an African American GI. Ms. Park's transnational experience exemplifies the pattern of migration and acculturation process of KMBs in Kansas. I devoted a specific chapter to Ms. Choi, which is intended to illustrate a human agent defying a stigma imposed on her body and negotiating strategically in a specific social venue.

My oral history and fieldwork materials will be used specifically for Ch. 1, 2, 3, and 4 of my dissertation. These chapters are designed to illuminate the unique aspects of Korean communities and international dynamics within the Korean diaspora in Kansas. They will examine how the women have resisted their stigmatized identities, reconstructed identities of their own, acted as agents of race, power, culture, and gender, and ultimately claimed their place in Korean American history and the state of Kansas. Moreover, these chapters explore deeply how the history of the gendered Korean immigration was made and how it has influenced Korean and other ethnic groups in Kansas. I have also drawn on the lived experiences of the biracial children of KMBs to illuminate what Korean diaspora has become, while it has dealt with shifting and fluid identities of its members within its boundary.

Chapter 1

The Discovery of KMBs as Agents in the Korean Diaspora in Kansas

Ethnographic Research

I consider the personal narratives, community narratives and oral history accounts of KMBs as a category of subjugated knowledge, as conceptualized by Michel Foucault. KMBs' stories of their lives can reconstruct multiple discourses and perspectives about the history of Korean immigration to the United States through their dramatic representations of oral history accounts. Just as Joan Sangster points out that feminist scholars have employed oral history to fill the missing portions that the traditional approaches to history have overlooked, feminist scholars have recognized oral history as a way to integrate women into historical scholarship by taking on the social, cultural, economic, and political dimensions that blurred the representation of women. Sangster emphasizes that putting women's voices at the center of analysis and illuminating gender as a category of analysis might unearth the context within which issues such as gender, race, class, and ethnicity shape the construction of an individual woman's historical memory. To her, contextualizing oral history means to look into the dominant ideologies that transform the lives of women because women's voices, through oral history, reflect their understanding and negotiations of the dominant ideas (7-9). Oral history examines the personal life histories of the ordinary and/or marginalized people who could rarely find their places in the master narrative of their histories. It illuminates their subjective experiences and their agency.

It has taken me about five years of community involvement to gain some trust from most of my key interviewees. When I began my fieldwork in Junction City, Leavenworth and

Kansas City, I found myself a complete stranger to the communities of about 8,000 Korean Americans. Since Korean communities are dispersed across the state in Junction City, Leavenworth, and the GKC area, doing research on the communities required me to get to know more about Korean immigrants in Kansas through community involvement. For example, the Korean hair-dresser in Junction City called me “crazy” when I went to her hair salon to get my haircut every other week. But, she is the one who later introduced me to several of her regulars who eventually became my interviewees.



Figure 13: Kim's Hair Salon in Junction City, KS. Picture taken on September 9, 2002 by the author.



Figure 14: A Korean restaurant in Junction City, KS. Picture taken on February 16, 2002 by the author.



Figure 15: A Korean restaurant in Junction City, KS. Picture taken on January 5, 2002 by the author.

The Korean grocery store owner in Leavenworth, KS began to offer me a 15 percent discount on my grocery purchase after I became his regular customer.



Figure 16: Arirang grocery store in Leavenworth, KS. Picture taken on April 18, 2003 by the author.



Figure 17: Leavenworth Korean Church. Picture taken on May 20, 2003 by the author.

It also helped me that I volunteered to work for one of the ethnic Korean churches in Kansas City. Several members (who are KMBs) of my church were from Leavenworth and some of them ran their own small businesses. Therefore, it became much easier for me to interact with several KMBs by visiting each of their stores. I regularly shopped and got my haircut at their stores.

Getting to know Korean Americans in the Greater Kansas City area was the toughest task because it is a relatively large city, and there was nothing like Korean ethnic enclaves. In the early 1960s, Raymond Breton coined the term “institutional completeness” to illuminate the degree to which networks of social organizations dominate an immigrant/ethnic community. According to him, “The community with many formal organizations is said to be more institutionally complete than the one with only a few or none” (Breton 28). Using Breton’s definition, without ethnic enclaves, the Korean community in the Greater Kansas City area can be said to be more institutionally complete than any other immigrant or ethnic

community in the area given that it is so tightly organized by ethnic organizations such as Korean churches, Korean associations, merchant associations, and alumni associations.

Therefore, when I began my fieldwork in the Greater Kansas City area in 2004, I sought to secure a place where I could, at least, become an insider of the community. To do that, I became associated with the owner of the largest Korean grocery store in Kansas City, a man who later became the president of the Korean American Chamber of Commerce in the Greater Kansas City area. Mr. Ahn, the owner of the Oriental grocery store, is from Ma-San, Kyung Sang Province in South Korea. The Ahns opened their store in 1999. During the nine month period before he took over the business, there had been five ownership changes. According to Mr. Ahn, the Jewish owner of the business district was really upset about constant closings of Koreans stores in the mall area. And, it reached the point that the Jewish owner did not want to lease to Koreans anymore. Now that Mr. Ahn turned things around, there is even “a waiting list” to lease because his store attracts a large number of customers. He also served the Korean community by working as chairman of the executive committee of KAS-GKC and is well-known for his charity work. Mr. Ahn provided me with the newsletters of his organization that became a valuable source of information on Korean immigrants in Kansas City. Through the newsletters, I found that there were three hundred twenty Korean-owned small businesses, fifteen ethnic Korean churches, and three major institutions such as the Korean American Society of Greater Kansas City (KAS-GKC), Korean Institute of Greater Kansas City, and Korean Senior Society (KSS).

In the meantime, I came upon Mr. K, a general secretary of the KAS-GKC, who received his Ph.D. from the University of Kansas and was working for the Kansas state government. At the time, Mr. K and the president of the organization were looking for people

who could work with them for the KAS-GKC. After several months of my guest-attendance at each of the biweekly meetings of the organization, the executive members of KAS-GKC asked me whether I could join them to work for the Korean community in the GKC area. I agreed to take the position of an editor for publishing the association's monthly newsletter and to help assist other members to coordinate its upcoming cultural and athletic events. Through that opportunity to be involved in KAS-GKC for four years, I was able to meet and interact with people of various backgrounds, from KMBs and elderly Korean immigrants to second- and third-generation Korean Americans who strove to learn their cultural heritage and Korean language. At this point, my methodology has shifted from oral history to ethnography.



Figure 18: Commemorating the Korean Independence Day at the office of Korean American Society of Greater Kansas City. Picture taken on February 26, 2005.

Additionally, since the majority of the Korean immigrants in Kansas City go to Korean churches, I decided to go to one of the Korean churches to be ‘one of them’. Korean ethnic churches are considered “the most important ethnic organization” in that they provide Korean immigrants with means to meet their psychological, cultural, and economic needs (Min). I began working as an editor in the media department at the Korean Presbyterian Church of Kansas City on May 9, 2005, and have been actively involved in church activities for four years. The opportunity of working as one of the church’s members has greatly improved my relationship with those Koreans within the church. Moreover, having been deeply involved in various community events such as ethnic festivals and volunteer work, I was finally able to get to know some people who were willing to share their stories and perspectives on my research topic on Korean migration to Kansas.

I chose participant observation as my ethnographic works on Korean immigrants in Kansas because little has been known about the relatively dispersed community, especially KMBs and the dynamics within the Korean diaspora. As Jorgensen argues, the methodology of participation attempts to “uncover, make accessible, and reveal the meanings (realities) people use to make sense out of their daily lives” (15). By participating in the daily activities of Korean immigrants in Kansas, I strove to examine the insiders’ world of meaning to illuminate the nature of social reality of Korean communities in Kansas by understanding the actors’ perceptions and interpretations of their social world and how an actor interacts with other social actors in a given social context. More importantly, I have tried to give back to the GKC Korean community what I have learned about Korean immigration to Kansas by writing and publishing a story of Koreans in Junction City in the newsletter of the KAS-GKC

and putting Census data on the organization website.⁸ In particular, I received many calls from Koreans in the GKC area who asked me more about the history of Korean immigration to Kansas and who were willing to share their stories of immigration after I published on Junction City Koreans. After gaining trust from them, some Korean immigrants were also open to my access to their businesses and their day-to-day lives with people of different races and ethnicities, which led me to a new venue of American society, urban ghettos.

In 2005, I spent my entire summer at several beauty supply shops in the Kansas City ghetto where Koreans dominate the market. It was Mr. Kim, the store owner, who gave me the opportunity to do my research at his stores. He later became president of KAS-GKC and eventually a big brother figure to me. Mr. Kim's family immigrated to the U.S. in the mid-70s. His father had a military accessory business through which he sold numerous military medals, belts, and souvenirs to U.S. servicemen. Through his connection to his American military friends, Mr. Kim's father immigrated to America. Once established, he brought all of family, his siblings and their family members to Kansas. Moreover, Mr. Kim's marriage to a Korean woman also made possible the immigration of his wife's parents and sibling. Mr. Kim opened up his first beauty supply store on Troost Ave. in Kansas City, MO in the 80s. Then, he opened another one on Prospect Street in the late 80s. He opened up his third store on Brooklyn Ave. in the late 90s.

Ms. Choi, a KMB, was a store manager at one of Mr. Kim's well-known beauty supply shops in Kansas City. Open to close, I spent my time with Ms. Choi five days a week. My day-to-day interactions with Ms. Choi, employees, and African-American customers provided me with valuable insights into the lives of Korean immigrants, ethnic Korean

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<http://www.kansascitykorea.com/bbs/bbs.htm?dbname=D0004&mode=read&premode=list&page=1&ftype=&val=&backdepth=&seq=9&num=2>

business, race relations between Koreans and African Americans, and ghettos in urban America.

Although Ms. Choi knew that I was a Ph.D. student, I had never mentioned to her what I was doing for my research. Rather, she simply seemed to assume that I was involved extensively with the Korean American community in Kansas City; I was working as a director of communication at one of the ethnic Korean churches. The one who was in charge of the entire media department of the church was Mr. Brown, an African American married to a Korean woman, Ms. Kwon. She married him when he was stationed in South Korea as a serviceman. I was also working as an editor (and later as the director of cultural affairs) for KAS-GKC. Once she asked me why I was interested in working for the Korean American community in Kansas City. I told her that I enjoyed working for fellow Koreans.

Ms. Choi's day began at 10:00am when the store opened, and it closed at 8pm. The place itself is a globalized social space where products mostly made in China, India, and Korea are sold by immigrant Koreans to predominantly African American customers with a few Ethiopian, Somali, and Sudanese immigrants who came to settle in the Kansas City area as refugee migrants. Not surprisingly, the beauty supply shop is frequented by numerous immigrants from Africa. Ms. Choi told me that Sudanese customers tend to be relatively young, tall, and skinny. These customers spend a considerable amount of money on hair- and skin-care products. Somali immigrants are lighter-skinned than most of the American blacks. They wear traditional Somali attire, so one can easily identify who they are. According to Ms. Choi, "they tend to spend less." Sometimes, a few biracial Korean-black customers came in to the store saying *anyonghaseyo*, or "hi," to Ms. Choi. All of them said that their mother is

Korean and father is African American. Their parents met in South Korea when the father was stationed there as a serviceman.

In fact, several Korean beauty supply shop owners are members of NAACP.⁹ It is because they believe that the best strategy for them to minimize potential dangers and risks in dealing with African Americans in the ghetto is to maintain “good customer service” that is pertinent to running a successful operation and maintaining positive relations with black customers (K. Park 79). For example, Mr. Kim, the owner of the store, always emphasizes to his employees the importance of maintaining civility: “Always greet the customers. Make sure that customers feel welcomed and respected.” Equally important is “never to be in conflict with customers” not only for a safety reason but also for the business purpose. Similarly, Mr. J, who has run his beauty supply shop for about 14 years in downtown Kansas City, told me about his strategy to maintain a positive relationship with African American customers and how it would improve the sales at his store such as:

1. The best way to make money in this neighborhood is to treat black customers like “kings.” In this way, black customers can have surrogate satisfaction. Plus, [black] customers tend to spend more money when you give them a certain uplifted status.
2. Never wear expensive clothes so that you do not give customers any impression that he is rich and well-to-do.
3. Never park your luxurious car in front of your store.
4. Lunch is only with a handful of rice, kimchi, and pepper paste, showing customers that you are frugal.
5. Never say anything specific about your life to your customers. When customers asked him about his wife who was on a trip to Korea, he always replied that his wife was “sick and resting at home.
6. Refrain from telling customers that you are the owner of the shop. Not surprisingly, when several customers asked Mr. Jin “how much does it cost us to take over the store,” he answered that he had no idea because he was just a poor immigrant employee working at the store.”¹⁰

⁹ Many owners recalled tension between Korean merchants and African Americans in the Kansas City ghetto right after the L.A. Riot of 1992. Since then, they have tried to improve race relations with African Americans by making donations to the community or joining the NAACP to advocate the cause of African Americans.

¹⁰ Field note.

In a way, Mr. J's way of dealing with his African American customers is by playing *other*. When customers came in, Mr. J greeted them with a big smile and a bow. He is "just a poor immigrant employee" from Asia, wearing same rundown shirts and pants every day. On his lunch break, he ate a bowl of rice and soup with *kimchi* behind the counter. Some black customers complained about the "funny" smell of Korean food. However, Mr. J did it with an intention to communicate that the store did not make good money out of the business. He believed that his strategy worked because no one knew about his big SUV that he always parked on the parking lot of a local grocery store, and they sometimes looked at him with pity.

Just like most of the urban ghettos in America, 'Breaking News' of robberies, assaults, and homicides usually spotlights on the ghetto area in most of the ten o'clock news broadcasts on local Kansas City TV stations. In neighborhoods with unbelievable decay, misery, and violence, separated from the white, prosperous and privileged world of the downtown Plaza area, one of the most famous shopping centers in the United States, most of the black 'underclass' resides in the abandoned neighborhoods all around it. At the same time, heavy metal gates and bars protect the windows and doors of each of the stores as well as Korean-owned beauty supply shops. Some black residents said that it was the "government conspiracy" to get all the Korean-owned beauty supply shops operating in their neighborhoods, taking all the money from them, and destroying their communities which were "already dead anyway." For example, Hank, a former African-American employee of Mr. Kim's beauty supply shop, used to stop by the store to drop off a few boxes of fruits and vegetables for the store employees. These were all donated to his church by several grocery stores. Every week, he delivers them to needy families in the ghetto. He said that a lot of

African Americans did believe “the government conspiracy theory” given that “there is no way those Koreans suddenly showed up in the ghetto and opened up lots of stores without the government assistance.”

It is inconceivable to take a walk and stroll on the ghetto’s Prospect Street or Troost Avenue to talk to people on the street or near their home. It is in this area where I was once robbed. It happened right in front of a Korean-owned grocery store in the ghetto. I was walking down the street and doing my fieldwork looking for Korean-owned businesses. A few African American men approached me and asked for money. I was so frightened that I immediately took out my wallet and gave them my money. Ironically, the one who chased them off with a broomstick was a middle-aged KMB, the owner of the grocery store. She yelled at them, “Go Away! Because of you, I’m losing lots of customers!” Then, the Korean woman said to me, “Mr.! Don’t be too scared. A few bad people here just take advantage of your stereotype about black people.”¹¹ I have to admit that I myself had my own preconceived ideas about African Americans as *dangerous people*. A simple eye contact with them would frighten me to death especially in the ghetto whose description in the media and movies always seemed to center on gang-violence, guns, drugs, and poverty. I realized that coming from a culturally and racially homogeneous society and having never been exposed to an urban American society, I was not well prepared to deal with *real world* racial diversity in the United States. To make matters worse, my images of African Americans were negatively shaped by Hollywood movies and TV programs that stereotyped blacks as lazy, unintelligent, prone to violence, and inferior to whites. In fact, I am from the generation of American movies and cartoons such as *Superman*, *Tarzan*, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, and *the Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, and most importantly the media coverage of “violence against

¹¹ Kim, Sang Jo. Fieldnotes. (11/11/2004).

Koreans by African Americans” during the Los Angeles Riot of 1992 that cemented my perception of African Americans as violent people. My education in American Studies helped me ease my anxiety about African American men, but I realized that it was not enough. In a way, I became the victim of my own prejudice and stereotype.

More importantly, the event made me determined to learn more about what the Koreans were up against in the ghetto and various ways of their coping strategies in their negotiation with African Americans on a day-to-day basis. For example, many Korean merchants in the Kansas City ghetto live with a constant fear of death or robbery. For example, on Jan. 8, 2008, Kyung S. Lee, 32, was shot to death inside his beauty supply store on Troost Ave., in Kansas City, MO. In an apparent robbery attempt, four gunmen stormed the store, ransacked, and killed the husband of the owner of the store.¹² After this incident, several Korean employees and managers at other beauty supply shops quit their jobs. One of the Korean managers I interviewed told me he decided to quit because the incident kept reminding him of his being held at gunpoint by two men during the robbery at the beauty supply shop about a year ago. He said, “I will never forget the finger on the trigger. I thought I was going to die on the spot. I was held at gunpoint until they left with all the money from the cash drawer. No one will understand how terrified I was. I have had nightmares ever since that happened to me. I just got sick and tired of working in the ghetto, so I decided to quit.”

In addition, because of the safety and robbery issues, the use of a restroom at the store is strictly for employees only. Occasionally, black customers asked employees about a restroom, and Korean employees always replied, “Sorry, we don’t have a restroom here.”

¹² “Man killed inside store was husband of business owner.” *Kansas City Star* 8 Jan.2008. His wife was left with three children. Through fundraising efforts within the Korean American community, Korean American Society of Greater Society donated about \$25,000 to the family.

“Then, how can you take care of your small or big business?” “We go to a grocery store or McDonald’s nearby.” It created inconvenience for black customers and even anger for some of them. However, as one Korean owner told me, “If you let that happen, it will be a disaster for us because we have been there and done that. Shoplifting? For sure. Doing drugs? Sometimes, it happened. That’s why we say, ‘Sorry, no restroom here’ because we want no trouble at the store.”

I once asked Mr. Kim if he had ever been afraid of being robbed or killed in the ghetto. He replied, “You know you never know when you will die. It may be in about an hour, tomorrow or twenty years later. If you have to die here in the ghetto, let’s say next week, it’s because it is your destiny to be that way to go to heaven. I am not afraid of doing business here, but I am worried about the safety of my employees. That’s why I always tell them not to argue with customers or if robbery takes place, simply give them the money from the cash drawer. It’s because their lives are more valuable than the money. Otherwise, you will get at least slapped by a loaf of bread on your face like I did.” “We just take the drawer out and hand it to the robbers. We have the security bell under the counter in case any robbery takes place. But, it’s useless because it takes the police forever to come to the scene after we press the security button. Even the police are afraid of dealing with crimes in the ghetto,” added one of Mr. Kim’s managers.

In this tough neighborhood, Ms. Choi is also known for “being tough,” and many African-American customers call her “Lady Choi” or “one hell of woman.” Ms. Choi reminds me of Ms. Park, a KMB, who has lived in Junction City for 50 years. Ms. Park told me:

The more I suffered the more generous and tolerant I had become. When I look back on my life, I have lived by doing what people could not imagine and some they

thought impossible to do. I may look physically weak; I am enormously strong, and I'm a person of full of vitality. I have tried not to be too dependent on other people's help.¹³

Ms. Choi stands up to whoever she thinks does not do a right thing at the beauty supply shop. Her strategy of dealing with African American customers is "maintaining mutual respect." She respects her customers as much as she expects the same thing from them. Anything other than respect is met with Ms. Choi's strict rule and attitude. Moreover, Ms. Choi knows "street English" meaning years of her time with so many different kinds of Americans made her able to have natural day-to-day interactions with people of different races. Her failed marriages to American men left a scar on her, but her lived experiences have made her "determined" to make her life better.

One day, that tough Lady Choi showed me a different side of her when she said to me, "I'm overwhelmed. Thank you. I really appreciate you for this article." Her eyes were swelled up with tears when she was reading an article on Koreans in Junction City, Kansas, which was a part of a newsletter that I published monthly as an editor of KAS-GKC. The story that I wrote was mainly about KMBs in Junction City: how, despite struggles and adversity, these women have become a respected part of the local community. I was at a loss. I wondered whether I would be able to understand fully the meaning of every drop of tears from her face. Maybe not, but I tried to understand because my constant glimpse of her seemed to tell me that she was still in the process of healing her wounds deep down in her heart. I decided to spend more time with her.

Ms. Choi continued with a calm voice, "I can feel for those KMBs. I have lived in several military towns across the country. You know, life as a military bride in these places is

¹³ Oral history interview. Nov. 12, 2002.

not easy. There was no one who could help us out. We had to be on our own. By the way, what made you interested in writing about them?”

I replied, “Well, I found that there had been nothing written about these Korean women in Kansas. I was afraid that no future generation would remember that these Korean women were here in Kansas, despite all the ordeals and struggles, if the trend continues. And, people like you would have been my next door *nuna* (sister), *emo* (aunts) or *omoni* (mothers) had you lived in Korea. I would say it is not so much sympathy as empathy that motivated me to study about KMBs in Kansas. That’s why I decided to write the article to let people know that somewhere in the middle of nowhere, many Koreans (KMBs) made their home.”

Although we came from a different background, Ms. Choi and I shared Korean cultural values such as filial piety and *jeong* or a human emotion that can best be described as a mixture of bonding, love, sentiment, sympathy and heart. Jeong is a unique cultural value and sentiment shared by most Koreans.

