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A study of Korean immigrants in America, 1872-present

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A study of Korean immigrants in America, 1872–present

Jung, Jong-Deuk, M.A.

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A STUDY OF KOREAN IMMIGRANTS IN AMERICA
1872-PRESENT

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of History
San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

By
Jong-Deuk Jung
May, 1991

APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

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APPROVED FOR THE UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT

KOREAN IMMIGRANTS IN THE UNITED STATES 1872-PRESENT

by Jong-Deuk Jung

This thesis addresses the topic of Korean immigrants to the United States between 1872 and the present. It examines what the expectations of Korean immigrants were, their activities, and their successes or failures. Korean immigration to Hawaii is examined first, then immigration to the mainland, in considerable detail. Responses to what were perceived as problems by Korean immigrants arising from their exposure to American society are also examined. The author interviewed a variety of individuals concerning their experiences as immigrants. Data on the Korean immigrant experience were obtained primarily from written documents, both primary and secondary.

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INTRODUCTION

Koreans came to the United States in recent history due to a variety of changes taking place in political, economic, social, and cultural conditions in Korea. Although there were relatively few Korean immigrants coming to the United States until recently, Koreans are now one of the largest, fastest-growing groups of Asian immigrants. So Korean immigration to the United States has only assumed major proportions in recent years.

This paper will present Korea's domestic situation, involving both political and social aspects, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, together with an account of Korea's external relations during the same period, and will describe the legal and illegal Korean immigrants in America from 1872 to the present.

My purpose is to analyze the life of Koreans in America and their background. This study has also attempted to sensitize the growing number of Korean immigrants to their own cultural history. Also, Koreans planning to immigrate to the United States may learn what to expect upon their arrival.

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to Bong-youn Choy, author of Koreans in America, for his excellent

assistance and valuable suggestions.

I am particularly indebted to Miss Barbara Oskoui, graduate student at San Jose State University for her proof-reading and support.

My cordial thanks are due to Dr. George Moore, who has always encouraged my paper and helped me in various ways as advisor and former chairman of the History Department at San Jose State University.

Most of all, I deeply acknowledge my debt to my parents and wife who have supported and encouraged me in my studies.

In the romanization of Korean names and words, the McCune-Reischauer system is employed. This system is not used, however, when the name of a particular individual is well known and familiar to the Western world, as in the case of Syngman Rhee, or when the individual personally uses a different system of transliteration, as in the case of Illsoo Kim.

CHAPTER I

KOREA IN THE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURIES

Korea has a long and rich history. It has a blend of historical influences. Korean society is built upon a complex of Confucian, Buddhist, and--more recently--Christian values and beliefs. But the blend is no mere copy, and its roots are ancient. The individuality of the Korean people, and their sense of ethnic identity, have both survived and accommodated Chinese influences. Despite its thorough integration of Chinese culture over many centuries, Korea keeps its own distinct culture.

For example, although the Korean language has borrowed heavily over the centuries from Chinese, for many centuries it has had its own writing system. King Sejong (1418-1450), fourth ruler of the Yi Dynasty (1392-1910), completed his work and introduced the system known as Han'gul (Korean alphabet) to the court on December 25, 1443, while emphasizing as his objective the desire to meet the needs of the common people by providing them with a means of expressing their thoughts in writing much more easily than in Chinese.¹

¹Edward B. Adams, Korea Guide (Seoul: Samhwa Printing Co., Ltd., 1977), p. 273.

The nineteenth century is when Korea can be said to have undergone an age of opening its doors and allowing intrusion of foreign ideas. Korea, the Land of Morning Calm, in its isolation, became extremely vulnerable during the nineteenth century, when Western powers, joined by Japan, sought territorial expansion in the Far East. Clinging to the hope that its "elder brother," China, would provide a buffer against the outside world, Korea was ill prepared for events during the last twenty-five years of the nineteenth century. Korea's foreign policy was still based on the concept of reliance on China, to which Korea had long maintained tributary relations, as a safeguard for national independence.

Korea remained an isolated tributary state of China until the late Yi dynasty. In 1876, it was rudely jolted out of its self-imposed isolation by Japan when the Meiji government forced an unequal treaty upon Korea. The Treaty of Kanghwa gave Korea a degree of autonomy, but in many ways simply put the Japanese in the dominant position the Chinese had previously held. Korea remained a bone of contention between China and Japan until China was defeated in the 1894-95 Sino-Japanese War.²

Ten years later, Russian and Japanese interests in Korea collided, and the result was the Russo-Japanese War.

²Andrew C. Nahm, Korea: A History of the Korean People (New Jersey: Western Michigan University, 1988), pp. 176-179.

The Russo-Japanese War officially ended in 1905, with the signing of the Treaty of Portsmouth, negotiated through the mediation of the American President, Theodore Roosevelt. The defeated Russian government acknowledged Japan's paramount interests in Korea. Korea was made a Japanese protectorate in 1905, and was finally annexed by Japan in 1910.³ Korea remained under Japanese rule for the next thirty-five years.

Korea was widely blamed for her isolationist policy during the second half of the nineteenth century by Korean reformers living inside the country at that time,⁴ and we must certainly condemn the indiscriminate rejection of all things foreign. Because of Korea's unrealistic policies towards foreign countries, the Korean people were not aware of what had been happening in neighboring countries. Japan and China had opened