In fact, the history of KMBs has been overlooked by the existing scholarship suggesting that these women’s history is “not significant enough” in Korean American history. The existing studies have mainly reflected a one dimensional aspect; that is, KMBs’ being passive in the context of Korean and American history. For example, a social work-related study on Korean woman-American GI marriage defines the character of the women in this way:

While she appears to be a loner, she is dependent upon her associates for direction and control of her life. She may be simply socialized to tolerate domination from males and some other females, while being something of a passive/aggressive; materialism, envy, jealousy, competitiveness, withdrawal, etc.¹⁴

¹⁴ Kim, Bok-Lim. “Casework with Japanese and Korean Wives of Americans.” Social Casework, 53 (1972): 273-9.

When women are present in these studies, they are seen as silent, passive, and subordinate. They are marginalized in these studies.

What the existing studies have overlooked is these women's agency. For example, one can witness lives of so many KMBs across Kansas, who have become a respected part of local communities. It is no exception in the Kansas City ghetto. Several KMBs work at beauty supply shops, restaurants, and a Korean grocery store right at the heart of the ghetto to make their family's lives better. They are not the victims of their decision to marry American servicemen. Rather, my ethnographic works and interviews with them reveal the human capital that these women accumulated through their lived experiences, which they utilized to make their day-to-day interactions with Africans Americans natural, respectful, and productive.

Ms. Choi is a KMB, and she is Korean. After a considerable amount of time working together, she began to treat me like her "son." For example, when she and I had a lunch break, Ms. Choi always brought many homemade Korean side-dishes for me and, sometimes, scolded me for losing too much weight. Gradually, Ms. Choi began to understand the purpose of my research and finally offered an interview though many Korean immigrants feel uncomfortable making family history public. Throughout my ethnographic research on KMBs, an issue of gender overwhelmed me when I conducted interviews with KMBs. Some KMBs seemed to be hesitant to open up to a male Korean university student. As a researcher, it was hard for me to negotiate my desire to know about the lives of my interviewees and their desire to remain hidden for fear of causing themselves and others discomfort. Therefore, I decided that the safest approach was to avoid direct questioning and instead spend more

time waiting until each of my interviewees was willing to answer each of the questions that I asked or to volunteer information without my asking.

As my relationship with Ms. Choi improved, I realized that the gradual improvement of a relationship between a researcher and his/her informants may influence informants' production of memories. For example, when Ms. Choi talked about "the bad memory" of her life in Korea, her choice of words and tone of voice seemed to get intense and harsh with her eyes glaring in anger. More specifically, it was the issue of 'respect' that bothered her the most: "as long as you respect me, I respect you. Many Koreans treated me so badly, so I fought them to death."

What makes oral history different is that it is more about the meaning than the facts of events that happened in the past (Portelli 1977). That, however, does not mean that oral history has no factual validity. Rather, oral history interviews produce unknown events or unknown sides of known events (Portelli, 50). Portelli says that while written documents are fixed and do not change once we find them, oral history documents are the product of a relationship between the interviewee and the interviewer. At the same time, the contents of oral sources, to a great extent, depend on what the interviewer puts into it in terms of "questions, dialogue, and personal relationship" (54). One good example is when I had the following conversation with Ms. Choi:¹⁵

"Mr. Kim, what is your dissertation topic? I know you want to write something about Koreans in Kansas. I have lived here for a long time. Lived in Washington, Kentucky, Texas, and Kansas. If you have any questions about me, my experiences or anything, feel free to ask me."

"I study about people like you."

"Why? There is nothing you can learn from people like me."

"What do you mean?"

"We are not a prominent group of Korean immigrants. Don't you people tend to like to highlight the stories of successful Korean immigrants?"

¹⁵ My conversations with Ms. Choi were in Korean; this is a glossed translation from my field notes.

“Not really.”

“Then, how could most Koreans treat the people like us as if we are nothing or invisible? A lot of people still think that we are *yanggongju* (western whores).”

“Why do you think they treat you like that?”

“It’s because we married American soldiers.”

“I look at you as a fellow human-being.”

“Then, what do you think about me?”

“I feel that you are *omoney* (or mother) because you are around my mother’s age, and you really remind me of my mother who sacrificed almost everything for me. I’m pretty sure that you have done so for your children.”

In fact, the dispositions of Confucian ideology such as respect for the elderly and filial piety are still deeply inculcated in me. Our shared cultural elements made my interactions with Ms. Choi more comfortable and respectful. She was like a mother to me, and she began talking to me about herself as a mother. For example, Ms. Choi seemed to be proud of achieving new symbolic capital through her daughter’s being an officer in the Army, although it came with a cost as she said:

[Pause]... [silence] and [tears]... My daughter is a captain in the Army, and she lives in North Carolina with her husband. They just bought a beautiful house, and my daughter keeps telling me to live with her. She is my hope and dream come true. On the other hand, I am still bitter that my (biracial) son doesn’t live with me. When my American husband left me for a white woman, he took my son with him. I kept in touch with him several times, but I could no longer do it because my ex-husband didn’t like it. I just hope for the best for my son. But, it hurts me a lot.

In the meantime, the boundary between *insider* and *outsider* is not stable. Both a researcher’s and narrator’s points could be partial or impartial that lead to the larger phenomenon of what happens when “culturally entangled identities” attempt to do ethnographic fieldwork in the all too familiar spaces of their own backyard (Narayan 25). As Portelli suggests in his work on oral history, oral history is not a process in which a researcher examines a subject and finds the very truth. Rather, it is a dialogical process in which a researcher and a subject examine each other and come up with a new knowledge that is mutually produced. An

interview is a learning process for both parties where the power/knowledge nexus is mutually constructed in the interaction between a researcher and a subject.

Ms. Choi told me during our lunch break behind the register, “You don’t seem to be like the kind of people taking advantage of other people’s old wounds for their own good. And, I have almost come to terms with my past. Lots of things happened in my life. Whether I like them or not, I had to overcome so many hurdles. I have had to get over the feelings of being victimized by this world. I had to get the world to knock a chip off my shoulder about being passed around in Korea and the U.S. I had to be strong. Otherwise, my daughter and I would have never been where we are at now.”

Portelli considers the oral history interview as a process of “interrogation” and “thick dialogue” built upon the dialogical relations between interviewee and interviewer (Portelli, *Oral* 68). He argues that “both subjects bring to the interview an agenda of their own, which is constantly renegotiated in the course of conversation” (Portelli, *Oral* 69). Therefore, the final production is the product of constant negotiation between interviewers and interviewees with different agendas. Portelli contends that oral history is a process where history meets memories and private place encounters public space where history can be seen from multiple and brand-new perspectives through the dialogical process (Portelli, *Dialogical* 2-3).

However, as a sympathetic “outsider” who always claimed to work for KMBs and other Korean immigrants in need, I have come to a point where I somehow believed that I became “one of them.” But soon, I realized that no matter how much I tried, I would not be able to be like them. Rather, I struggled with making myself qualified to give voice to KMBs’ unique history. For example, I found myself caught up between a participant observer and a fellow human-being. Although Ms. Choi said that she was finally at peace with her past, it

was, sometimes, hard for me to have direct eye contact with her because she had eyes glaring with anger and indignation that I would never be able to comprehend. Her eyes seemed to be touch-me-nots or ticking bombs about to explode and filled with extraordinary human experiences and sufferings. While my symbolic capital as a Ph.D. student garnered a respect from Ms. Choi, I wondered if I was qualified enough to look into the vigorous human agency that has defied all odds to acquire a symbolic capital of American citizenship and a cultural capital of accumulated knowledge of a fabric of race, class, and gender in America to which I had rarely been exposed. As much as Ms. Choi respected me as a scholar, I had to acknowledge that she has the forms of accumulated capital that I lack and value rather highly.

Ms. Choi said that she met her American husband in Korea. When I asked her how she met him, she said, “I met him through a matchmaker who suggested that I marry him. I went ahead and married him. I thought my future would be bleak because I was a divorced mother with one daughter. You know in Korea there is a stigma placed on divorced women. So, I wanted to have a fresh start in America. That’s why I married my American husband. And, you know, back then, everyone dreamed of coming to America because America meant money, prosperity, and opportunity. And, marriage to an American guy was the only way to come to America for people like me.” Leaving behind the stigma of being *yanggongju* and looking for a chance for a better life, KMBs like Ms. Choi came to the United States, willing to go through new obstacles and challenges, while in the process, they accumulated various capitals they could utilize in different circumstances.

Sometimes, Ms. Choi could be extremely furious with anger, especially if she felt a sense of a loss of respect and injustice. It looked as if it were an expression of her defiance against the negative gaze of contempt and disrespect in the name of shame and *yanggongju*.

For example, there have been many incidences of shoplifting that Ms. Choi had to deal with. One day, three black teenagers came in to the store and stole lip-gloss and lipstick, but Ms. Choi caught them. A fight broke out. The bullying teenagers tried to run away with stolen goods, while Ms. Choi pulled them back furiously and kept yelling constantly, “You don’t lie to me. You don’t leave here [with] anything. Stop!” Every fiery word came out of Ms. Choi’s mouth. The teenage shoplifters did not back down. One of them threw a plastic bag at Ms. Choi, which only made her more determined to “bring back justice.” I came to the scene to help Ms. Choi. “Stay away, Mr. Kim. I can handle it myself!” yelled Ms. Choi. Ten minutes later, things calmed down. The teenagers took the stolen goods out of their pockets and apologized to Ms. Choi. “Don’t you ever dare to try it again. Next time you do it, the police will come and get you. Be good to your mamas! Make them proud of you!”

I could finally heave a sigh of relief. It took Ms. Choi a while to calm down. “Every time this kind of thing happens, it makes me ten years older. A lot of customers, especially those who are new to this store, do have some attitude. You know they think they can do whatever here. I’m a small Asian woman. But, I’m not a typical Asian woman. I have fought through all the ordeals. One ordeal after another I became a stronger person. Having to deal with this kind of shoplifting stuff never scares me.”

According to Pierre Bourdieu, society is a social space where people exist in relation to each other based on their economic capital (money and material resources), cultural capital (stratified lifestyle tastes, preferences, and knowledge), and social capital (networks) (1986, 1989, 1990a). If the beauty supply store is a social space or field, Ms. Choi utilized her capital, such as her understanding of African Americans to maintain, order, civility, and respect. Ms. Choi always said that the way that black mothers raised their children is very

much similar to Korean mothers'. There is "more intimacy" and "stricter discipline" in black/Korean mothers' interaction with their children. She asked me, "Mr. Kim. What would your mother do to you if she found that her child son stole something at a store?" I replied, "She would slap me on the face or spank me for sure." "Then, see what happens when I let a black mom know that her daughter is stealing lip-glosses" said Ms. Choi. There were a mother and daughter coming into the store. Ms. Choi found that the woman's daughter was putting lip-glosses in her pocket. When she told the mother what the little girl was doing, she immediately turned to her daughter slapping her face saying, "Don't you ever do it again! Don't you dare to do it again!" Then, the mother apologized to Ms. Choi for what happened. Ms. Choi later said, "That's how black mothers raise their children: more protective, closer, and disciplining."

I cautioned Ms. Choi, "But, I want you to be careful." Ms. Choi insisted, "If I let this happen, it will never stop. But, I feel sorry for those black people. As long as they make no trouble here, I do my best to serve them. I have met many different races in my life. So, I know how black people are treated in America. In this ghetto, there are not many places that black kids can go to. Do you even see a Wal-Mart, Target, or Hy-Vee (a grocery store) here? These companies don't want their business here because they know they will lose money. And, they know it is dangerous. There are just rundown mom-and-pop stores and Korean-owned beauty supply shops. This store is one of their playgrounds."

It was after this incident that a sense of camaraderie built up between Ms. Choi and me. I never wanted her, whose age is around my beloved mother's, to be in any more trouble. Indeed, it is the grown-up son's responsibilities to fulfill his filial piety to his mother. I felt a similar sense of responsibility to Ms. Choi. For example, to make sure that nothing like the

previous incident would happen again, I assisted her as a human surveillance camera behind the counter, while customers moved about the store. In fact, in most Korean-owned beauty supply shops, the main counter is one or two steps above the floor. One of the main responsibilities for a store employee is to stand on his/her feet most of the time to watch the customers and run back and forth to assist them as quickly as possible. However, it created unease among black customers that they are watched over by immigrant employees from atop as “potential shoplifters.” I, then, ran back and forth from the register to the wig section of the store to assist customers to try a wig on. On the other hand, Ms. Choi stood behind the cash register diligently performing the emotional labor, while exchanging greetings and jokes with the customers. Her role is to maintain normalcy and civility in the daily routine of the beauty supply store.

Ms. Choi is the possessor of emotional capital, and this quality gives her an advantage that others do not have. It is this type of capital that she utilized to maintain her positive relations with black customers, which also helped increase the daily sales of the store. For example, Ms. Choi said that sometimes she missed the time when she combed and twisted her daughter’s hair “back then.” It was as if the memory of a mother’s innate precious bonding time with a daughter was accumulated as a part of her emotional capital. What made Ms. Choi able to “go through hell and high water” was in fact the love and dedication that she gave to her daughter. Ms. Choi once told me, “Mr. Kim, you may have some prejudices and stereotypes about black people. But, once you get to know them, you will realize that they are just like us. The way black mothers raise their children is similar to that of Korean mothers’.” She went on to say, “Mr. Kim, you know black women are vulnerable people. You will never understand how stressed out they are about their hair. They are born beautiful

people. They just have curly hair. But once they wear a wig or add a weave to their hair, it fits them perfectly. They look gorgeous. If a Korean woman wears a wig, it only makes her ugly. Same with a white woman.” In fact, it is the combination of Ms. Choi’s understanding of black women as vulnerable people (because she herself had to go through a vulnerable path of her life) and her emotional capital and lived experiences that enable her to be accepted into the most intimate and private place for a black woman: hair, which Maya Angelou called, “a crowning glory of a black woman.”¹⁶

At the beauty supply store, the most popular products are weaves and relaxers. Ms. Choi tends to sell more of these products than other beauty supply stores. There is a reason for the over-popularity of weaves and relaxers at Ms. Choi’s store, and it has to do with her customers. A weave is made from strands of synthetic or human hair around twelve, sixteen, or twenty inches long. Glued or sewed, the strands are either attached directly to the woman’s own hair, or the real hair is covered with a net, while weave is attached to the net. Generally speaking, it lasts from one to two months once a customer gets her hair done. It is a complicated investment for a black woman in that first, sometimes, it takes six to eight hours to have a weave installed into her hair. Second is the cost. The everyday average working African American woman spends \$1,000 to \$3,500 on one weave.¹⁷ Third, there is the social implication for the black man/woman that affects their intimate relationship. Because of the complicated process of installing weaves and the high price for them, a black man is not even allowed to touch it or interfere with it.¹⁸

¹⁶ Angelou commented it in Chris Rock’s movie, “Good Hair,” 2009.

¹⁷ Quoted in Chris rock’s movie, “Good Hair.” A beauty shop owner said that once a woman starts on weaves, she will not go back. Chris Rock jokingly said, “One trip to the weavologist can bankrupt you.”

¹⁸ In the movie, black men expressed their animosity about the cost of the weave and their dissatisfaction with the “hand-off” rule. The said that it interfered with the man/woman intimacy.

The beauty supply shop has a number of regulars. When they came in, a gender-based mutual respect is expressed through exchanges of words and greetings between Ms. Choi and the customers. Many of them asked Ms. Choi about newly introduced weaves and the right relaxers for them. Then, Ms. Choi had each of them sit down and drape a cloth around their shoulders. After that, she plugged in the pressing iron, and its temperature went up to 400 degrees Fahrenheit within ten minutes. In the meantime, my job was to bring a case of glue to Ms. Choi. One handful of strands after another, she pasted glue onto the end part of a weave. Ms. Choi attached them one by one to the customer's hair. The hair was slowly and carefully ironed and straightened by the hot iron rods that Ms. Choi was holding. A simple mistake by Ms. Choi could have burned the customer's skin or hair. When Ms. Choi was gluing or sewing her customer's hair, an unspoken rule of consent, belief, care, respect, and trust is felt throughout the entire process. It is a painstaking process for the customer to just sit for two hours without being able to do anything. For Ms. Choi, it is physically and psychologically demanding to take her extra time and energy to do the customer's hair. Ms. Choi rarely spoke when she was doing their hair. Staying focused, she carefully combed, relaxed, ironed, and applied the weave to the hair. It looked as if Ms. Choi was doing it with maternal love and affection. No matter how much time she spent, she would feel great about the look of the customer after all the physically demanding work.

Ms. Choi said that not many people are allowed to do that for black customers. According to her, getting this kind of hair done would cost a black woman hundreds of dollars. She said that she did it for free. I asked why. She replied, "You know this woman has been sitting here for like two hours to get her weave done. You will never understand how stressful it is for black women to have good hair. Plus, it helps our sales, too." Then, she

asked me to bring a net as always. It would cover another customer's real hair so that the weave she would potentially purchase would be attached to it. Ms. Choi said, "A woman wouldn't want herself to be seen like this in front of others." In fact, the customer allowed herself to be vulnerable on the corner of the beauty supply shop because it was the vulnerability that could only be seen by the person she trusted. And, it was the vulnerability that would empower her eventually through the intimate exchange of trust and affection.

I asked, "Oh, then, why do they allow you to do that for them?" Ms. Choi replied, "Because they know that I care about their hair. And, I love doing this for black women. After everything is done, she will transform herself into one heck of a beauty." The way that Ms. Choi interacts with African American customers suggests the embodiment of human capital that can be utilized to bridge the gap between Korean merchants and African American customers in terms of cultural and social understanding of *others*. More importantly, Ms. Choi's help with customers' hair boosted the daily sales of the store. Her emotional investment in the vulnerable place of her customers is based on mutual trust and it became a win-win situation for both her and her customers. More importantly, it is the accumulation of capital that informs her success in a business that caters to African Americans.

Ethnographic Reflection

According to Ruba Salih, the subject could be a place of variations as an agency to challenge the socio-culturally imposed rules and regulations: therefore, when the subject makes a decision to move from one place to another, it is not just a matter of an individual choice. Rather, it is the concept of "fantasies of identity" that are "ideas about what kind of

person one would like to be and the sort of person one would like to be seen as by others” (66). She claims that within this context, an individual makes choices to “challenge or to achieve different positions” as the one who leaves the system (11).

In 2011, I saw the picture of a Korean mother that my biracial informant had kept for a long time. The picture was taken about ten years ago. I looked at the eyes of the KMB mother in her sixties that seemed to be full of intensity, vigor, and determination with a bit of sorrow and loneliness. They looked intense. The picture reminds me of Ms. Choi, the manager at the beauty supply store in the Kansas City ghetto, whose eyes always made me wonder about the depth of human experiences that transcend a nation-state boundary and within which issues of race, class, gender, ethnicity, capital, stigma, and shame are deeply contested. Recently, my informant showed me another picture of her mother with her daughter and grandchildren, which she took about a month ago. Standing in the middle of the picture is the Korean grandmother in her mid-seventies, surrounded by her biracial offspring. This time around, she looked more relaxed and seems to come to terms with her past finally at the end of her life. At least, that was what my informant told me about her mother who had “never stopped working extra in her entire life to support her children because she knew she was alone and worried so much about the future of her biracial children.”

Since I first got a glimpse of Koreans and KMBs in Junction City, KS in 2002, it is Junction City, the heart of America’s heartland, where KMBs and their relatives started one of the first ethnic Korean communities and Korean diaspora in Kansas. Many Koreans in Kansas treated me as a son, a brother, or a grandson. One such person was Ms. Park who was a KMB and the first interviewee for my research on Koreans in Kansas. We met at a Korean-owned hair salon in Junction City, KS in April, 2003. When I first met her I was nervous, but

Ms. Park warmly grabbed my hand, asking whether she could take me somewhere for dinner. I politely said to her, “Thank you, but I am ok.” However, she kept insisting on buying me dinner saying, “As a host to receive a Korean guest from Lawrence, I would be more than ‘guilty’ if I left you hungry.” Patting my shoulder, Ms. Park comforted me, “Just feel comfortable as if I’m your real grandmother.” She had requests for an interview from “people like you” before. Years ago, several researchers asked her for interviews, but Ms. Park said that she was not comfortable with talking about her life. Then, she grabbed my hand again emphasizing *inyeon* (God-given fate) that made our meeting possible. “It is the meeting that God finally allowed me to have.”

Then, Ms. Park asked me if I could follow her to her house which was located on the outskirts of the city. I was nervous when I came into Ms. Park’s house because I was not only visiting a Korean grandmother’s house, but also I was entering a space where I had never been to or been part of. I was allowed into a private space of a KMB who spent most of her life in America, raising her (biracial) children in the same house. Upon entering her house, several picture frames displayed in her living room greeted me. In those frames were a Korean man, an African American man, and an African American woman who Ms. Park told me were her biological children. Before she married her first African American GI husband in Korea, Ms. Park already had a son from her marriage to a Korean man. She chose a marriage to an African American serviceman as a way for “picking stars out of sky.” “I knew people here would treat me and my children differently, so I thought the best way for us to be accepted and embraced in this society was to work hard and be successful,” said Ms. Park.

Still, being 73 years old meant “nothing” to her, because Ms. Park still worked at a factory in Junction City from Monday through Thursday. “I don’t have to work anymore. I

have a wonderful house. My grown-up children are doing great. But, I just can't stop working, I have worked in my entire life. No break! I feel like if I do stop, I will die soon.” Ms. Park devoted the rest of her week to her Korean church. Moreover, Ms. Park's children became successful later due to what the Korean hair salon's owner in Junction City said was “her sacrifice and dedication to them. And, she's known in the Junction City Korean community as one of the most successful Korean immigrants in the area.”

It is the stories such as Mr. Park's and Ms. Choi's that I have attempted to examine and illuminate throughout my ethnographic research on Koreans in Kansas since their stories have been invisible in the constructed silence. “Look at that loose (Korean) woman. That's her new (American) husband. She sleeps with American men way too often,” a church member whispered to me at the beginning the service in my church in Kansas City. Ironically, Mr. J, who expressed his contempt for KMBs, came to Kansas through chain migration by a KMB, a sister of his brother's wife. Mr. J never mentioned how his family came to the United States. He just said that he came through his brother's sponsorship. It was his mother living in a housing project who told me the family secret.

“My mother is an active participant in her life who has sacrificed everything to raise the children to live a good life,” said my informant of her Korean mother who came to Kansas as a KMB with three biracial children in the 60s. “Can you imagine that a Korean woman who came from a very good family in Korea suddenly found herself in a rural area in Kansas, cleaning a toilet and doing the dishes for white people, while she was always busy taking care of her children who look different from most people in town? I refuse to believe that my (Korean) mother's life in Kansas is worth nothing. We shouldn't be forgotten.” KMBs in Kansas are not the voiceless people at the margin of the Korean diaspora in Kansas,

nor are they invisible in the social stigma of *yanggongju*. Rather, adjusting their lives to a new social environment, they have been striving for a better life, making Kansas their home.

Chapter 2

The Immigration of KMBs to the United States since 1953

I have conducted fifteen in-depth interviews with KMBs in Kansas. Ms. Park was 75 years old when I conducted an interview with her. She said that she was among the first three Korean settlers in Junction City in the 60s. Ms. T in Leavenworth was 74 at the time of the interview. She came to Kansas in the late 60s. In fact, five of my interviewees were in their 70s, while three KMBs were in their 60s, three in their 50s, three in the 40s, and one in the 30s. All of them were relatively new immigrants who came through their marriages to American servicemen. These women have been part of gendered migration of Koreans to Kansas, which draws my attention to situate them in the context of the history of Korean immigration to the United States and how their transnational bodies are deeply contested in the realm of family and capital.

An Overview of the Three Waves of Korean Immigration to America

According to Eytan Meyers, immigrant receiving country's immigration policy plays a key role in shaping immigration patterns to the country. An immigration policy reveals how an immigrant-receiving country determines the number of immigrants they will receive; how immigration restrictions or preferences should be applied, based on one's ethnic and racial background; what special policy has to be formulated to accommodate political and economic refugees; and how to differentiate permanent immigrants from temporary migrant workers (3). As Aristide R. Zolberg suggests, "All the countries to which people would like to go restrict entry. This means that, in the final analysis, it is the policies of potential receivers which determine whether movement can take place and of what kind" (406).

In fact, changes in U.S. immigration policies have greatly affected Korean immigration to the United States. Generally speaking, Korean immigration to the United States is broken down into the three waves, which is a chronological terminology for characterizing a significant pattern of Korean immigration to America. The first wave of Korean immigration started at the turn of the twentieth century as Korean laborers moved to Hawaii, San Francisco, and other parts of California. The second wave started at the end of Korean War in the 1950s as military brides, students, and adoptees moved to the country. The third wave indicates the period from the late 1960s through the 1980s. This wave occurred after the passage of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, during the prime of Korean's glorification of the "American Dream" of wealth and social mobility (Hurh and Kim 36-40).

In particular, a labor shortage on Hawaiian sugar plantations caused the first wave Korean immigration to the U.S. The United States had prohibited the immigration of Chinese and Japanese laborers through the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the Gentlemen's Agreements between the United States and Japan of 1907. Out of concern for the shortage of laborers and need for cheaper labor from other Asian countries, the U.S. capitalists began to recruit Koreans to work in the United States. For example, Koreans were permitted to immigrate to Hawaii as laborers. Between 1900 and 1905, approximately 7,000 Koreans came to Hawaii to work under harsh conditions for long hours on sugar plantations. They also worked as cooks, janitors, and launderers. The early Korean immigration followed the liberation of Korea from Japan's colonization. In fact, most of the early Korean immigrants were eager go back to Korea as soon as the Japanese colonization of Korea ended in 1945,

even though a few of them had assimilated and had built successful businesses in the United States (M. Cho 1-6).

Korean immigrants in the United States in the second wave were mainly composed of Korean War brides, orphans, and students with visas, unlike the first wave. For example, the number of Korean immigrants increased to 15,050 by 1964 from zero in the 1940s. While in 1952, only one Korean woman was admitted as the wife of a U.S. citizen, the Korean immigration to the United States dramatically increased to 1,340 in 1964 and reached 3,000 in 1971, the largest group of which was KMBs. KMBs in the second wave period hold their significance in increase in a number of Korean immigrants to the United States. For example, in the 1960s 70 percent of all Korean immigrants were female. Before 1981, approximately 53,629 Korean women who had married American servicemen were admitted to the United States. Furthermore, Hurh and Kim (1984) suggest that these second wave Korean immigrants were different from those of the first wave in that most of immigrants were young women and orphans. For example, the sex ratio among those in the first wave was 10 males to 1 female, while the ratio for post-Korean War immigrants was 1 male to 3.5 females. Additionally, push and pull factors such as the Korean War, economic devastation, and the booming American post-World War II economy particularly appealed to prospective Korean migrants when the Korean War devastated the country's economy (50).

In fact, most Korean female immigrants in the second wave of Korean immigration came from lower socio-economic levels in Korea and were married to American servicemen. Although not a single study was produced to validate this point, Sue-Jean Cho (2008) asserts that most Korean women who were married to American servicemen during and following the Korean War were prostitutes and "barmaids." Because of their socioeconomic status,

these women had very limited opportunities for education in Korea, so they were not prepared to be on par with people from the outside world. Most of these women came from Korean traditional rural areas where there were few economic developments and opportunities, so they tried to find jobs in larger cities such as in factories and small businesses. Frustrated by their search for jobs and because of their poorly educated backgrounds, they eventually met American servicemen who seemed to have a lot of money and a willingness to spend it. These servicemen hoped to get comfort and companionship from these women in a foreign country. In turn, these Korean women thought of marriage to those American servicemen as an alternative and an excellent way out of their unstable lives and insecure socio-economic positions (1-13).

Then, the third wave of Korean immigration to the United States was generated by the 1965 Immigration Act, which abolished the quota system imposed by the National Origins Act of 1917 and opened the “flood gates” for modern and ongoing Korean immigration. Between 1969 and 1973, more than 71,000 Korean immigrants were admitted to the United States, and the Korean share in the total U.S. immigration rose from 0.7% to 3.8%. Between 1976 and 1990, approximately 35,000 Korean immigrants per year were admitted. The total number of Korean Americans surpassed two million in 2010.

The majority of the third wave of Korean immigrants came to the United States as families and established Korean communities across the country. For example, these new immigrants moved to large cities throughout the United States where they came to establish a number of community institutions, such as schools, churches, cultural organizations, and newspapers. For example, there were nearly 260,000 Korean immigrants in the Los Angeles area, and 80,000 settled in New York City in 1990. Moreover, living and working with their

family members in these large cities provided a greater sense of security than the settlements chosen by the first and second wave of immigrants. Typically, Korean immigrants have run grocery stores, restaurants, gas stations, liquor stores, and real estate offices as well as retail and small businesses.

Meanwhile, the 1976 U.S. Immigration Act made it easier for immigrants to bring their family members in a type of chain migration. For example, each year since 1976, 90 percent of all Korean immigrants have been admitted to the United States as a family reunification. In this process, it is not surprising that immigrants who came to the United States in the 1970s had a middle and upper-middle class background, whereas immigrants who came to in the 1980s and 1990s were characterized as the lower socio-economic class in Korea (Sue-Jean Cho 1-18). Despite the distinctive characteristics among the three waves of Korean immigration, the third wave actually overlapped with the second wave because both waves reflect the immigration of KMBs, Korean orphans adopted by Americans, and Korean students to the United States (S. Cho 2).

Critical Gaze on the Second Wave (Interim) Korean Immigrants

The second wave of post-Korean War immigrants arrived in the United States between 1950 and 1964.¹⁹ According to Hurh , there are three least studied groups of Korean immigrants among Koreans in America” (49). The groups include Korean wives of American servicemen, orphans, and professional workers including Koreans studying in the United States. Although the group mostly consists of the first two categories, Hurh and Kim assert that more sociological research on the lives of the Korean wives of American servicemen is

¹⁹ This does not mean that these three categories of immigrants stopped arriving in the United States after 1965. Rather, thousands of each category were admitted each year (U.S. commissioner of Immigration and Naturalization, 1965-1977).

needed. In their view, most Korean American sociologists have overlooked this particular group of immigrants, and that the women are “doubly marginal[ized]” by both the American community and the Korean immigrant community (51).

Bon-youn Choy’s analysis of the second wave Korean immigration is an example of how existing Korean American scholarship treats KMBs. Although Choy acknowledges that the majority of Korean immigrants between 1959 and 1971 were female, she falls short of explaining the female-dominated, gendered migration of Koreans to the United States during that period. Instead, Choy suggests that these females were the wives and children of American servicemen, but she fails to explain why and how this type of immigration took place. Moreover, Choy puts post-war Korean immigrants into three groups: the intellect class, the business class, and the working class, not even mentioning gender (271-42).

In the meantime, social work scholars such as Bok Lim Kim who attend to the fate of these KMBs tend to focus on their marital adjustment and conflicts, incidences of domestic abuse, and strategies for providing better care.²⁰ For instance, despite the significance of her study of the marital adjustment and conflicts of KMBs, Kim’s study fails to reflect on other aspects of race, gender, and class in the lives of KMBs because her study is based on the needy KMBs, most of whom were clients for casework in social service agencies. In addition, a social work related study on Korean woman-American GI marriage puts these women at the bottom of the invisible social hierarchy. For instance, Galbraith and Barnard suggest that KMBs “appear to be loners, they are dependent upon their associates for direction and control of their life. KMBs may simply be socialized to tolerate domination from males and some other females, while being something of passive/aggressive; materialism, envy, jealousy, competitiveness, withdrawal, etc.” (54). An intermarried Korean

²⁰ See Bok-Lim Kim (1972), Sil Dong Kim (1975), and Trebilcock (1973).

woman is suspicious of affection; she is considered dangerous. She is, by nature, “a pessimist, in order to be protected from being hurt.” Because of the intermarried-Korean women’s ‘suspicious’ characters, Galbraith and Barnard call for “the discouragement of Korean-American marriages” (55-61).

However, scholars such as Lee suggest that we look at the issues of intermarriage between Korean women and American GIs in a larger context, not just as the victims in Korean and American societies. According to Lee, there are push factors that drove many Korean women to migrate through exogamy to American servicemen because of their socio-economic needs. “Economic disparity, resource scarcity, political instability, war threat, traditional rigidity, extended family pressures and western influences” push many individuals to move to the advanced nations. He adds that the prolonged presence of American forces throughout South Korea simulated a larger number of opportunity-seeking individuals, especially women intent on marrying on American servicemen to come to the United States and realize their American Dream (8).

Habitus, Field, Capital, and Human Agency

My interview with one of the KMBs, Ms. Park, illustrates what exogamy to an American serviceman means to her and how it was a part of her effort to acquire the symbolic capital that was not available to most Koreans:

Going to the U.S. was like picking a star out of sky, and many people dreamed of living in America at that time. They [siblings and relatively] did not want to hurt their pride in their family because of that [my marriage to a black soldier], so even my nieces have kept that secret so as not to be embarrassed. They knew that there was no way for me to go abroad to study, but anyway, everyone guessed that I finished my study and settled down in the U.S. I fabricated a copy of my family register to come to the U.S., because to get an original copy of it, you should go through a township office, then words of mouth about my marriage [to a black man]

would spread to the whole villagers, enough to make my family ashamed and embarrassed. Therefore, although I was born in South Korea, my domicile of origin is in North Korea. To do that, I bribed some people, and my then American husband, who was a military police, got help from some of his Korean friends to get the document done.²¹

According to Pierre Bourdieu (1986), habitus is a set of dispositions which incline individuals to respond and act in certain ways. Produced dispositions are structured in the sense that they unavoidably reflect the social conditions of existence of individuals. They may be relatively homogenous across individuals from similar backgrounds. Dispositions are durable: they are ingrained in the body in such a way that they endure through the life history of the individual, operating in a way that is pre-conscious and hence not readily amenable to conscious reflection and modification. However, one's particular practices and perceptions is the product of the relation between the habitus and the specific social contexts or 'fields' within which an individual acts. In traditional Korean society, if an individual violates socially-defined norms such as filial piety and chastity, it is regarded as a disgrace not only for the individual but also for the entire family. Violations of the norms mean the loss of the status of the family in society, and it might further prevent the family from participating in social activities (Segal 188).

Tuigi (mixed-breeds), *Kichichon* (camptowns), *Yanggongju* (western whores), and *Kookjekyllhon* (international marriages) are words of stigma imposed on any Korean woman who supposedly has a physical relationship with an American serviceman in camptowns. Within each of the words, shame plays a strong mechanism of control over Korean women's sexuality. These words are used as "symbolic violence"--the imposed system of meaning that legitimize and thus perpetuates the inequality in social hierarchy--

²¹ This quote is from the oral history interview I conducted with Ms. Park, 82, who lives in Junction City, Kansas.

against an individual. It is a “disguised form” of power (Bourdieu), a symbolic abstraction of the interactions between people. Moreover, the upper- and middle disciplining power in Korean patriarchy imposed the ideology of “chastity” as an ideology of patriarchal control and disciplining Korean women’s bodies as “uncontaminated” and “uninterrupted” gender identity (C. Choi 13). Those who cross the moral boundary of chastity were severely condemned as social outcasts. But, in reality, while the rigid patriarchal social system demanded women to maintain filial piety and sexual chastity, a small number of women who were mostly from the lower social echelon were exploited to serve men sexually (C. Choi 172).

For example, a researcher who later became a military wife describes the stigma imposed on the camptown and people who have signs of any physical contact with American soldiers around Camp Casey in the Dong Du Chun area in South Korea:

It was an experience I will never forget... Half Korean-American children ran to and from immersed in the cheerful innocence of youthful exuberance. This was the first time in my life that I had ever seen half African/American-Korean children. They were playing with the children of one of our agents, a tailor store owner. As soon as the agent noticed her children playing with the ethnically mixed children, she sternly removed them from the area, and dragged them inside the store where we were conducting business. At this point she proceeded to scold them very forcefully with disdain in his voice my manager shook his head and said: “you ought not to have let your children play with them.” My manager’s disapproving comment still stands out in my memory. At the time the blatant racism of the situation went unregistered as I was still in shock at having just seen Korean children of mixed ethnicity. They were speaking fluent Korean just like anybody else. My agent’s husband made the comment: These children should be in school. But you know their mother....” Finishing the assertion with a shrug as if to say “well what can you do.”²²

According to Goffman (1967), deference is symbolic power in potential form: once deference is acquired, it can be deployed as the symbolic power to frame (define) actions, situations, and events in ways that induce compliance and constitute social order. In day-to-

²² Jeong, Woo Jung. *Korean Military Wives: A Study of Cultural Adjustment in the United States*. Thesis. The University of Kansas, 2005, v-vi.

day human interactions in camptowns, the stigma of *yanggongju* is a norm that people take for granted, and the symbolic power to control Korean women's sexuality is transmitted from one individual to another. Then, condemning someone in the name of shame, *yanggongju*, and *Tuigi* become a normative attitude for both the ones who condemn and the condemned. In this process, the construction of *yanggongju* works to send a strong message to Korean women that racial and sexual venturing into the non-ethnic territory leads only to catastrophe by being sexually victimized and reproducing undesirable Koreans. Therefore, the ideology of shame and chastity is the disciplinary power to police and scrutinize women's sexuality to make KMBs remain isolated in the shadows of camptowns both in Korea and the United States. In Korea's public representation of itself, the discussion of those women who were in physical/psychological contact with the American military men had to remain overlooked, silenced, and condemned in the name of chastity and *minjokjukjajonsim*, or national pride. Korean society's stigmatization of those camptown women as *yanggongju* which later expanded to include any woman dating or married to a foreign man, functioned as a multiple-role: the Korean society was not morally responsible for these women, the patriarchal society's control of most of its women was intact in non-camptown territory in South Korea, and Korean men's masculinity in the presence of more masculine American men would not be in jeopardy.

Ms. Park is the product of her generation, the one that had endured colonization, the war, and devastated post-war economy in a society where rigid gender norms were still severely imposed on women. She was born in 1931 in the Choong Chung Province, which is the geographic heart of South Korea. It was at the peak of the Japanese colonial period, during which time she was not allowed to speak and learn Korean in school or in public.

When she turned 17 in 1950, the Korean War broke out. Ms. Park said that she still vividly remembers when *Ppal-Gaeng-I* (the red-blooded communists) swept through her hometown until they retreated up north to their stronghold. Her father's cousin died in the fighting during this turbulent era.

Ms. Park married an African American serviceman in 1958, moved with him to the U.S. in 1960, and permanently settled down in Junction City, KS in 1964. When she was dating him in Korea, Ms. Park could not do it publicly. And, only a few of her friends knew about the identity of her black husband because interracial relationships in Korea were rare. If publicly seen, they were met with public scorn and contempt. Another military bride describes what it was like for her dating her husband publicly:

While I was dating my ex-husband in Korea, I was forced to tolerate all kinds of abusive language from co-workers, and friends. They referred to him as a stupid *yang noum* (western creature [bastard]). (Jeong 8)

When asked why she decided to marry an African-American man, Ms. Park replied, “Back then, I could not just live on my own will. Whereas in the U.S., even if you were once a former stripper, when you were in love with someone, it worked. That was what drove me to America. Black man or white man? I did not mind. Let’s go to America and pick a star out of the sky. I finally got it.” She said that she was just “in a desperate situation to get a chance to go to America” and a marriage to an American man was the only way for “people like her” to get the chance. To the postwar generation of Koreans, American citizenship is the symbolic capital to acquire at a time when Koreans had “Yankee Disease” considering “everything American, even American feces...smelled good.”²³

However, Ms. Park recognized that her marriage to an African American man would bring shame to her family. Whether she and her family members tried to deny it or not, the

²³ Kim, Elaine H & Yu, Eui-Young, *East to America*, 10.

guilt and shame were already ingrained and internalized within themselves as deeply held dispositions in their habitus. At the same time, to Ms. Park, America meant symbolic power of new life, prestige, and economic opportunities as she described the country as “a star out of the sky.” But, it came with a price. Ms. Park said that after she came to America in the mid-60s, she never returned to South Korea and was rarely in touch with her family and relatives. It is because she “didn’t want to bother her family and relatives anymore.” Instead, to fulfill her filial piety, Ms. Park “worked like a dog” to send her family in South Korea some money.

Moreover, my interview with Ms. Choi suggests that many Korean women considered exogamy to an American man as a way to acquire the types of capital that, otherwise, would not have been available to them in Korea. “The man liked me. And I thought why not [marry him],” said Ms. Choi about her white American ex-husband whom she married in the late 70s in South Korea. Ms. Choi is currently married to a Korean man who works as a construction worker in Kansas City. It is Ms. Choi’s third marriage. Her oldest daughter was born from her first marriage to a Korean man in Korea. Ms. Choi said, “My Korean husband left me and my daughter for his new-found lover. We were left with nothing for survival.” It was around that time that “a matchmaker” approached her, suggesting, “You are a divorced single mother with a child. You know, in Korean society, how would you be able to support your daughter and yourself?” The matchmaker talked about the stigma attached to a divorced woman in Korea. The life of *yihonnyo*, or a divorced woman, was particularly harsh because the patriarchal society severely condemned a divorced woman, especially one with a child.

Although Ms. Choi seemed to be hesitant about where she met her white American ex-husband, she “really” wanted to go to America and get a new life. That is why she decided to marry him and eventually became an American citizen. By becoming an American citizen, Ms. Choi said that her daughter (from her first marriage to a Korean man) could become a captain in the Army, and she could give her third? husband (a Korean) an opportunity to become an American citizen. As people exist in the social space in relation to each other based on the volume and composition of their economic, cultural, and social capital (Bourdieu 1977, 2), Ms. Choi’s husband’s family saw her as “the most perfect prospective wife for him” because Ms. Choi holds an American citizenship. That was the main reason that his family encouraged him to marry Ms. Choi.

However, the symbolic capital that Ms. Choi achieved (becoming an American citizen) also came with a price. It looked as if the idea of shame would never go away from her whenever Ms. Choi said, “People like me live life like this as it is our *palja* (fate).” Ever since she came to America in 1979, Ms. Choi completely lost contact with her parents and relatives. When asked why she did that, she replied, “They were so embarrassed by my marriage to an American soldier. Especially, I hurt my parents a lot. I just couldn’t be in touch with them anymore. Let me just stop at that.” Ms. Choi could not go on telling about her life anymore. However, Ms. Choi said that she did not regret having married American men because otherwise “my daughter would have never been able to be an Army officer and have a good family of her own.”

As her story with her family back home in Korea went on, Ms. Park said she was not able to bring her family members to the U.S. because her family registry was fabricated for the purpose of “escaping the negative looks and eyes from the people around her family.”

Her identification does not show that she was originally a member of her family. Rather, according to her family registry, she is a refugee fleeing from the communist north as an orphan. Although she really wanted to, she said, with regret, that she could not have any chance to bring her siblings to America. Instead, she tried “every drop of her blood” to support her family members back in Korea.

In the meantime, Ms. Park told me that almost all male Koreans in Junction City immigrated to the U.S. thanks to their intermarried sister or daughter. Since the military brides were assigned responsibility to support their extended family, sister-sponsored immigration became popular. Lee suggests in his investigation of demographic data on the military bases in the U.S. that there is a unique pattern for Korean American intermarried women. “Korean women’s adherence to the Confucian ethics with regards to family obligations causes pressures on their husbands by demanding either reassignment back to Korea or having their parents or siblings immigrated to the U.S.”²⁴

Jae Myung Li, whom I met several times in 2003, in Junction City, typifies this model of sister-sponsored immigration to the U.S. Through his sister, who was married to an American serviceman, he came to Junction City with his family. Later, he helped his brother’s family immigrate to the city, too. Eventually, he became the owner of one of the town’s oriental food stores as well as the Seoul restaurant, both of which are located on Grant Avenue, where many Korean stores were once located. Li and his brother mostly take care of the grocery store while his wife and his brothers are in charge of the kitchen at the Korean restaurant.

²⁴ Danial Booduck Lee, “Military Transcultural Marriage: A Study of Marital Adjustment between American Husbands and Korean-Born Spouses,” Department of Social Work dissertation, University of Utah, 1980.

Under the family reunification provision of U.S. immigration law since 1965, it is estimated that military brides are responsible (directly and indirectly) for “bringing 40 to 50 percent of all Korean immigrants since 1965.”²⁵ Using records from the U.S. Embassy in Seoul, the South Korean news-monthly, *Mal*, reported in 1988 that “a statistical average of fifteen relatives follow every military bride to the United States.”²⁶ According to Lee, the drastic shift of immigration in the 1970s and 1980s U.S. immigration from “Trans-Atlantic Immigration” to “Trans-Pacific Immigration” is consistent with the immigration of KMBs and their relatives.²⁷

Ms. Park, during the interview, told me that while she had begun witnessing an increasing number of Korean immigrants to Junction City from 1965, she suggests that 99 percent of the Korean male population in the city had immigrated from Korea because of their intermarried sister or daughter who could legally sponsor the men as their immediate family members. Park added that because these Korean male newcomers had no special job skills or were not fluent in English, they used to start their work at KP, or Kitchen Police, on the Fort Riley base under Park’s supervision. Park said that she had been a supervisor for more than 20 years.

Because of the changing regulations in the 1965 Immigration Act with two particular clauses--the preference system for relatives of the U.S. citizens and permanent resident aliens and benefit for immediate relatives (spouses, children, parents) of U.S. citizens--the Korean presence has increased in Junction City, along with a booming female Korean population.

²⁵ Daniel B. Lee, "Korean Women Married to Servicemen," in Korean American Women Living in Two Cultures, ed. Young In Song and Ailee Moon (Los Angeles: Academia Koreana, Keimyung-Baylor University Press, 1997), 97.

²⁶ *Mal*, August 1988, 109.

²⁷ Lee. “Military Transcultural Marriage,” 7.

In conclusion, Korean migration to the United States is deeply gendered in the context of U.S. immigration policy, the presence of the U.S. military in South Korea, and many Korean women's desire to acquire capital and social mobility through marriages to American servicemen. KMBs' interracial relationships with American servicemen have often met with resistance from Korean society in the name of chastity and shame. The society views them as *yanggongju* who have crossed a moral boundary of the nation. However, these women attempted to challenge the stigma they bear among other Koreans by pursuing the symbolic capital of realizing their American Dream.

It is the capital that even their family members and relatives have pursued, despite their internalized stigma on their sibling's intermarriage to an American man.

Chapter 3

The Gendered Construction of Korean Community in Junction City, KS

Background

In 2001, I had my first glimpse of the Korean community in Junction City, KS. The city is located about 120 miles away from Lawrence, KS, which is where I live. Upon entering the city entrance on the interstate highway 70, I noticed the significant signs of Korean presence; there were Korean beauty shops, restaurants, and churches with Korean-English bilingual signs in front of them. Since then, I have come to know many KMBs, their children and relatives, and Americans whose experiences with KMBs in Junction City, I was convinced, were worth being written as part of the history of Korean immigration to Kansas. Although the major history of Korean diaspora in Kansas began in the Junction City-Fort Riley area, nothing has been written about how and why a number of KMBs and other Korean immigrants ended up in the rural American city. However, looking closely at the Junction City Korean community, one can find a unique gendered migration pattern, a community formation, and an adaptation process of Koreans to American society.

Several key interviewees have helped me understand the Junction City Korean community. One such person was Ms. Park, the KMB I introduced in the previous chapter, who was willing to share her story of coming to American to “pick stars out of sky.” Another was Ms. Peter, whom I met in 2002. Between 1990 and 1994, she taught English as a Second Language classes (ESL) in Junction City High School. She had a number of KMBs in her class, and her story about the KMB students was telling. During the first couple of years, Ms. Peter had all of her students write a personal journal regularly. Gradually, it had become

really difficult for her to grade students' journals because "these journals were often so personal, and students would reveal things that were hard for me as a teacher to have them cope with. I had the feeling that I was rather doing counseling than teaching sometimes because those women had a lot of things to deal with." It was hard for her to imagine that so many Korean women who spoke little English and who had little knowledge of American culture and society followed their American G.I. husbands to places like Junction City, where they struggled. To help ease their adaptation process, Ms. Peter and several people in Junction City High School tried very hard to teach them English and American culture. She kept most of the journals and other materials done by her Korean students and shared them with me. Later, those materials have become a very valuable source of information, through which I came to understand the process in which KMBs have battled prejudice from both Americans and Korean immigrants and how they adapted to life in rural America.

Another key informant was K. Kim, 35. K. Kim grew up in Junction City and currently lives in Kansas City. When he was young, his family came to Junction City through chain migration by his aunt, a KMB. I came to know K. Kim when I started working for GKC-KAS in 2004. He was, then, working as a director of sports, while my job for the organization was to publish monthly newsletters as an editor. Two years younger than me, K. Kim always called me *hyoung* or brother. We became close enough that I sometimes invited him as a guest speaker for the class I taught at the University of Kansas. A specialist in Human Resources department in a major company in Kansas City, K. Kim is considered one of the most successful Koreans that the Junction City Korean community has produced. He is "the proud son" of a pastor in one of the Korean churches in Junction City. Every other week, he and his wife drive to attend the church service in his father's church and help the church

members, who are mostly KMBs. He said that the Junction City Korean community was built by KMBs and Koreans who came through chain migration like his family.

Years later, I met Ms. S., 43. Her mother is a KMB and father is African American. She does not remember her father because he left the family when she was a baby. Ms. S's family moved to a place near Junction City from South Korea in the 70s. In her early 40s, her memory of "the Korean family" who "never even said hello to her Korea mother until now" never goes away, although there were not many Koreans where she grew up. She never forgets the Koreans, whites, and blacks who never accepted her because she looked different from them. Ms. S said that some people still give her "a funny look." I called her *nuna* or sister because she is a few years older than me and I saw Korean in her. In return, she treated me as a brother, and we felt comfortable talking to each other. She is the one who made me think deeply what it means to be Korean/American because she looks to me as an embodiment of a person with multiple identities. Half of her is Korean. The manners in which she treated me seemed American, yet with some Korean twist such as *jeong* and filial piety to her mother.

In the meantime, I met Ms. Jeong, 31, in 2004 when she was an MA student in International Studies at the University of Kansas. At the time, she was writing her thesis on KMBs in Leavenworth, KS. Being a KMB herself, Jeong contacted me to ask about my research on KMBs and Koreans in Junction City, KS. We compared and contrasted Korean communities in both cities. Moreover, she explained that many KMBs have dealt with stigma of *yanggongju*, and she believed that such stigma was a grave injustice done to Korean women who tried to come to America and have a better life. As written in her thesis, after Jeong and her American husband moved to Leavenworth from South Korea, she had to

divorce him due to marital conflicts such as cultural misunderstanding and his drinking problem. It was “a bad marriage,” but at the same time, the marriage experience gave her an opportunity to understand what it is like living as a KMB with a stigma of *yanggongju*. Although she was college educated, whenever her marital history was brought up, she said that she found herself having to deal with negative looks and gazes from fellow Korean immigrants. That is also a primary reason she stopped going to Korean church in Kansas City and decided to go to church in Leavenworth, where most of the members of the church are KMBs. She was “determined to do something about injustice done to KMBs by both Korean and American society.”

With help from my key informants on the Junction City Korean community, I have conducted my ethnographic research in the Junction City-Fort Riley area. This chapter is designed to illuminate the process of formation of the Korean community in Junction City; how it took place and challenges and struggles that the community has faced. It is also intended to discuss strategies and efforts that Korean immigrants, especially KMBS have made to battle stereotypes and prejudices by both Americans and Korean immigrants.

Introduction

In 1910, Carl L. Becker, a historian and professor at the University of Kansas contended that the state of Kansas, America’s heartland, proved to be a heart of assimilating the European-born citizens and immigrants. Becker maintained that the people of Kansas had “shaped a community [in this case, European Americans] on ‘the frontier of human endeavor’ based upon ‘an identity of race, custom, habits, needs; a consensus of opinion in respect to morals and politics’.... Its people are principally American born, descended from settlers

who came mainly from the middle west. It is an agricultural state, and the conditions of life are, or have been until recently, much the same for all.’ “The Kansas spirit,” he proposed, “is the American spirit double distilled. It is a new grafted product of American individualism, American idealism, and American intolerance. Kansas is America in microcosm.... Within its borders, Americanism, pure and undefiled had a new lease of life” (5-29).

The notion of Becker’s “Kansas Spirit” is reflected in the speech of the governor of Kansas in July 1916 when he proclaimed, in front of 3,000 attendees at the annual Swedish Lutheran picnic, “Kansas is cosmopolitan and glad of it...a product of the melting pot and admits it with pride and satisfaction.”²⁸ The proclamation also comes with *E Pluribus Unum* of great “Americanism” as the governor concludes his speech by saying:

As far back as the earliest history of Kansas, during the border war for human freedom that preceded the Civil War, and in that greater conflict, our citizens of German birth and those from Sweden, Norway and Denmark marched shoulder to shoulder with the American born and pledged their lives as freely as unquestioningly, as we did, that the nation might live and be free.²⁹

The governor’s notion of “melting pot” refers to white immigrants from European countries as he acknowledges 28,807 Germans, 279 British, 17,076 southern Europeans, and 14,181 Swedish and Norwegian, and 2,170 French as new fellow citizens of the state of Kansas.³⁰ The 1916 newspaper touts the immigrants of European origin as evidence of the state’s infusion of new foreign blood into the “American” melting pot.

As a matter of fact, the restrictive immigration policy in the early 20th century played a major role in making the migration of European immigrants to the United States possible. The period coincides with the movement of white natives against Asian immigration to the

²⁸ *Topeka Journal* July 20, 1916.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

United States and passing of anti-Asian immigration laws that virtually prevented Asians from obtaining U.S. citizenship. For example, the first comprehensive selective immigration act was passed in 1917, which stipulated that Asians and Pacific Islanders in the so-called “Asiatic barred zone” could not legally immigrate to the U.S. Moreover, Congress passed the Immigration Act of 1924 to impose a permanent ban on Asian immigration. Since it retained “national origin provisions, Northern and Western European nations held relatively large annual quotas (e.g. Germany, 26,000; Great Britain, 65,000) and Eastern European countries held relatively small quotas (Poland and Italy had 6,000 each)” (Thornton 66).

Likewise, the history of Kansas has been the story of European immigrants that was thought to be a “proof of American society, the benign and absorptive powers” of American democracy and America as a nation. It is the “ethnic inclusion,” “ethnic mobility,” and “ethnic assimilation” on the European model that set the norm of America as an ideal place to accommodate newcomers (Jacobson 84).

Until the end of World War II, the history of Kansas had been constructed as mostly white and sometimes black. Even until recently, the traditional black and white binary line has occupied the history of the state of Kansas. As Velina Hasu Houston, a prominent playwright, who was born and raised by a Japanese mother and an African American father in Junction City, KS recalls, “In Kansas, the world is black and white. They don’t want to hear about yellow and red and multicolored people.” When Houston applied to the Kansas Arts Commission to pursue her Japanese “War brides” history book project, her project proposal application was denied on the grounds that the project was not about “Kansas” (Franzen 128).

Despite its invisibility, a new ethnic mosaic in Kansas was in the making due to the influx of tens of thousands of newcomers from Asia and the Americas. For example, when the “colored” soldiers of the 9th Cavalry returned from the Philippines in 1922, Filipina wives of fifty US soldiers followed their husbands to Fort Riley in Kansas, which made Fort Riley a site of interracial Army families. Subsequently, in 1924, Filipino musicians and their families came to Fort Riley and settled in Junction City as part of the 9th Cavalry band (Franzen 16). In the meantime, the first “Chinese national” to be granted United States citizenship in Kansas was Frank Yobe Yokohama, 65, from Wichita, Kansas. He came to Kansas from Yokohama, Japan by way of Mexico. It took Yokohama 46 years to be finally eligible for the U.S. citizenship. Yokohama was the beneficiary of the McCarran Act of 1952 that allows a foreign national to be eligible for U.S. citizenship as a spouse of a United States citizen.³¹ Before then, it was almost impossible for any foreign national from Asia to file a citizenship application.

In fact, changes in U.S. immigration laws and a specific U.S. Army policy played a significant role in bringing new immigrants to Kansas. More specifically, after World War II, U.S. military and immigration authorities had to deal with “war brides” as exceptions to the country’s restrictive immigration policy that still barred Asian immigration to the United States. Spouses and children of GIs were allowed a passage to the United States. For example, the War Bride Act of 1945 was enacted to permit the U.S. servicemen to bring their foreign brides to the United States, while the Immigration Act of 1946 enabled the Asian spouses of U.S. citizens to bypass the restrictive quotas on Asian immigration and enter as “non-quota

³¹ Yokohama came from Yokohama, Japan, so it is clear that he is a Japanese national when he applied for the U.S. citizenship. According to the article, he married a white American woman from Newton, Kansas. Therefore, he was eligible for an American citizenship as a spouse of the United States citizen. Kansas City Times, Sept. 4, 1953.

immigrants.” Moreover, McCarran-Walter Immigration Act of 1952 made exceptions for “war brides” into a continuing policy for the special consideration of the wives and children of servicemen. War brides from Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, and the Philippines became key cohorts of Asian immigration to the United States, especially Kansas until and even after 1965, and they established a basis for continued immigration even after the new Immigration Act of 1965 that lifted the restrictive ban on Asian immigration and established a legal preference for family reunification.

As a result, the demographic landscape of Kansas changed dramatically after World War II, the Korean War (1950-3), and the Vietnam War (as well as the continuing U.S. military influence in Europe and Asia) brought several new immigrant groups to the United States. For example, after the Fall of Saigon in 1975, many Vietnamese, Laotians, and Cambodian refugee migrants moved to southwestern Kansas to work in the meat-packing plants in Garden City and Dodge City. Kansas City was one of the first cities in the United States to receive Hmong refugees from Southeast Asia.³² Moreover, Geary County, KS received 275 Germans in 1950, 1,775 in 1960, 1,220 in 1970, and 829 in 1980, mostly wives of American servicemen. Following German immigrant women were the Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Thai, and Vietnamese women, most of whom also married American servicemen and came to settle in Geary County, KS. Table 1 shows the demographic changes of European and Asian immigration to Geary County, where Junction City has played a central role in terms of its population, economy, and administrative functions. Table 1 and 2 suggest the presence of a sizable number of foreign military brides in Junction City, the population of which has been about 20,000.

³² Kansas Historical Society, <http://www.kshs.org/p/cool-things-hmong-story-cloth/10367>

Indeed, the Fort Riley-Junction City area of Kansas has been known to have an exceptionally large number of foreign military brides from South Korea, Germany, Japan, the Philippines, and Vietnam. From the beginning of the post-World War II era, African American soldiers returned from overseas with European wives, and soldiers of all races brought their Japanese wives back to the United States. After the Korean War (1950-53), many US soldiers began to return home with their Korean wives. Domestically, antimiscegenation laws were still upheld in many states until the Supreme Court finally struck down all laws forbidding interracial marriage in 1967. Given the serious racial climate in the 1950s, the Department of Army designated Fort Riley as one of the “compassionate bases” that the Army believed would provide interracial couples with a much “safer terrain” given many other larger military bases were located in states that still had anti-miscegenation laws.³³ Especially, the Army sent Japanese-American couples to Fort Riley in the 50s and 60s given the anti-Japanese sentiment and hostility against the Japanese that stemmed from World War II.

Koreans in the Junction City-Fort Riley area

Junction City is adjacent to Fort Riley along the Republican River. With the presence of the 1st infantry Division, Fort Riley has a larger population than Junction City. As in most of the cities that have military bases nearby, the socioeconomic relationship between Junction City and Fort Riley is close. The military base has provided the city with multicultural and multiracial populations, which included German, Korean, Japanese, and Filipino women who have been married to American servicemen in their countries and have

³³ Chico Herbison and Jerry Schultz, “Quiet Passages: The Japanese American War Bride Experience,” The Center for East Asian Studies, the University of Kansas.

moved to Junction City. With the influx of new people into the city, Junction City has become the most ethnically diverse city in the state of Kansas.

Within these circumstances, a major history of Korean immigration to Kansas began with the influx of KMBs into Junction City from the 1960s. Despite the relatively long period of Korean presence in Kansas, there has been no study of Korean American communities in Kansas or of communities that are located near the military bases across the country; how they have formed their own ethnic networks, and what they have gone through in that unique circumstance. An article in 2000 written by sociologist Joane Nagel is a refreshing departure from other scholarly literature on KMBs. Nagel starts her article with story of the Korean community in Junction City, Kansas, whose formation of the ethnic community is directly related to its diasporic struggle within the context of American military presence in South Korea. She termed the community “an ethnosexual site where the global meets the local in the pursuit of racialized sex and romance” (159).

Through the 1990s, the continuing migration of KMBs and massive chain-migration of their immediate family members and relatives has made the construction of Korean American communities possible. My interviews and fieldwork found that more than seventy percent of Korean immigrants in Kansas migrated to Kansas through chain-migration made possible by KMBs.³⁴ More specifically, the 2000 census shows that 348 Koreans live in Junction City, while the 1990 census reflects 478 Koreans in the place. Among those people, 375 are females. Moreover, Korean women and their husbands are believed to have sponsored most of the 103 Korean men living in the city for immigration from South Korea.

³⁴ Not all Korean migration to Kansas traces back to Korean military brides. Many recent Korean migrants in Kansas include professionals with a U.S. degree and their spouses, a significant number of Korean nurses with their families, and a large number of Korean adoptees. Yet, it is hard to deny that a vast number of Koreans came to Kansas through chain migration to which KMBs played a significant role.

Unlike other military brides of different nationalities, KMBs in Junction City started building their ethnic community by bringing their relatives to join them, starting small businesses, and forming ethnic Christian churches. Koreans are engaged in the local economy to the extent that their visibility in the city economy is greater than their proportion of the city population. For example, on Grant Avenue, leading to Fort Riley, there was a strip mall composed exclusively of Korean businesses such as ethnic grocery stores, restaurants, dry cleaners, a video rental store, bars, and clubs. Several Korean-owned shops are on Washington Street and on its side street are Korean churches, hair salons, a tire shop, and a travel agency. Three Korean ethnic churches have been operating in Junction City since Korean immigrants took over churches that belonged to the locals. These included the Korean Mission church occupying the former Christian Science building; the Korean Baptist Church of Central Kansas, whose building once belonged to the Faith Lutheran Church and parochial school, and the Korean United Methodists, whose building was formerly the Church of Our Savior.

Park, Keum-ja has been especially important to my research because she is one of the first three Korean settlers who moved to Junction City in 1963 after marrying an African American soldier who was stationed in South Korea. According to her, Korean women and their relatives began to settle in Junction City from the 60s:

I began to see the growing number of Koreans coming to Junction City from 1965 since I came here in 1963. The Korean newcomers worked under my supervision when I worked at KP (Kitchen Police) on Fort Riley base. As you can imagine, when they first came they had limited access to jobs. They would work as dish washers and cleaners at KP. One of them is the family of the current Korean grocery store here. They came to Junction City in the early 1970s, and the family began to have their own businesses: Korean grocery store, restaurant, and later Korean mill house. They are one of those who became so successful in this Korean community. The first Korean grocery opened as Je-il grocery that is on Grant Avenue.

Other scholars have notes that the Korean presence in rural America is often the result of the “presence of KMBs and their families” (Yuh 164). In fact, in many parts of the Midwest and Southwest one can witness a heavy concentration of Koreans in military areas such as Fort Leavenworth (Leavenworth, KS), Fort Riley (Junction City, KS). Fort Hood (Killeen, TX). For example, while half of Koreans in Texas were evenly divided between Dallas (7,290) and Harris (6,571) counties, the rest of Korean immigrant population, mostly females, inhabit counties such as Bell, Bexar, Travis, Tarrant, and El Paso with major military bases. In particular, in Killeen, TX, there are approximately 7,000 to 8,000 Koreans out of a total population of 83,000. Killeen is adjacent to Fort Hood, and the Korean population in the city is predominantly KMBs.³⁵ Because of the preponderance of KMBs in Texas, Korean women outnumbered men three to two in 1990.³⁶

As David Reimers suggests, the Hart-Celler Act of 1965 replaced the national origins provisions of immigration law with a system based on family reunification, professional job skills, and refugee status. Although each country received an annual quota of 20,000, immediate family members of U.S. citizens, including military wives, were exempt from the quota (176). Reimers explains that the family reunification provisions were given preference and took up to “74 percent of the total number of slots.” Therefore, when Korean women became U.S. citizens, they could sponsor the immigration of their siblings and parents. The siblings could sponsor other immediate family members of their own. Through family reunification, it is more common for women than men to invite their family members to come to America. Women who came as military brides or nurses and then became American

³⁵ *Korea Daily*, 12/09/2008. http://www.koreadaily.com/news/read.asp?art_id=750994.

³⁶ Edward J. M. Rhoads, “Koreans,” *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/pjk01>), accessed April 16, 2011. Published by the Texas State Historical Society.

citizens often sponsor their kin. Junction City, Kansas, clearly exemplifies this type of gendered Korean migration to America. Offering a Korean community near Fort Collins, Colorado, as an example, Yuh suggests that military brides are the primary components of the Korean community and that these women invited their family members to immigrate to the United States. The relatives often settled nearby because KMBs helped their relatives adjust to “American society, find jobs, work their way through U.S. bureaucracy, put their children in school, and find places to live” (Yuh 164).

Stigma, Silence, and Struggle

The illumination of lives of KMBs and the Korean community in Junction City presents us with a unique opportunity to understand aspects of a community building process and gendered migration pattern of Korean diaspora in rural America. Within the diaspora, the identity of KMBs has been constantly defined and redefined, or understood and misunderstood where issues such as race, gender, and class are deeply contested. There are multiple dimensions, dynamics, and complexities existing in the diaspora.

Many Koreans in the Greater Kansas City area view Junction City as a rural military town full of *yanggongjus* because most Koreans living in Junction City are KMBs who moved to the city from South Korea following their American husbands. One of the Korean seniors I interviewed in Kansas City said, “You know. What kind of people could marry American GIs? Where could you find those American GI husbands in South Korea? Only *yanggongjus* could, right?” Unless one takes time to find out about the Korean community in Junction City, the community remains invisible in the Korean diaspora in Kansas.

Similarly, K. Kim, who grew up in Junction City and currently lives in Kansas City, said, “There is a stigma on Koreans in Junction City or Leavenworth because people automatically assume you are a different kind of Korean if you say to them that you live in either of the places.”³⁷ For example, in her thesis on Korean military wives in Leavenworth, KS, Jeong, a KMB, recalls the negative treatment that she received from fellow Koreans not only in Korea, but also in Kansas:

While I was dating my ex-husband in Korea, I was forced to tolerate all kinds of abusive language from co-workers and friends. They referred to him as a stupid *yang noum* (western creature). Unfortunately in my time here in the U.S., I also have suffered as a result of this mindset regarding Korean women who marry U.S. soldiers. Churches I attended in both Kansas City and Lawrence were so judgmental and condescending towards me that I thought it best to quit. Whenever it was brought to light that I had been married to an American, people’s attitudes seemed to change on the spot (8).

Jeong contends that it was not just first generation Koreans but also 1.5 or second generation Korean Americans who marginalized KMBs, as she wrote:

One day, at my previous church in Kansas City, I happened to sit at lunch with a Korean college student who had immigrated to the U.S. with her parents...I was happy to sit with her because she was around my age. However, I could sense that this was a sentiment that she did not share. She immediately asked me whether or not I lived in Leavenworth. Upon hearing that in fact I did, a look of scorn darkened her face and in a voice dripping with accusatory sarcasm she asked me just where it was that I happened to meet my husband (9).

Moreover, her interviews with KMBs in Leavenworth suggest that many KMBs experienced a similar “alienation and discrimination” just because they married American soldiers.

Accordingly, one of her interviewees said, “there were lots of Korean immigrants in that church, people were whispering about me and saying things like ‘dirty women’. No one talked to my [biracial] children” (qtd. In Jeong 9).

³⁷ Kim’s father is a pastor in one of the Korean churches in Junction City. His aunt who married an American serviceman brought Kim’s family to the United States. Known in the Korean community as one of those immigrant families who made their American Dream, he works as a manager at a telecommunication company, while his two brothers work as an accountant and hold a managerial position in a company.

Furthermore, KMBs who married African American servicemen have suffered even more ostracism from other Koreans. The public view was that Korean women who were married to African Americans or Latinos put themselves into “the dregs of a foreign society [and] that such women must therefore also have come from the dregs of Korean society” (Yuh 160). Due to the prejudice and stereotype, KMBs who married blacks or Latinos had dealt with harsh treatment from the other Koreans. One example is Heinz Ward and his mother. Ward was born in 1976 in Seoul to a Korean mother and an African American soldier father. In his interview on ESPN’s *Outside The Lines*, Ward says, “When my mother walked down in Korea, people would call her name and spit on her....My mom and I left Korea when I was two for Georgia....Growing up, I was never accepted by black kids because I was Korean. Korean kids never accepted me because I was black. White kids never accepted me because I was black and Korean....To hell with Korean people! I was really ashamed of being Korean.”³⁸ One of my informants, a black-Korean biracial, shared a similar story: “Growing up, I couldn’t have any Korean friends because they did not want to hang out with me. They wanted nothing to do with me because I looked different from them. It really hurt me a lot. I have a Korean mother. I am part Korean, but they never accepted me.”

Indeed, the sentiment toward blacks or Latinos by many Koreans is also shared by other Asians as well. I once visited a Vietnamese immigrant family; the couple has a teenage daughter who was dating “a white boy.” When I asked them what they thought about her daughter dating a non-Vietnamese, her father replied, “As a Vietnamese, I prefer my daughter to date a good Vietnamese guy. But, we’ve lived in America so long that we are ok with our daughter dating a white guy. If she dates a black guy, that will be a different story. It

³⁸ The show was aired on June 11, 2009.

will make me so sad because once she does, everyone will look at my daughter like a prostitute. Only prostitutes dated black Americans during the Vietnam War.”

Ms. Park, one of the interviewees, said that many Korean immigrants, including those relatives of KMBs’ who think they are different from KMBs, tend to look down on the women:

The funny thing I can tell you is that more than ninety percent of those [Korean] immigrants in Junction City came to the United States through chain migration, directly or indirectly. Those people have at least one of their family members married to an American GI. But they tend to look down on the military brides. I am not telling a lie. I can really sense their attitude toward people like me. But this is America, not Korea. If in Korea, they can discriminate us, but they shouldn’t do that to us in this country. All of us immigrants are in the same boat. We should stand together to deal with hardship we face here. But we tend not to. I can say that the relationship between them and KMBs is like oil on water. In the end, maybe there are three different groups in the Korean community: KMBs, those who married American officers, and those who came here through chain migration.

Despite the stigma and symbolic violence against them, and the boundary of inclusion/exclusion existing between these two communities, KMBs have moved to places such as Junction City (and Leavenworth), constructing an ethnic network of their own and forming an ethnic community. Not being able to be in touch with the Korean community in Kansas City due to a geographic distance, KMBs had to find their way through the hardships, loneliness, and language barriers. Since the McCarran Act of 1952 removed race as a barrier to naturalization and paved the way for legal recognition of Asian-GI marriages, KMBs, like any other immigrants to “the land of opportunity,” have arrived in Junction City with a number of expectations, hopes, and dreams.

At the same time, there were fears and anxieties. For example, Rev. Jae Jeong Shin, minister of the Korean United Methodist church in Junction City, discussed the problems facing Korean women married to Americans. “Cut off from their Korean families and

surrounded by different culture, customs, and habits, they became terribly homesick. Their husbands may not eat Korean food or understand Korean customs. Some women can't communicate with their American families. In many cases, as their children grow up speaking English, they can't even speak to their children" (Franzen 172). One KMB's main reason to divorce her American husband was because of the food. "I wasn't able to eat Korean food with my ex-husband. I used to eat alone at home or go to a Korean friend's house. I missed Korean food very much. One day, I bought some kimchi from a local store and it was a disaster. Disgusted by the smell of fermented cabbage, he forced me to throw away all the Korean food in my refrigerator" (Jeong 43).

One survey that a former ESL teacher conducted in her class in Junction City High School in 1991, especially, illuminates the struggle and challenges that the KMBs had to deal with. According to the survey about the culture shock of her students in ESL class, most of the KMB students said that they felt confused, lonely, and sad."³⁹ When asked about "things they don't like about Americans," students responded by saying "when American people [are] mad at me," racial discrimination," and "prejudice." In fact, the initial reception that many KMBs received from the locals was often hostile and unfavorable. In a predominantly white Midwestern town, many locals found it very strange to witness a growing number of Korean women with biracial children who look different from their mothers. For example, one of the biracial children of a KMB from the nearby Junction City area said that after her family moved to the area, not a single day passed without her Korean mother being ridiculed and made fun of by some locals due to her looks and lack of English skills (See figures 2, 3, 4).

³⁹ According to Peter, many KMB students could take ESL classes because of efforts of Junction City High School. Especially, a counselor at the school, a former serviceman stationed in Korea, did everything he could to accommodate English classes and leaning environment for these women. He had a good knowledge on the Korean community and really wanted to help them ease their adaptation process. Sometimes, they overlooked the federal regulations to let in as many Korean students as possible.

Culture Shock

Su Chong

I. Do you remember how you felt when you first arrived in the United States?

Check the sentences which were true for you:

- 1. I felt very scared.
- 2. I felt confused.
- 3. I felt lonely.
- 4. I felt happy.
- 5. I felt sad.
- 6. I felt excited.
- 7. I felt angry.
- 8. I didn't like the American people.
- 9. I felt surprised.
- 10. I felt hopeless.
- 11. I felt wonderful.
- 12. I felt very small and stupid.

II. 1. What is one thing you are afraid of in America?

(speaking English)

2. What is one thing you don't like about Americans?

(RACIAL DISCRIMINATIONS.)

3. What is one thing you want to change in your life now?

(I good English speaker!)

4. What is one thing you like in your life now?

(that I am a christian!)

5. What is the most difficult problem you've had in America?

(When I didn't know how speak English, so the language)

III. Check the sentences which are true for you:

- 1. I like a school and I want to stay here.
- 2. I like _ _ _ _ but I don't want to stay here.
- 3. I don't like _ _ _ and I don't want to stay here.
- 4. I don't understand Americans.
- 5. Most Americans do not help me very much.

0-5

Culture Shock

I. Do you remember how you felt when you first arrived in the United States?

Check the sentences which were true for you:

- 1. I felt very scared.
- 2. I felt confused.
- 3. I felt lonely.
- 4. I felt happy.
- 5. I felt sad.
- 6. I felt excited.
- 7. I felt angry.
- 8. I didn't like the American people.
- 9. I felt surprised.
- 10. I felt hopeless.
- 11. I felt wonderful.
- 12. I felt very small and stupid.

II. 1. What is one thing you are afraid of in America?

People because of language

2. What is one thing you don't like about Americans?

Too many people use drugs, have too much freedom with out it

3. What is one thing you want to change in your life now?

I still working on positive think, and see the bright side

4. What is one thing you like in your life now?

I go to school and learning, and have a lot of love.

5. What is the most difficult problem you've had in America?

When American people mad at me (she yelled me).

III. Check the sentences which are true for you:

- 1. I like here and I want to stay here.
- 2. I like _____ but I don't want to stay here.
- 3. I don't like _____ and I don't want to stay here.
- 4. I don't understand Americans.
- 5. Most Americans do not help me very much.

Culture Shock

Jeong

14

I. Do you remember how you felt when you first arrived in the United States?

Check the sentences which were true for you:

- 1. I felt very scared.
- 2. I felt confused.
- 3. I felt lonely.
- 4. I felt happy.
- 5. I felt sad.
- 6. I felt excited.
- 7. I felt angry.
- 8. I didn't like the American people.
- 9. I felt surprised.
- 10. I felt hopeless.
- 11. I felt wonderful.
- 12. I felt very small and stupid.

II. 1. What is one thing you are afraid of in America?

It is difficult to survive.

2. What is one thing you don't like about Americans?

Who have racial discrimination.

3. What is one thing you want to change in your life now?

I want to change my life positively.

4. What is one thing you like in your life now?

I like the best thing is that I am studying.

5. What is the most difficult problem you've had in America?

The most difficult problem I have had a language problem in Amer

III. Check the sentences which are true for you:

- 1. I like _____ and I want to stay here.
- 2. I like _____ but I don't want to stay here.
- 3. I don't like _____ and I don't want to stay here.
- 4. I don't understand Americans.
- 5. Most Americans do not help me very much.

However, KMBs' struggle with adjusting to life in the U.S. is paralleled by their determination to overcome the challenges. For example, one of the Korean students said that one thing she liked about her life in America was her faith in Christianity. Another student wanted to change her life positively. Others suggest that the best thing for was to be able to go to school. Despite facing a number of hardships and adjustment problems, each of the students strove to survive in ways that they never had before.

All of the [Korean] students were really hard-working students. I should not say all because there is always an exception. The adult women students had more variation than younger students. They worked their butt off. One of them was a classical pianist who was Korean. She worked so hard on her piano. She is the one who killed herself unfortunately.

Learning English was number one [priority] because they [KMBs] knew that was a key to everything. So these [KMB] students in my class worked so hard. They would do anything that it took to learn English. Even those who spoke English pretty well would still want to be in my class because they wanted to perfect their English. For adult learners they varied in their motivations. All of them were really motivated to learn English. For some, they were more interested in other subjects: American history, math, and whatever. The others just wanted to be in class to be with their Korean friends. Those women I had in my class were more like housewives, and they were more focused on education than they did on getting a job.⁴⁰

I had an interesting experience with some [Korean] women who just arrived in the city for the very first time with the men they just married. They did not speak any English. I think of one woman. Her name was Oon Choo. She was very young, probably 19. Very pretty. I don't know what her background was because she did not speak any English. She had just gotten married. She was younger than most of the other women. She found that it was really comforting to be with other [Korean] women in the classroom because I think they helped her orient to life in Junction City. I think within one month of her being there her husband was shipped overseas to the Middle East. And I wondered, first of all, "did she know what was going on in the Middle East?" I mean how was she getting news about the situations? I did not know how well educated she was to begin with. So did she know a lot about global events? Did she know he was the guy who would be sent around the world fighting? How about the guy's parents? Have their met their daughter-in-law? What would be their responsibility once their son died?

⁴⁰ Interview transcript from Lizette Peter. 2002

Ms. Peter said that she was really concerned about the well-being of her Korean students. Not being able to speak English and with limited knowledge about American society, many KMB students found Ms. Peter's class helpful in that it provided them with an opportunity to learn English and a chance to spend some time with other fellow Koreans and wives from other countries.

Not surprisingly, to many KMBs, Junction City did not seem to be the place to achieve their American Dream. It was the place where there were not many ways to make a living or jobs available for military dependents. In particular, living conditions for the dependents of the privates were less than desirable, as one article describes: "Riley's housing office had told the wives [of the privates] that the fort had no housing for families of such low rank. The only housing in Junction City within their price range turned out to be mobile homes in grim trailer parks featuring sagging trailers, disassembled cars and weedy patches of grass.... I saw the trailers had no walls under them and wondered how the young wives would cope when cold wind shot up through the trailer floors (Wilson 171).

Ms. Peter recalls her visits to some of her Korean students' houses and to those of high ranking officers:

Since she [one of Peter's Korean students] had such limited English skills, she would use those few words to say a lot. She would write in her journal over and over. On one page, "sad, sad, sad, sad, sad." Every line, "sad, sad, sad, sad, sad, sad." The place where she lived was kind of dumpy. The ones I saw anyway. The housing for the privates. A lot of people crammed into the small townhouses. They were on the military base. They were made out of stone. Although good looking structures from the outside, they were really old. Very rundown, and people were so close to one another whereas officers' houses were like mansions.

Nonetheless, all of Peter's KMB students stated in their journals that they wanted to have their "own business," "be a rich woman," "own my house and a pretty car," "graduate from (high) school and go to college," or "be an engineer and study until I die." Additionally,

their common wish for their future was to “travel around the world, visit different places, and learn about different cultures.”

However, life in a rural military town like Junction City was not easy for many KMBs with their background and language skills. To make matters worse, their husbands’ low pay and divorce put them in a very difficult situation to take care of their children. This vulnerability led some KMBs to become victims to prostitution. “I thought American guys, they have money...Military pay isn’t enough.”⁴¹ For example, in September 1986, the Associated Press broke a series of articles titled, “U.S.-based Korean prostitution ring.”⁴² The story is about a growing Korean prostitution along with “thousands of people” and “millions of dollars involved, whose origin was “imported from Korea” and whose profits rely on Korean prostitutes coming to the United States through “sham” marriages to American servicemen. According to the article, Junction City had been a major spot for recruiting women, mostly Koreans, to work as prostitutes in states such as Hawaii, Texas, New York, Illinois, Michigan, and Wyoming. In one of the AP articles, police Detective A.B. Farrow claims that out of 1,000 to 1,200 Koreans in Junction City, more than 100 Korean women may have been recruited by the Korean prostitution network operating in dozens of U.S. cities. The Junction City police can document 20 to 25 cases of such recruitment. Susie, a pseudonym, is among those Korean women who were recruited. She is 31 years old. After marrying an American serviceman, she came to the United States in 1977 and arrived in Junction City, KS in 1984 with her GI husband, son, and daughter. Life was “very hard” for

⁴¹ Cohen, Sharon. “Susie’s story: From GI wife and mother to prostitute.” *Junction City Daily Union* 24 Sep 1986: 11. Print.

⁴² Sharon, Cohen. “Michigan City cracks down on Korean-run health spas.” *Junction City Daily Union* 24 Sep 1986: 11. Print.

her because her husband's pay was not enough to make ends meet. To support her family, she worked in a commissary and a Korean restaurant as a waitress.

Then, a lure of money came from a Korean woman who offered Susie \$1,000 to pay off her debt and an opportunity to make "big money" as a waitress in a "special" club in Houston. After leaving her children with a babysitter, Susie ended up working as a prostitute serving sometimes "15 customers" a day. She made good money in a brick building where "you can hear nothing, see nothing. The only thing money is good." Two weeks later, she was able to pay off her loan. Out of her guilt, Susie called her husband to let him know the truth that eventually led her husband to divorce her. Susie lost everything with her realization that "the money is good, but it's not the future, you know. Lonely inside."⁴³ Although the Korean community in Junction City held a meeting and asked anyone involved in "this humiliating act ... to reconcile and repent," the news reinforced the image of KMBs as tragic victims of being *yanggongju* as Dr. Hyun C. Shin, a psychiatrist and vice president of Korean Community Services in Detroit says in one of the AP articles, "A very small minority has damaged our very good reputation."⁴⁴

Moreover, according to one of my interviewees, extreme poverty after a divorce from their American husbands and their responsibility for raising their children led some Korean women to do domestic work for old white farmers. She said that sex was also involved in exchange for money: "when [the old white farmers] flirt with Korean women, you can tell what kind of look and gaze they give to these women. Growing up, most of the men probably never saw any Asian woman. Then, all of sudden, 'the exotic other' shows up right in front

⁴³ Cohen, Sharon. "Susie's story: From GI wife and mother to prostitute." *Junction City Daily Union* 24 Sep 1986: 11. Print.

⁴⁴ Sharon, Cohen. "Michigan City cracks down on Korean-run health spas." *Junction City Daily Union* 24 Sep 1986: 11. Print.

of them. They wanted to fulfill their desire, while these Korean women were in desperate need of money to take care of their children. That's how it worked."

KMBs were not only viewed as "exotic others" by some locals, they were also seen as those who came from a poor, uncivilized third world country. For example, on September 22, 1991, in the "Letter to the Editor" section of Junction City Daily Union newspaper, Lisa Dotson of Junction City wrote:

Many of us: American and European: know about Korean culture and life. Soldiers who have been stationed in Korea come home with horror stories. Dogs are thrown alive from the roof top of Korean houses for amusement and eating. Korean students and people carry heads of dogs in their pocket around for good luck... Is that why you have more money for businesses in our beautiful country: add to dog and cat meat, Korean prostitution income?⁴⁵

Dotson then goes on to conclude her letter by saying that there would be no friendship between "civilized Christian Americans" and Koreans, and if the Koreans wanted to be accepted and respected by "civilized, decent and Christian people in the U.S.," they should stop "pet fortune and eating."⁴⁶ Describing herself as a devout white Christian with compassion for an animal cause, Dotson makes it clear that Europeans are superior to Asians in terms of their care for animals. She wrote that Koreans abuse and eat dogs, some of which are "the pure breeds" coming "originally from Germany and England and where they're bred for intelligence and companionship."⁴⁷

In the next two weeks, the "Letter to Editor" section of the newspaper was flooded with written refutations regarding what Dotson wrote on Koreans and their handling with dogs. Those who wrote to the newspaper all live in Junction City or in the vicinity; they include a Korean pastor, former soldiers who have been stationed in South Korea, husbands

⁴⁵ Dotson, Lisa. "Unhappy with pet treatment." Letters to the Editor. *Junction City Daily Union* 22 Sep 1991: 6. Print

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

of KMBs, a 14-year-old white middle school student, a Korean American woman, and a local who “simply wanted to respond to Dotson’s racist remarks.” People from all walks of life turned out to be the vigorous defenders of their Korean friends, wives, and neighbors, and it showed how the diversity and interactions of different cultures could pave the way for a better understanding of a different culture.

Charles Garette wrote:

How can you even imply you’re a Christian when what you’ve done with this ludicrous [letter] is far more cruel than anything done to animals.... She also makes hate legitimate by hiding it under the guise of freedom of speech. It’s a shame.⁴⁸

Brad R. Carroll, a retired Army:

The whole letter is nothing but fiction. I spent three tours in Korea. The people are very kind and are not in the dog killing business.... We as a community need to learn to live together and try to learn not to criticize each others’ culture.⁴⁹

Kim Pyong Chun:

When I read that she believed Koreans make their money by selling dogs, cats and prostitution, I could have thrown up. Koreans get ahead by working hard and saving their money, the family also plays an important role.⁵⁰

Sherrie Thompson:

It sounds like you don’t want Koreans and Americans to join together and live in harmony.... How can you talk of God being angry, when you sit on the judgment seat making proclamations against Koreans. I believe in God and am proud of my Korean heritage.⁵¹

Ray Topping:

You don’t know anything about the Korean culture nor the way of life there!! You see Ms. Dotson, I am one of those soldiers who has been stationed over there in Korea, not once, but twice.... You see, there are many good and honest Korean Christians living here within the Junction City, Fort Riley, and Manhattan area....As

⁴⁸ Letters to the Editor. *Junction City Daily Union* 28 Sep 1991. Print.

⁴⁹ Letters to the Editor. *Junction City Daily Union* 3 Oct 1991. Print.

⁵⁰ Letters to the Editor. *Junction City Daily Union* 22 Sep 22 1991. Print.

⁵¹ Letters to the Editor. *Junction Daily Union* 3 October 1991. Print.

far as you and any other European or American accepting me, my Korean born wife, family and friends, I really don't give a damn.⁵²

Julia Erickholt, a 14 year old:

I think it is perfectly OK for us to have Koreans as friends and pen pals. A civilized, decent, Christian American will look at friends for who they are, not skin color, religion, or cultural belief.⁵³

Gregory M. Fedorchuk:

Ms. Dotson lumps this all together with Koreans taking over our businesses in our beautiful country, as if Korea is ugly; perhaps Korea was not made by God. "Korean prostitution" is thrown in just as a given. My friend's wife is Korean. She is not a prostitute. She is a devoted wife and mother. She is a Christian. She works at unskilled labor for Americans to help her husband. She is the type of person that I seek as our acquaintances.... The Koreans have Korean whores patronized by Americans, we have American whores patronized by Americans.... We have a civilization that goes back about 3,000 years⁵⁴, the Korean civilization goes back 5,000 years.... Ms. Dotson's letter embarrasses me as an American.⁵⁵

The Dotson episode demonstrates that the presence of KMBs in Junction City created a terrain in which people had come to understand different cultures and expand their idea of diversity.

Human Agency

As much as there were people prejudiced toward Korean newcomers, the presence of KMBs created a new social terrain in which KMBs has helped to bridge the gap between what used to be considered peripheral culture and the core of the more dominant one and its people. As Sherif Hetata suggests, people at the periphery can cut the widening gap between themselves and those at the core. He further explains, "They can bring the cultures of the

⁵² Letters to the Editor. *Junction City Daily Union* 25 Sep 1991. Print.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ I believe Fedorchuk is referring to European civilization.

⁵⁵ *The Daily Union*, September 27, 1991.

South closer to the North.... They can bring the cultures of the North to the attention and understanding of the South in a different way. They can do a lot to dispel the misconceptions; the ugly images that people in the North and the South have of one another, and contribute to build up solidarity and resistance to the developments engineered by power groups. They can help in setting up intercultural studies based on multicultural studies based on multicultural groups with equal rights” (286).

KMBs are not just the product of their generation in Korea, but also accumulators of cultural, social, and symbolic capitals such as their holding American citizenship and their understanding of race, culture, and society in America. First of all, they use these capitals to better themselves and their children. For example, the Americanization process of biracial children of KMBs was expedited through their Korean mothers’ way of raising their children in deeply Korean ways. According to Bruce Cumings, Korean mothers regard their child not just as “a biological outcome” but also as “a being to be shaped and reared as a human creation, like a work of art.” With her “unquestioned authority” and knowing “what’s best for the child” she raises her child like a sculptor shapes and produces her precious material over time (13). My interviews with biracial children said that the way they were raised by their Korean mothers is different from how other American children were raised. For example, while their mothers worked “like 24/7,” children were always encouraged to “speak like white people do,” “study hard to be successful,” and “respect your parents and others.” Especially, darker skinned biracial children were always reminded to “know your place in America. That’s why I want you to speak perfect English, study and work hard to overcome your status as black.” In this way, biracial children’s Americanization process was expedited through their mothers’ sacrifices and efforts to raise them in a deeply Korean way as their

Korean mothers and they are dealing with the stereotype and stigma imposed on their questionable identity. One biracial person puts it the following way:

In many ways, half-Korean children feel more of a sense of responsibility because they are battling stereotypes that they are the worst of both cultures, particularly mainstream American culture. It's no secret that Americans are often stereotypically viewed as lazy or selfish by other cultures, and Koreans contrast themselves from Americans because they see themselves as ones who encourage self-sacrifice for the sake of aging parents. Korean mothers feel a greater sense of responsibility in raising children to be well-behaved, selfless, and hardworking, especially if they are mothers of half-Korean children. Within dominant Korean culture, half-Korean children and the mothers of these children are outcasts. These women not only married foreigners, but many of them married soldiers, and this stigma compels many Korean mothers to reject mainstream American values when raising their children. The point is for these mothers and their children to set a good example to both Korean culture and to American culture.⁵⁶

To set themselves as good examples for their children, while not forgetting their responsibility for their family back in Korea, many KMBs worked tirelessly to support their children and relatives. Said Ms. Park:

My life in America has been suffering itself. Nevertheless, I have never stopped sending money to support my family in Korea, through which all of my sisters got their education all the way to college and married well-educated and successful husbands. They became very successful in their lives. My mother and sisters recognized me for what I had done for them. I have never forgotten them. Never will I. I love them. Even now, I am ready to help them if they are in emergency.

Ms. Park said she often reminded her biracial children of what she had done for the family as an example of the way for the children to live their lives:

When my children had their own and became mature enough to understand my life, I told them everything that I had done for their grandmother and aunts. I told them, "The reason I tried to do my best to help my sisters become successful, although I have suffered to death to raise you, was to show you that you do the same to take care of each other, no matter what. I am not trying to make myself proud of what I have done. Do what I did to my sisters to your brother and sister.

⁵⁶ Tammy Conrad-Salvo, *Hapa Stories*, http://www.hapastories.com/hapastories.php?theme_id=COMMUNITY&story=25&pg=1 (accessed 11 Dec. 2010).

Likewise, biracial children's idea of a positive personhood has been partly constructed by their Korean mothers' claim on the whites' sexual and cultural inferiority who "do not take good care of their children, lazy, and dirty. They even send their parents to nursing homes." Whites are a majority in America, but in claiming a moral and cultural superiority over whites' as a strategy to raise their children, some Korean mothers describe themselves as "more family oriented and dedicated" than white mothers.

Just like Ms. Park said that coming to American was "like picking stars out of sky," most Koreans have imagined America as "the land of opportunity." That is what led more than one thousand Korean women to come to America through their exogamy to American servicemen. America as a superior nation and a dominant culture has been deeply ingrained in the minds of these women. However, being dominant or being subordinate is relational in that as Yen Le Espiritu contends, the "margins" do imagine and construct the "mainstream" to claim superiority over it (416). Seen as not well assimilated as their lack of understanding of the mainstream white culture, language, and way of life, many KMBs realize that not everything about America is positive. In other words, KMBs under enormous pressure to erase their otherness utilize elements in their otherness such as "caring" "sacrifice," and "communalism" to raise their biracial children. In this way, KMB mothers reaffirm their self-worth and transmit their cultural values to their offspring.

Although biracial children of color do not want to be identified as 'black', several interviewees told me that they could see the similarities of some cultural superiority between black and Korean cultures over the white culture: dedicated mothers, close-knit family environment and cleaner. White people tend to be "unclean"; they even have their shoes on

in their house.” Sometimes, because of the strict imposition of rules and values, some biracial children rebelled against them:

Clearly, half-Korean children have huge expectations to live up to. I know of some half-Korean children who completely rebelled against the seemingly stricter, more old-fashioned ideologies of their Korean mothers. In some cases, the children turned out to be “normal” American children. Others got pregnant, were forced to marry someone they thought they loved, or became estranged from their parents. When my mother hears about these instances, either from me or through community gossip, she never fails to remind me that these bad situations resulted from not following proper, conservative (i.e. Korean) behavior.⁵⁷

As one biracial person says, “half-Korean children like me either willingly or unconsciously embrace Korean culture.” However, biracial children have gone through a difficult process of identity formation and finding a sense of belonging:

There is nothing about people like me. People look at me as black which I am not. Koreans treat me like I am not Korean which I believe I am. Then, who am I? I was raised by my Korean mother just like the way that other Korean kids were raised by their Korean mother. I am Korean because I know Korea is my motherland. It has been a constant struggle to ‘fit in’. Like my Korean mother who had a hard time being accepted by both American society and Korean communities, I did not know where to belong. I would also like to know why it has been so difficult to find my place in America and in the Korean communities.⁵⁸

Nonetheless, transnational cultural values that biracial children inherited from their Korean mothers have affected the ways in which biracial children of KMBs have formed their identity. “When I state that I am Korean, it is less nebulous than I am African American – mainly because I grew up with my mother and not my father or any extended family that was African American. It was my mother who had babysat my daughter. My daughter’s speech, although elegant, is peppered with my mother’s broken English but because of the fluidity and eloquence she speaks with, goes undetected. I can pick it out because I know my mother’s tongue. I, too, speak her mixed metaphors and broken idioms as well as manifest

⁵⁷ http://www.hapastories.com/hapastories.php?theme_id=INHERITANCE&story=22&pg=1 (accessed 12 Dec. 2010)

⁵⁸ Email correspondence with one of my biracial interviewees.

her mannerisms that I see in other Koreans. Thus, KMBs played a role not only in the massive chain migration of Koreans to the United States but also as agents of transmitting and maintaining traditional Korean cultural values. These transnational cultural values played a pivotal role in the identity formation of biracial children.

Moreover, despite initial reception that was not favorable to them, KMBs in Junction City have opened up businesses and been recognized to have brought a new culture to the locals. Rose Palmer, who works for the Geary County Economic and Development and Commission, says:

Koreans' influence on cultural enrichment of Junction City is beyond description. We have Korean restaurants. As we have Korean-owned beauty shops here that brought us different styles. [Korean-owned] clothing stores with different [style] clothes. My daughter's friends that have lived all their lives here in Junction City have never tried any of the different things so when they came to my house, we had a night that we have done different kinds of foods and did away from the hamburger and hotdogs, and apple pit. Instead, we had Chinese food from Korean-owned Chinese restaurant. We went down to Korean grocery store to buy some Kimchee because we love Kimchee. It is very stinky, but it does not bother me at all.

Based on her knowledge, Ms. Palmer says that most of the Korean-women-owned stores are military related, which makes the city unique. She says of her impression of the Korean American women living in Junction City:

My impression of Korean women is they are very strong women. I respect them because they have had to leave their country and to leave their families to come here and accept another culture and "be" accepted by those who have lived here before them. Being in the military installations had made it probably easier for some. I wouldn't say it all easy because you do have different people, but have been brought up differently, so you don't know how people are going to treat you. My feeling on most of them is that they are very strong and very proud of being in business. For example, take the travel agency business. Before she opened the agency she had run a taxi service. She had run that business, I would say, almost probably 15 years. And then, she sold that business and bought the travel agency. When the older couple decided to retire, they wanted to get out of the business. Then, she purchased that business and has been running it for probably 6 years, it has been very positive to help assist other Koreans or Asians. She can socialize with them and help them get their travel needs done too.

The Korean-owned travel agency is located on the side street of Washington St. Ms. Choi, the Korean owner, works in the lobby office, while her American husband occupies the main office taking calls from his clients. On the wall behind her desk, there are pictures of South Korean Presidents, cities, and mountains in South Korea. Ms. Choi said that she had reminded herself of where she was from and the culture that she had inherited. She opened up the business after struggling with her husband's pay and deciding to "do something to get better."

The travel agency is one of eight Korean-owned businesses around the downtown area. For example, J. D.'s Furniture & Brass is owned by Chong Gooden who opened the shop when her husband retired from the army. Two blocks down from the store is Pusan restaurant that is KMB-owned. The restaurant is frequented by KMBs and their family as well as "soldiers who had served in Korea. They "felt more at home in Korean restaurants or clubs than they did in traditional Junction City establishments" (Franzen 175). Korean students from Manhattan, KS, where Kansas State University is located, are also regulars to the restaurant. Near the downtown area, Kim's hair salon has served KMBs, other locals, and Korean students at Kansas State University. Ms. Kim, the owner, said that her family came to the United States in the early 80s through chain migration. Her sister-in-law married an American serviceman. Right next to the hair salon is a car stereo/tire shop that Ms. Kim's husband owns.

Furthermore, KMBs in Junction City found the city their home and became important elements of Junction City's rich diversity by reaching out to the non-Korean community. For example, the Korean Baptist church of Central Kansas, under Rev. Paul C. Kim, has opened

a food pantry in the church, helping all people in need in their neighborhood. Moreover, when the Junction City Chamber of Commerce held its Crossroads of Leadership Program for potential leaders of the community in 1991, Nina Willey, Ki Hwan Daniel's daughter, became increasingly upset when some people in one session discussed the removal of bars on Washington St., one of which her mother owns. Willey stood up and said: "My mother [Ki Hwan Daniel] has owned the Mission Billiard Parlor for eighteen years. She does a lot for the community. She helps people who are on the street by providing food, shelter, and odd jobs. If you don't like the way outside of her business looks, tell us what you want and we'll improve it" (Franzen 174).

Before his death from stomach cancer in 1973, Ki Hwan Daniel's husband bought the Mission Billiard Parlor and helped her learn to manage it so that she could support herself and their three children. Although she could not read or write English, Ki Hwan had good business skills. Her regular customers were mostly civilians, "older and white" with an army crowd on paydays. Some of the regulars included people who are unemployed and homeless. On many occasions she offered them jobs in her billiard parlor or found jobs for them. She even provided her customers with a turkey feast. Her business flourished, and she brought her family over from Korea: her mother, a brother and his wife, a sister and her husband, and five nephews. She became a leader of the Korean community (Franzen 173-4).

As more Koreans opened up small businesses in Junction City, they formed the Korean business association. One of the former presidents of the association is Jae Myung Yu who came to Junction City with the help of his sister and American brother-in-law. After his family moved to the city, they started working on the military base for several years to save enough to open up their own businesses such as the Korean grocery store, restaurant,

and mill house, which are leading up to the Fort Riley gate. Yu's Korean restaurant is frequented by many U.S. soldiers and locals, and his restaurant has played an important role in bringing Korean culture to Junction City:

One by one, as lunch buffet hours was passing, people came in but went hurriedly to the buffet stands, for fear their foods might lose the flavor that could be only emanated from the freshly made ones. When a middle-aged white man came into the restaurant, he greeted the waitress and the female restaurant owner, "Annyonghase yo" or good afternoon. And he asked the waitress, "Matitneun kimchi oneulobsoyo?" or any delicious kimchi ready for me today? He was well versed about several Korean foods and also could speak a few knowledgeable Korean words. Moreover, right beside my table sat a father with his two young daughters. At the restaurant, five main dishes were prepared and six different kinds of Kin Chi were served; cabbage kimchi, cucumber kimchi, radish kimchi, etc. The father taught his daughters what they were eating and what the original names of the foods are in Korean. He said, "Hey, this is *jab-chaе* (Korean style spice noodles), and that is *bul-go-gi* (Korean barbeque)." At least, they were familiar with what they were eating. Without Korean restaurants, they would never have known them. (Field note, 9.21.2002)

In the Korean community in Junction City, Korean churches have provided KMBs and their families with an opportunity to "maintain social interactions and friendship with fellow Koreans" (Min 381). Ms. Park's belief in God had put her through the years of struggle and hardship:

At the center of my struggle and mere success was my belief in God. There are four Korean churches here in Junction City; the Eun-hye Baptist church, Yon-hap Methodist church, one Evangelical church, and a Presbyterian church. I go to Yon-hap Methodist church that was founded in 1984. Words will not be able to describe how blessed I have been to meet God in my life. I was baptized in 1973 in American church. It did not matter whether I understood a weekly sermon or not. Thanks to Jesus I have been blessed with my children who became prominent figures in this country, not because I had the ability to make them successful in their life.

Many KMBs hold regular church district meeting called *kuyok yebae*. This group district meeting constitutes a religious service with a number of opportunities for informal social interactions. Church members belonging to the same district rotate hosting the meeting at their house. I attended one of Ms. Park's *kuyok yebae* upon her request. There were six Korean women and a daughter of one of the members. When I got to their meeting, all of the

members were already present singing a hymn in a small living room. Then, each of them offered an individual prayer. One prayed to God that her American husband would turn over a new leaf to take care of the family. Another prayed for better days after all the economic hardship that she had dealt with. Other members all prayed for the little girl at the meeting who has disability. The women I interviewed all tried to regain their physical and emotional strength through God. They also listened to other members' prayers and concerns and offered advice. Ms. Park said that it was good to share her pain and sorrow with fellow Koreans. She insisted, "what God had given to us is that the love to take care of each of the fellow Koreans in this alien country."

It is important to note that KMBs are not a homogenous group. There are divisions and conflicts among these women depending on their husband's rank and race. "My husband is a lieutenant colonel, so I can't talk to you," "Do you know that officers' wives are not allowed to talk to sergeant's wives because of military regulations?" "You can't come here because this is only for officers' wives, sergeants' wives are not allowed to come" (qtd in Jeong 75). Said Mrs. T, "many officers' Korean wives seem to believe that if their husband is a Major, then they are also a Major, if their husband is a lieutenant colonel, then they act though they are the one who has earned the right to a position high up in the chain of command." Even at the church, officers' wives almost always sit together and eat their lunch, while Korean wives of the enlisted eat together on the other table. Although most KMBs achieved their symbolic capital of an American citizenship, their capital is valued in relation to one another, and their identity is constructed situationally. For example, those who married a private, especially a black private had to deal with more discrimination and racism from other KMBs and Korean immigrants. As Jeong, a KMB, suggests that she had met KMBs

who socially segregate themselves from others, while informing their children that “all Korean women who marry U.S. servicemen are whores,” and they even “refuse to speak Korean as a way of separating themselves from those they deem socially inferior” (Jeong 12).

Furthermore, the social status of a KMB tends to be judged based on her husband’s rank:

As a regular attendee of a Korean church around the military base (in Leavenworth, KS) for more than six, I witnessed many such instances of discrimination and preference based on husband’s rank. One pastor had a habit of only officially welcoming new church members who were married to officers. On occasion, when he made announcements during the service, even though it had nothing to do with the sermon, my pastor would often interject off topic like “We haven’t seen Mrs. Y for a while, Mrs. Y is back from her trip to Korea. Welcome back. Your husband is a Major, right?” (Jeong 76).

Jeong contends that many Korean wives of the enlisted experienced discrimination from officer’s wives. Thus, social status of a KMB is greatly influenced by the rank and race of her husband.

After KMBs came to Junction City, KS, they had gone through dynamic transnational transformation in a rural Kansas town. By building and sustaining an ethnic community and cross-cultural alliances with the locals, they were able to make Junction City their home. In this community building process, however, each KMB’s coping strategies in the new place was different within these circumstances to negotiate their racialized and gendered identity. My interviews with KMBs suggest that some women chose to remain permanently isolated from anything Korean because of the deeply embedded pain that they had to endure from Koreans and Korean society. They also did so to expedite their children’s Americanization process. Some turned to prostitution in exchange for money. One of my interviewees explained that many KMBs and even biracial children of these women worked at bars, massage parlors or became some white men’s mistresses. She added that many white men viewed these Korean women as “exotic others,” and there was “a demand for the exotic

Asian women” in small towns, Kansas. Most of them strove to better their lives and children by working on the Fort Riley base, at retail stores, or at factories near Junction City. Many of them also opened their own businesses from which the Korean community and people in Junction City have benefited greatly in terms of economy and culture. Most importantly, most of the KMBs chose to sacrifice their lives for the betterment and success of their children. They believe that uplifting the status of their children through education and hard work would give the mothers an opportunity to be accepted to mainstream Korean and American societies.

Conclusion

As Richard Gruneau argues, structural constraints give social actors new possibilities to expand their agency (26-8). “Black man or white man didn’t really matter. I had to go to America.” In a society where traditional patriarchal gender-norms and stigma of *yanggongju* still held disciplining power over their *questionable* identity, to KMBs like Ms. Park, Geum-ja, 87, marrying an American serviceman was the only way for her to escape extreme poverty, support the rest of the family that she left behind, and realize their American Dream. Simply viewing these women as victims of *yanggongju* and representing them as a homogeneous group that lacks agency reflect the views of the existing studies that have situated KMBs at the margins of the Korean American community and American society. Thus, my efforts to look at the Korean community in Junction City are to overcome the limits of the existing studies. KMBs, whether their marriages to their American husbands failed or not, have become integral members of both the Korean and the local communities to which they belong.

Chapter 4

The Erasure of KMBs in Contemporary Korean Kansas City

Introduction

In 2004, I jumped into the Korean community in the Greater Kansas City area. What started out as a simple academic curiosity to know about Korean immigrants in Kansas turned out to be a driving force for my commitment to the Korean community; I had spent several years serving the community, working as an editor and the Director of Cultural Affairs for KAS of GKC. I had also attended one of the oldest Korean ethnic churches in the area where I served as a director of media. Additionally, I had assisted Korean Senior Society of GKC by organizing and hosting its events because the president and many members of the association were the members of my church.

Without its ethnic enclave, the Kansas City Korean community appears to be what Huping Ling calls “a cultural community.” A cultural community is a social space or boundary where an ethnic community is not defined by its shared physical boundaries but by the people’s common practices of their culture and beliefs such as their ethnic language schools, religious institutions, and community organizations, cultural agencies, and political organizations. Ling argues that this cultural community approach is useful when it comes to examining those immigrant groups that have not formed the ethnic enclaves but still maintain a sense of community through various cultural practices and religious beliefs such as annual ethnic festivities, various ethnic organizations, and ethnic churches. Similarly, the Korean community in GKC area is supported by three hundred twenty Korean-owned small businesses, eighteen ethnic Korean churches, and three major institutions such as Korean

American Society of Greater Kansas City, Korean Institute of Greater Kansas City, and Korean Senior Society.

Despite their shared identity as Koreans, however, members within the community are heterogeneous in terms of race, class, and gender. For example, there are many KMBs and their biracial children. Many elderly Koreans live in housing projects, while their children live in suburban areas such as Overland Park and Olathe, KS. Korean women outnumber men in the GKC area. Kansas City has a sizable population of Korean adoptees.⁵⁹ And there is a hierarchy within the Korean diaspora in Kansas. The hierarchy has been constructed and supported by the reconstruction of Korean patriarchy through cultural institutions and psychological boundary of inclusion/exclusion. Many Koreans put KMBs on the bottom of the hierarchy because of these women's "suspicious character" and their outmarriage to other ethnic or racial members. These women have had to endure racism, sexism, and discrimination not just from American society but also from their fellow ethnic members whose immigration to America through chain migration was in many cases made possible by a KMB.

In my years of involvement with the GKC Korean community, I have come to know so many different Koreans who are mostly first/1.5 -generation immigrants. We all shared many Korean cultural values such as *hyodo* or filial piety and *jeong* or a human emotion that can best be described as a mixture of bondage, love, sentiment, sympathy and heart. To Koreans, filial piety is the guiding principle for sons and daughters to obey and honor their parents, while supporting them in their old age. To most elderly Koreans, I was their grandson. To many KMBs, I was their son or brother. Many other Koreans immigrants

⁵⁹ According to Yang, the secretary of Korean American Society of Greater Kansas City, Kansas City has the second most number of Korean adoptees, next to Minneapolis, MN.

embraced me not just as a researcher, but also as their brother or friend sharing *jeong* and *filial piety* with one another. It was my way of conducting ethnographic work on the Korean community in the GKC area by deploying myself as a Korean who shares similar Korean ethnic values with Korean immigrants. However, it has not been an easy process to get to know the Koreans in the area because it took me years to get to know them and sacrifice every weekend to organize and attend every ethnic event or meeting to know deeper about them.

Boundary of Inclusion and Exclusion

Crossing a sexual/ethnic boundary stirs disagreement and anxiety among the in-group ethnic members- and, because ethnic ideologies tend to involve strong negative construction of outsiders, pushes these members to a “stick to your own kind” position. A new ethnic group’s boundary is maintained through ethnic institutions such as churches, associations and ethnic-owned stores. Uma A. Segal contends that ethnicity can serve as a mechanism of inclusion and exclusion. An ethnic group may hold more closely to its cultural traits if it is insecure about its position in the large society, if the larger society ridicule or rejects it, or if it feels a sense of pride in retaining its ethnic identity. On the other hand, people may seek to emulate the majority for the very reasons described above if retaining cultural traits makes the immigrant group appear too different from the dominant group (182).

To be included within the boundary of an ethnic community, one is supposed to possess common cultural qualities. For example, Segal discusses a list of common behavioral norms that are embedded among Asian immigrants such as “filial piety, direction of parent-child communications, self-control and restraint in emotional expression, respect for

authority, well-defined social roles and expectations, shame as a behavioral influence, inconspicuousness and middle position virtue, awareness of social milieu, fatalism, communal responsibility, high regard for the elderly, centrality of family relationships and responsibilities.” Among the norms, “well-defined social roles and expectations and shame as a behavioral influence” are critical to examine the exclusion of the internationally-married Korean women from the Korean American community (5-8).

Furthermore, Segal argues that the norm of “well-defined social roles and expectations” within Asian American communities is clearly defined gender roles and responsibilities. While men in general are assumed to play a dominant role inside and outside the family, women’s roles are restricted to the nurturing roles for maintenance of family relationships and functioning of family. In other words, roles and expectations within the family are designated according to gender and age. In particular, the status of males and elders garner more importance and power in decision-making process in community, businesses and society in general. In this traditional sense of gender roles and expectations, if a male-dominated community or society deems that its female member violates the generally accepted line of gender hierarchy, especially through interracial marriage, she risks being excluded from the community (188).

The norm of “shame as a behavioral influence” could be a reason for the exclusion of the internationally married Korean women.⁶⁰ If an individual violates socially-defined norms, it is regarded as a disgrace not only for the individual but also a trauma for the entire family.

⁶⁰ The stigma on internationally married Korean women is often centered on Korean women who married American GIs. The status of those who married officers or civilians usually depends on that of their American husbands. For example, currently vice president of Korean American Society of Greater Kansas City is a Korean woman who married an American civilian who came to Korea as the member of the Peace Corps in the early 70s. She is widely regarded as one of the successful Korean immigrants and recognized for her contribution to the Korean community in the GKC area.

Segal contends that “shame” is “a strong mechanism of control,” and it shapes an individual Asian’s sense of who he/she is as a member of the family and society. Therefore, violations of the norms mean the loss of the status of the family in the community that might further prevent the family from participating in social activities (188). In the process, ethnic members in the Korean community could reaffirm their pure and positive Koreanness and their new identity as ‘desirable’ Americans.

At the same time, the Korean community’s construction of KMBs as victims at the hands of the American men works to send a strong message to Korean women that racial and sexual venturing into the non-ethnic territory leads only to catastrophe. The image of KMB as the target of American men’s conquest serves, in the community, to alienate her from other Korean women, who are positioned as “virtuous women” (Segal 184). Therefore, many Koreans regard the group of KMBs as a challenge to Koreans’ definitions of self, and thereby a challenge to Korean nationalism.

KMBs, a Model Minority, a Korean Community in GKC

In Korean diaspora in Kansas, KMBs have been invisible because their presence within the Korean ethnic boundary haunts a number of Korean immigrants as a shame to the family and a shameful history. In particular, the Korean American community’s historical marginalization of the KMBs took place in the context in which Korean immigrants’ pursuit of becoming “respectable Americans” and exemplary members of the so-called “Model Minority.” Korean immigrants’ notion of racial uplift and assimilation into the mainstream is associated with citizenship with an emphasis on positive representations of educated and economically advanced Korean immigrants, while they have distanced themselves from the

uneducated, economically unsuccessful, and sexually-violated by American men Korean *undesirables*. Thus, Koreans' struggle with uplifting themselves and asserting themselves as a positively assimilated group of immigrants resulted in excluding certain group within its ethnic boundary.

For many new immigrants, becoming exemplary citizens of their new country has been one of their primary concerns. Likewise, the ethnic uplift ideology of "fitting into the American mainstream" has been one of the Kansas City Korean ethnic institutions' agendas in order to have the Korean immigrants "recognized" by the mainstream society. Korean ethnic institutions such as Korean churches, Korean American Society of Greater Kansas City (KAS-GKC), Korean Senior Society (KSS), and Korean Golfers' association, I have witnessed Korean ministers tell their churches members to "behave themselves as the positive elements of 'the mainstream' society, and presidents of ethnic organizations remarked on their organization members' living up to the standards of the "mainstream."

Kevin Gaines (1996), in his book, *Uplifting Race*, gives a clue to the question of what it means to live in America as a minority and how the notion of otherness encourages a minority group to dispel the negative connotation associated with the group and to promote the positives of it through the ideology of "Uplift." In his study on the black middle-class struggle with representing themselves as fitting into the white society, in the late 19th century, Gaines argues that the uplift ideology of the African middle-class was not simply a matter of educated African Americans' wanting to be white, but "uplift" represented the struggle for a positive black identity in a deeply racist society, turning the pejorative designation of race into a source of dignity and self-affirmation through an ideology of class differentiation, self-help, and interdependence. Additionally, he asserts that while black intelligentsia spoke

universally of the race's advancement, there was vigorous disagreement on precisely how this was to be achieved. In fact, there were bitter debates among black elites over issues of education, citizenship, equal rights, gender relations, and cultural identity.

In fact, Gaines starts from the belief that the notion of racial uplift changed from one based on inalienable rights and legal protection associated with citizenship to one associated with an emphasis on positive representations of educated, assimilated blacks of sterling character contrasted against "the morally deficient classes" within the black community. Similarly, when Koreans entered the United States, they perceived themselves as "marginal," as they struggled to adapt to the host culture while simultaneously ensuring a sense of personal worth and group identity.

Given that most of the ethnic Korean institutions are run by the first generation Korean immigrants, it is important for them to uplift themselves in the host culture in a positive way. An example of Korean immigrants' struggle to be accepted into the host society is the fact that most of the Koreans are church affiliated though many of them believed in a different religion or were non-religious before coming to the United States. According to Jeong Ha Kim (1997), "Immigrants are religious--by all accounts more religious than they were before they left home--because religion is one of the important identity markers that help them preserve individual self-awareness and cohesion in a group....In the United States, religion is a social category with clearest meaning, and acceptance in the host society, so the emphasis on religious affiliation and identity is one of the strategies that allow the immigrant to maintain self-identity while simultaneously acquire community acceptance" (27).

History Told and History Untold

However, the first generation Korean Americans' emphasis on the positive representations of those who "made it" from scratch renders some problems of race, class, gender, division of age groups and religious affiliation in their pursuit of Americanization, ethnic uplift, solidarity, and citizenship in America. In other words, in each of the ethnic institutions' efforts to strive toward the positive inclusion of Korean Americans in "mainstream America," my research has found that biracial children of Korean heritage, those low class Koreans, Korean women who came to America through intermarriage, the Korean elders who have seemingly suffered the most hardship among various ethnic cohorts, and division of Koreans by their religious affiliation were often excluded from the ideology of "uplifting Koreans." I will argue that Korean Americans' efforts toward membership or positive inclusion into the white mainstream society gain some results. But, the process of pursuing and uplifting the Korean American community also leaves a number of groups within the community voiceless and invisible, especially KMBs who were considered not desirable enough to represent the Korean American community.

"They don't help us, they only work for the sake of their own pride." "They only associate with rich Korean couples, they talk negatively about Americans using foul language and the only people from Leavenworth that they choose to talk to are the Korean officers, whom they are more than happy to treat to dinner" (qtd in Jeong 58). Leavenworth is considered a part of the GKC area, and the KAS-GKC has several of its KMB members from this city. According to Jeong, many KMBs in Leavenworth did not appreciate that they are not represented as part of ethnic Korean immigrants in the GKC area. Rather, the women believe that the organization has prided itself on its exemplary figures such as successful

businessmen, professors, and foreign exchange officers as the type of Koreans who best represent the GKC Korean community, though a large percentage of Koreans are KMBs and their relatives who came through chain migration.⁶¹

Indeed, KMBs have been invisible in GKC Korean community's pursuit of being recognized by the mainstream American society. For example, the year 2004 marked the fifty-fifth anniversary of the beginning of the Korean immigration to the Greater Kansas City area. In the fall 2004 issue of KAS-GKC newsletter, Ed Eilert, a mayor of Overland Park, proudly proclaimed the month of August 2004 as "Korean American Month." He stated in his letter of Proclamation, "approximately, 3,500 Koreans live in the [Greater Kansas City] area, of which over sixty percent are proud residents of the city of Overland Park, and an increasing number of younger generation return to Overland Park after completing their higher education and become valuable members of the workforce." In the newsletter, there is a brief history of the Korea immigration to Kansas. The history claims that Korean immigration to Kansas began when a student came to pursue his Ph.D. at the University of Missouri at Kansas City. However, nowhere does it mention the role that KMBs played in the construction of Korean communities in Kansas.

On September 27, 2005, for the first time in Korean American history in Kansas, the Korean American Society of Greater Kansas City held its first Korean Cultural Festival in Heritage Park in Kansas City. About two thousand Korean Americans and locals attended the festival. During the three day festival, it was female Korean volunteers, who represented thirteen Korean churches in the Greater Kansas City area and worked to serve ethnic Korean

⁶¹ Korean Army has its liaison officer, a lieutenant colonel, on Fort Leavenworth base. The officer is often invited by GKC Korean institutions as a dignitary for their ethnic events.

foods and took charge of the traditional Korean amusement games such as Moonwalk and tug-of-war.

While the Korean women's roles in organizing and promoting most of the events were mostly invisible or not well recognized, it was the Korean men who publicly represented the Korean American community as Dokko, Youngsik, the president of Korean American Society of Greater Kansas City and Kim, Wook, the consulate general of the Republic of Korea, made a speech on how the event would move Korean Americans forward to "the mainstream America" and how the mainstream would accept the Koreans as proud elements of American society. Korean consulate general added at the time of his speech that "Koreans in Kansas City are the exemplary of bridging Korean Americans to the mainstream American society."⁶²

The ethnic uplift ideology of "fitting into the American mainstream" has been one of the concerns of Korean ethnic institutions. Through my participant observation in the Korean churches, ethnic institutions such as Korean American Society of Greater Kansas City, Korean Senior Society, and Korean Golfers' association, I have witnessed Korean ministers tell their churches members to "behave themselves as the positive elements of 'the mainstream' society, and presidents of ethnic organizations remarked on their organization members' living up to the standards of the "mainstream."

⁶² Kim, Sang Jo. Fieldnotes. (2/11/2005).

KMBs and Korean Church

The first Korean church founded in Kansas is the Korean United Presbyterian Church of Kansas with twenty Korean immigrants in 1969.⁶³ Ten years later, the Korean Presbyterian Church of Kansas was founded on S. 51st Street, Kansas City, KS in 1979, which has been known to have the most number of elderly Korean immigrants. I worked for this church and its members, especially elderly Koreans. Members of the church not only include Koreans, but also include KMBs, their American husbands, and biracial children of KMBs. Most of American husbands of KMBs were former servicemen who met their Korean wives when they were stationed in Korea. For example, Mr. K met his wife in Daegu about 28 years ago. He has been involved with the Korean church for about 15 years because he believed it would be good for his wife and children to spend more time with other fellow Koreans. Mr. J, a Deacon, also met his wife in Korea. Since he works for the Immigration and Naturalization Service, he said that he had helped many Koreans be informed of the American immigration laws and social security benefits that they were qualified for. He has two teenage daughters who are also members of the Korean church youth music group. Mr. Brown, an African American, also met his wife when he was stationed in South Korea. Always working in the back office of the church, he helps with the church youth band and media equipment. Only Mr. C was a civilian when he met his wife in Korea when he worked as member of Peace Corps forty years ago. His entire family along with his Korean parents-in-laws whose immigration he and his wife sponsored goes to the Korean church.

⁶³ Late Reverend Chung found the church. Then, he founded a Korean church in Lawrence, Topeka, and Junction City, KS in the 80s. The Korean church in Lawrence is occupied by Islamic Center. Ms. Park, his wife, said that it was sad to see so many KMBs struggle in Junction City. Many turned to his Korean church for consolation and prayers for a better life.

The American husbands of KMBs encourage their biracial children to participate in church activities. When asked about challenges in adapting to going to Korean church, they replied that despite a language barrier they felt comfortable with being in the Korean church because they understood many aspects of Korean culture such as *filial piety* and *jeong*. For example, the wife of Mr. C said that she was, sometimes, guilty of not having spent more time with her husband because she had always been busy with taking care of her aging parents. It was Mr. C who encouraged her to do so because he knew the importance of the role of a daughter for her parents in a Korean culture.

Every Sunday, the worship service of the Korean Presbyterian Church of Kansas starts at 11am. At around 9:30am, the basement of the church is filled with elderly Koreans. Some of them come with the church's minivan driven by Ms. Kim, a KMB. She volunteered to help the seniors because it is her *dori* or a morally right thing to help them. She picks them up at housing projects in the GKC area and in Leavenworth. Many of them are parents of KMBs. Mr. Kim, the president of Korean Senior Society always sits on a chair in front of the basement entrance greeting his fellow elderly people. Mr. Kim, 88, is from Pyongyang, North Korea. Considered as the most educated Korean elder, he graduated from Waseda University in Japan during the Japanese colonial period. He came back to Pyongyang and became a teacher. Among his students was Kim, Jong-il, a former North Korean leader, in an elementary school before the Korean War broke in 1950. Since the communist North purged many of the intellectuals in the name of eradicating the bourgeois elements, he and his family fled south to Seoul, then to Pusan in the southeastern part of Korea. There, he continued to teach in high school in makeshift class rooms. After the war, his family moved to Seoul. His

younger brother who studied in the United States in the 1950s sponsored his immigration to America.

According to him, Korean Senior Society of Kansas City was founded in 1981. He and other founding members of KSS felt an urgent need to form an organization that would specifically address the issues of elderly Korean immigrants. Mr. Kim said that in 1981, there was no information on how many Korean elders lived in the GKC area. To catch hold of the exact number of those Korean immigrants over the age of 60, he and other like-minded elders started gathering information and visited each of the elders' houses. Since, in the early 80s, most of the people scattered around the Greater Kansas City area and Leavenworth, it was especially hard for him and his friends to look for exact information on the Korean seniors. KSS could finally publish the association's first address book and hold an official meeting in 1981.

Every Sunday, at around 10:30 am, right before the service, the basement is full of joy and laughter, while the elderly are grouped by gender, age groups, and places of their residence. When the worship service is over, the elderly come down to basement to have a free lunch that is made up of rice, kimchi, traditional Korean soup, and a side dish. Every month, an owner of a Korean grocery store donates boxes of kimchi and rice to the church. Elderly women always sit around at the same table, while elderly men take their own separate place in the basement to enjoy their lunch served by young people like me fulfilling our filial piety. After lunch, a KMB volunteer drives them back home to the housing projects and Leavenworth.

Occasionally, there are ethnic events for the Korean elderly held mostly by Korean churches and Korean American Society of Greater Kansas City. For example, on May 1,

2005, there was a Mother's Day event for the members of Korean Senior Society at the Korean United Presbyterian Church of Kansas City. More than forty Korean seniors attended the event. Volunteers like me pinned a piece of carnation on the jacket or blouse of each of the Korean elderly. Before the dinner was served, old Korean movie was played for the elderly to appease their loneliness and sorrow of living in the United States. Some wept, while some laughed. Suddenly, a female elderly, Ms. Chung, left the place full of emotions and anger. I escorted her down to the church dining hall where about fifteen female members of the church were busy preparing the Mother's Day dinner for the elderly people.

I asked her why she burst into emotional explosion. She said that she did not like the theme of sadness in the movie:

Why do they want to play that kind of movie for the elderly? Throughout our entire life, that's what we have been through. Those Japanese bastards during the Japanese colonial period...I lost my Korean husband during the turbulent era of the Korean War. Being from the very affluent family, I couldn't bear the complete loss of my family and wealth. How could I survive through all the ordeals? I married an American soldier and moved to Fort Braggs in North Carolina in 1963. I move to Leavenworth, Kansas where my husband worked on the base as a First Sergeant. You know what happened? One day, he went fishing and was found later to be drown to death. I have no children, and no husband to take care of and love. I have been alone all through my life. If they will show this kind of movie again, I will never come to this kind of event ever again. Tell them to play something more constructive and future oriented if it is possible.

Ms. Chung, then, sipped a cup of traditional Korean tea to compose herself. Ms. Chung came to the United States about forty five years ago. She is one of the most "Americanized" Korean elderly in the GKC area. Just like many KMBs who married American servicemen to escape poverty and a chance for a better life in America, Ms. Chung married an American soldier for a second chance in her life, but she had been through a tragedy and deep sorrow. She has *han* or a lifelong sorrow and resentment in her heart. She still seemed to be in the process of healing her wounds. She is "resentful" to Korea, and she said that she did not wish

to go back. That is why she felt uncomfortable with being exposed to the old Korean movie that was reminiscent of the poverty and sorrow of Koreans in the 50s and 60s.

Nonetheless, many of those who watched the movie seemed to be happy with it. The overall response were “a good movie to remind me of my childhood,” “funny from the perspective of the 2005 eyes,” and “ok to spend some time to watch that kind of movie.” After the movie was over, we distributed a gift box containing two Korean CDs and a digital clock. One CD contains traditional folk and popular songs from the 60s and 70s, the other contains gospel songs.

In addition to the ethnic events for the Korean elderly immigrants, Korean Senior Society has held a flu shot event to improve the health condition of the Korean elders every October. The event is held in one of the Korean churches in Kansas. The event was first organized by a Korean social worker, a KMB. She lived in Kansas City with her American husband before her family moved to Baltimore five years ago. However, she flies back to Kansas City every year to make sure that the flu shot event goes well. According to her, she decided to promote the event for the elderly because she found that not many Korean elders knew about the Medicaid, Medicare, and social security benefits that were available for them. It was surprising to her to know those Korean elders who resided in a place like the housing projects had not even taken the basic healthcare measure for themselves. Out of her understanding for the plights of Korean elders with her knowledge and experience as a social worker, she contacted several local pharmacies for sponsoring the event and gathered a number of volunteer nurses to help get the flu shot event going.

When the flu shot event was held in one of the Korean churches in October, 2005, there were two American volunteer nurses and one Korean nurse to help the elders receive

the shot. I volunteered to help the seniors write their name and address in English in the application form, and I worked to check whether the elders brought their Medicaid card with them. More than half of those who got the shot had hard time writing their name in English. Many of them would not have been able to attend the event without the transportation provided by their children or their churches.

Later I was invited by several Korean elders who live in two housing projects in the GKC area because many of them are members of my church and they embraced me as their son or grandson. My interviews with Korean elders suggest a unique aspect of chain migration of Koreans to Kansas.

South Mill and Santa Fe Apartments (Korean Elders and Chain Migration)

The three-story apartment building is located in the vicinity of downtown Kansas City area. Most of the residents in the building are welfare recipients. When I arrived at the place with the Korean pastor from the church where I had volunteered to work, several residents were smoking in front of the main entrance. The Korean pastor directed me to the elevator inside the building, which would take us to the third floor where several elderly Koreans live. Later, I learned that the elevator had only recently been repaired. It has been broken for weeks. Because of that, the Korean elderly living on the third floor have rarely gone out except for when their grown-up children picked them up to drive them to church every Sunday.

According to the Korean elderly in the South Mill apartment, there was a time when about twenty-five Korean elderly packed the apartment complex. An affordable housing cost, welfare assistance from government, and a better chance for them to have more

companionship with other elderly Koreans, many Korean elders voluntarily moved out of their children's house and moved into the senior apartment.

The Korean pastor and I arrived there around noon. All of the five Korean elderly women, members of my church, were waiting outside the apartment to greet the pastor and me. Three of them just returned from a vegetable garden behind their apartment building. The pastor said that the city has provided the elderly Koreans with a small yard so that they cultivate the yard to grow vegetables for their children. They have sold some of the Korean vegetables to Korean grocery stores in the GKC area. More specifically, the elderly grew vegetables such as lettuces, Korean cabbages, sesame leaves, and green onions in the yard. In fact, growing vegetables had helped the elderly form a small cooperative community to ease their loneliness and being left alone. Although some of them suffered from physical illness and mental loneliness, their cooperative works on the vegetable garden seemed to give them something to live for. Currently, nine Korean female elderly live with their own apartment unit to live in. They said that each of them pays \$112 for their rent every month. The city government assisted them with subsidy for the rent. We gathered together in one of the elders' apartments. Some of them cooked Korean curry and *banchan* or side dishes for me and the pastor.

Unlike the South Mill apartment, Santa Fe apartment complex is ten-story housing project where senior citizens of different racial and ethnic background live next to one another. Currently, eight Korean elders live there; two are males and five Koreans are females. The building is well maintained, and the staffs of the building seem to provide adequate support such as cleaning and assistance for the disabled elderly.

In this apartment building, most Korean elderly immigrants grappled with overcoming a sense of loneliness and growing personal health problems. For example, all of them cannot drive, and their children and the Korean churches are the main source for transportation. More importantly, the apartment management does not allow the Korean elderly to install the satellite dish to have access to Korean channels though most of the Korean immigrant families now enjoy Korean channels through satellite service. The management does not allow the satellite dish for fear that that it could potentially become a safety issue since the dish had to be installed outside the apartment windows.” It also “does not look good from outside.”

I visited the apartments and conducted interviews. All of them are over the age of 70, born in Korea, and currently living in the United States. The mean period of their residence was 11 years. They have lived in the U.S. from eight to twenty eight years. Eight interviewees depended mainly on Social Security pensions. Out of fifteen people I interviewed, two are KMBs who married American servicemen back in Korea and moved to settle in Kansas City. Six people came to America because of the immigration sponsorship from their KMB daughter or relative. Korean elderly immigrants whose immigration involves with intermarriage between a Korean woman and an American soldier have been subject to a stereotype or prejudice among Koreans in the GKC area. Other seven interviewees came through chain migration by their children or siblings who have professional jobs such as a nurse, a doctor, or an engineer.

Therefore, some of my interviewees preferred not to tell me about their children’s marriages to American servicemen. The stigma of *yanggongju* is there. For example, although a vast number of Koreans in my church in KC immigrated through their daughter or

sister married to American servicemen, a deacon in my church told me that they have “inferiority complex or shame of telling others about the secret.” And they want to “carry the secret to their grave.” The “secret” implies that those who migrated through internationally married daughters or siblings consider the fact of the marriage between Korean women and American GIs is a family shame. They prefer not to tell others about it. Likewise, a prominent member of Korean Senior Society suggested to me how the members of KSS’s came to the Kansas City area, he replied, “a number of the Korean elderly are from *yanggongju* families. Or the families that have their daughter or siblings who were comfort women of American GIs.” He further contended that many people look down on the people whose route of immigration is associated with Korean-American intermarriage.

My interviewee with Ms. Lee reflects the sentiment that many Koreans have toward international marriages and KMBs. Ms. Lee, 92, is from Daegu. She came to the United States in the 80s. Ms. Lee has eight children. One of them died of pneumonia at an early age. Later, she and all of her children moved to America. One of her children who married an American serviceman sponsored their immigration. When I asked her who sponsored her family’s immigration to the United States, Ms. Lee’s voice trembled. She, then, shouted, “*Kukjekyllhon* [international marriage] is such a shameful thing as you know. I DID NOT want to lose my face to other villagers and feel ashamed of our dirty secret! That’s why I asked all of my children to move to America so that wouldn’t live with such a family shame.”

Ms. Lee has seven daughters and one son. She had been under immense pressure from her family because she could not produce a son for the family. She tried again and again until she finally got one in her eighth trial. She moved to America in 1989 through her oldest daughter who married an American serviceman. Then, she sponsored the immigration of the

rest of her children. She decided to do so because the news of her daughter's marriage to an American soldier got spread to all the people in her village. Rumors and gossips about her "family shame" surfaced, and they hurt her family. Ms. Lee did not want her children to live with the shame that they did not have to carry on their back.

However, the family shame was another opportunity for her family to move to America. Despite the stigma and shame, Ms. Lee acknowledged her American son-in-law who made their immigration possible:

Thanks to my American son-in-law, my entire family could come to America. Unfortunately, he died several years ago. After his death, my daughter worked at a factory in Kansas City. Because of the overwork and bad treatment from her company, my daughter suffered a lot from piles. She filed a lawsuit against her company and finally won it.

Similarly, Ms. Chung, 84, moved to American in 1989 when her only son sponsored her for immigration. According to her, her son and his family came through chain migration through his sister-in-law who married an American serviceman:

I came to America in 1985. My eldest son came to this country twenty-eight years ago. I am from a rural area in Korea cultivating rice paddies. However, I spent 14 years in Japan helping my brother who then studied for his degree. Because of my childhood experience in Japan, I can speak Japanese, and my way of thinking is somehow similar to that of the Japanese.

My daughter-in-law's younger sister sponsored my son's family's immigration to the United States. She married an American soldier in Korea and came to America. My son ran a good business in Korea, but after he lost all of his money, decided to immigrate to America to give a second shot for his life. After he came to America, he opened a Korean grocery in Lawrence, KS that eventually earned him nothing. During the time of his business, I had tried to help his business stay afloat. My husband and I used to grow vegetables and gave them to my son's grocery store until my husband died ten years ago.

My son suffered a lot. He has diabetes and could have lost his vision because of the complications. Therefore, I decided to come here to baby-sit my grandchildren with my husband.

I do not want to spend the rest of my life in America. I hate to live here. Even if I stayed in Korea, I did not have to worry about being starved to death. My two daughters in Korea always called me to come back to Korea. They said that it was their greatest regret never to fulfill their filial duty for their parents. I want to go back,

but if I went back, I am afraid that I would never see my son again in my life. That is why I have to stay here to live close to him. Tears in my eyes never get dried up. My body is here, but my heart is always in Korea.

I have received a welfare check of \$579 a month and I pay \$111 for my apartment rent. I am not satisfied with my life being stuck in this apartment and receiving this kind of money for nothing. However, living alone is much better than live with my son's family. If I lived with my son's family, I would not be able to endure loneliness and discomfort.

I have sleeping problems. I just sleep four hours a day because of the cramp in my legs. Since my son has his own health problems, my grandchildren help me to go to a hospital whenever necessary. I usually take a taxi because my son has only one car. I cannot speak English, so my grandchildren do all the translation and interpretation in my communication with doctors. When I feel lonely, I sing gospel songs. In the daytime, I go to our vegetable garden to take care of the growing vegetables.

Mr. Chung's case the typical case of chain migration to Kansas, through which her son's entire family, his wife's entire family, and other immediate family members and relatives moved to the United States. Ms. Chung's grandchildren later became a Chiropractor and real estate agent who married a white American.

Ms. Choi case reflects the similar migration pattern that Korean parents play for speeding up the migration process of their children. Ms. Choi and her husband were the second group in her family to immigrate to facilitate the immigration of their five children. Ms. Choi's eldest daughter got married to a US citizen. After she established her residence in America, She sponsored the immigration of her parents. However, the decision to help with their children's immigration took a toll on their life as Ms. Choi and her husband live in a place of isolation:

I am resigned to this solitude life. No friends, not many people to hang out with, I just managed to live alone. As for my groceries, my daughter buys most of the things that I need. My daughter-in-law visits me every week. I spend my day watching American TV. I just watch TV because I have no other hobbies or any desire to live my life. For almost twenty-three years, I have left the TV on every morning because I wanted to make sure that my neighbors knew that my husband and I were alive. I wish to let the time fly more than anything else and die peacefully.

Likewise, Mr. Choi, 87, and his five children move to the United State through her eldest daughter who married an American soldier. First, his daughter came to American, and Mr. Choi came. Mr. Choi, then, sponsored the immigration of the rest of his children. According to the Immigration Act of 1965, married children of the U.S. citizens or permanent residents belong to the second preferential category next to that of “spouses of the U.S. citizens or permanent resident.” My interviews with the Korean elders suggest that they moved to the United States when their first child established a permanent residence. Therefore, the elderly became a vehicle to expedite the process of the rest of the family members to immigrate to the United States:

My (KMB) daughter kept asking me to immigrate to the United States. Before I came, I thought America was no better than Korea. I had no idea what to prepare and what to expect when I got here. However, I do not wish to go back to Korea because I have become American holding the U.S. citizenship. I have already purchased a burial site here in Kansas City.

My two sons immigrated three years after I came to America. My eldest son had lived close to me before he moved to Los Angeles. He is doing carpet cleaning business there and just bought a five-bedroom house. He is rich, but that does not mean that I have to rely on his family for economic assistance. I do not want to be a burden for them.

Mr. Choi has lived alone for more than eight years since his wife died of cancer. Since her death, he said that he had to the household jobs and deal with loneliness on day-do-day basis. His daily routine always starts from having breakfast and watching TV all day long, the American TV programs that he does not understand. Then, he has dinner and goes to bed. Mr. Choi does not understand or speak English. He just leaves the TV on because his apartment too quiet, otherwise. Mr. Choi currently pays \$128 a month for rent and receives a \$569 monthly welfare check from the city. The welfare check keeps him from depending on his children; one of whom lives 30 minutes from where he lives, and the other lives in Los Angeles who “just purchased a 5 bedroom house.”

To get away from stress and loneliness, Mr. Choi goes to one of the Korean churches in Kansas City. Church is the one place for him, other than the elderly at the apartment building, to have companionship with Koreans of his age group. He is concerned about his health problems such as back pain and diabetes. Moreover, he adds that he does not exercise,

partly because he has problem in moving up and down his apartment because of his illness. His son has provided him with transportation when he needs to see a doctor or go to church. His son and daughter-in-law do most of the grocery shopping too.

The story of Mr. Kim, 80, is similar to that of Mr. Choi. Mr. Kim moved to the United States in 1989 through chain migration by one of his daughters-in-law who had a sister marrying an American serviceman. She and his son first immigrated to America, and Mr. Kim and his wife followed them because their sons asked their mother to babysit their children. Korea is still in his heart. That is why he has refused to apply for American citizenship:

I moved to America because my wife and I wanted to help our children with their immigration and babysitting our grandchildren. I always think about going back to Korea. I want to die in Korea. Memories of Korea never disappear from my heart. That is why I bought my burial site in Korea. I do want to go back, but I am afraid of being a burden on my two sons' families who live in Korea. That is the only reason that I still live in this housing project here. I never applied for American citizenship because I want to go back to Korea. I just hold a green card.

Just like most of the elderly who live in the housing project, Mr. Kim chose to move into the place not to be a burden on their children. Additionally, he received a welfare check of \$569 each month and pay only \$128 a month for his rent:

I can manage to live with the welfare check with affordable rent for my apartment. I basically do not need any money because I have nothing to spend my money on. Being poor and old, I moved into this apartment not to rely on my children. In an economic sense, I feel secure to live here.

Similarly, Ms. Roh, 86, moved to the United States through her daughter who married an American serviceman. Being widowed at the age of 20, Ms. Roh has remained single in her entire life. Her daughter is the only reason for her to live her life. Ms. Roh has lived around the world because her daughter took her wherever she and her American husband moved:

After she married her first American husband, a soldier who was stationed in Korea, she always took me wherever she had to move. Therefore, I have traveled all around the world. I stayed in Okinawa, Japan for three years, three more years in the Philippines, several years in Omaha, Nebraska, and three years in South Dakota. Then, I finally got settled in Kansas City. Her current husband is a military doctor, and they live in Junction City, Kansas. They got married when my daughter was 39. When my daughter got diagnosed with cancer, he is the one who cured her illness. Her first husband was a rich man, but he did not treat my daughter quite well and got divorced.

Since she still suffered from neuralgia, Ms. Roh's American son-in-law always gave her prescription drugs, which made her feel much better now. He spent some time in Korea, so the American son-in-law can understand a little bit of Korean. Ms. Roh likes him, but she did not want to live with her daughter's family because she did not want to be a burden on them.

Min and Kim suggest that Korean wives of American GIs sponsored their immediate family members and relatives for immigration to the United States under the Immigration Act of 1965, but "crediting them as the very backbone of contemporary Korean America is yet to be accomplished" (2). At least in the GKC area, many of Korean immigrants route trace back to chain migration initiated by KMBs. Facilitating the chain migration process were elderly Koreans who are parents of KMBs and their brothers and sisters. Elderly Koreans decided to come to help their children to come to America. Due to this involuntary reason to immigrate to the United States, the Korean elderly were not being fully prepared to speak English, and their cultural dependence on their immigrant children tend to increase when they arrived in America. To make a matter worse, when they came to settle in the GKC area, there was no ethnic enclave or buffer zone where these people have access ethnic cultural resources to use in their acculturation process in America. For example, in the major U.S. cities such as Los Angeles, New York City, and Chicago, ethnic institutions

such as Korean Culture Center, *noindang* (a place for the elderly to rest and exchange information), or elderly university have supported elderly Koreans. In the GKC area, however, there is very limited ethnic institutional support for these people.

Rather, many of them chose to live on welfare, while living in housing projects such as South Mill and Santa Fe apartments. They did so not out of economic desperation, but because they did not want to be a burden on their children and a companionship with other Korean elderly. It raised many concerns for Korean immigrants in the GKC area as one prominent members of Korean American Society of Greater Kansas City stood and suggested in the general meeting of the organization on February 16, 2005:

You have all the nice pledges on building a cultural center, holding a big cultural festival, and laying a foundation on where the first, second, and third generation Koreans could interact with one another. But, here I can't find any word from you that are specific as to how to address the plight of the elderly. We should not ignore the lives of our fathers and mothers. We are obligated to listen and help our parents.

My interviews with Korean elders reveal the dynamics in the chain migration process of Korean immigrants to Kansas. Many of Korean immigrants immigration to the United States has been made possible by KMBs and sacrifice of their parents, their role has rarely been told by the recipients or in the existing scholarship on Korean immigration to the United States. Their contribution to their family and the GKC Korean community has been unrecognized in a social stigma of *yanggongju*. Despite their invisibility, their presence is deeply embedded in the minds of many Korean immigrants and the history of GKC Korean community.

Conclusion

In the past, Korean women who associated with foreigners, especially American servicemen, were at once a target of loathing, yet envy for many Koreans. More importantly, they have been invisible figures hidden in the collective psyche of Korean society and Korean diaspora in Kansas. KMBs have been such shadowy figures that only elderly KMBs and elderly Koreans immigrants whose migration to America involved with the KMB route were willing to share their stories about shame and familiar desire to pursue its American Dream.

My dissertation contends that in this constructed silence in Korean diaspora, KMBs have been, in fact, the backbone of the Korean migration to Kansas, while the official history of Koreans in Kansas have not recognized so. Moreover, KMBs have offered so many of their families and relatives a chance to migrate to the United States. And, they have passed on many Korean cultural values to their children to be good Korean/Americans. Most importantly, my dissertation centers KMBs as agents who have defied odds, hurdles, a stigma of *yanggngju* and shame to make Kansas many Korean immigrants' and their home. Ms. Choi in chapter 1 is an example of a human agent to utilize her accumulated social and cultural capitals such as her knowledge on race relations and cultural nuances in American society to maintain normalcy and boost sales at the beauty supply store.

KMBs have come to KS and battled prejudice from both Americans and Korean immigrants. They adapted to life in the U.S. as they raised children, formed associations/communities with (other KMBs) and established small businesses. While other studies of KMBs have focused on the prejudice and stigma surrounding them, my

dissertation focuses on the adaptation and achievements of these women when they tried to make Kansas their home.

There is a hierarchy within the Korean diaspora in Kansas. The hierarchy has been constructed and supported by the reconstruction of Korean patriarchy through cultural institutions and psychological boundary of inclusion/exclusion. Many Koreans put KMBs on the bottom of the hierarchy because of these women's suspicious character and their outmarriage to other ethnic or racial members. These women have had to endure racism, sexism, and discrimination not just from American society but also from their fellow ethnic members who could migrate to America through chain migration that KMBs made possible.

Illumination of lives of KMBs and Korean communities in Kansas reveals a new dimension of Korean diaspora in the United States. KMBs have reconstructed their identities as people with individual wills to change and control their lives. I am putting the pictures of Korean women like Kimberly's mother who been put at the bottom of Korean diaspora and have remained invisible in the past. I hope that my dissertation will give these KMBs the recognition they deserve as active members of the Korean American community in Kansas.

Appendices

Table 1: Demographic Change in Geary County: Foreign-Born Persons

	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
Germans	275	1,755	1,220	829	571	666 (32.8%)
Asia	39	1,054	670	886	766	678 (33.3%)
Japanese				57	73	57
Chinese				8	4	0
Filipino				116	52	111
Koreans				540	515	402
Vietnamese				71	71	47

Table 2: Total Demographic Change in Junction City

1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
13,462	18,700	19,018	19,305	20,604	18,886

Table 3: Demographic Change in Geary County : Race by Sex

	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
Japanese	9	413	154	68		
Male	6	92	35	23		
Female	3	321	119	45		
Chinese	11	19	21	55		
Male	11	8	15	16		
Female	0	11	6	39		
Filipino		180	142	173		
Male		86	79	83		
Female		94	63	90		
Koreans				554		
Male				92		
Female				462		
Vietnamese				70		
Male				18		
Female				52		
Other Races		120 ¹	294	101		
Male		48	143	73		
Female		72	151	28		

Table 4: Demographic Change in Geary County (1980)

1980	Korean	Japanese	Chinese	Filipino	Vietnamese
Junction City	459	114	21	112	29
Fort Riley-	226	40	9	105	31
Comp Whiteside(CDP)					
Manhattan	120	84	137	58	34
Topeka	68	77	123	70	133
Total	873	315	290	345	227

Table 5: Demographic Change in Geary County (1990)

1990	Korean	Japanese	Chinese	Filipino	Vietnamese
Junction City	553	93	32	62	110
Fort Riley-	129	0	0	74	0
North CDP					
Manhattan	244	88	270	87	25
Topeka	200	116	229	92	147
Total	1,126	297	531	315	282

Table 6: Demographic Change in Geary County (2000)

2000	Korean	Japanese	Chinese	Filipino	Vietnamese
Junction City	348	79	19	147	42
Fort Riley- North CDP	45	4	6	59	6
Manhattan	320	82	637	96	81
Topeka	127	94	319	179	81
Total	840	259	981	481	210

Table 7: Total Demographic Change in Junction City

1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
13,462	18,700	19,018	19,305	20,604	18,886

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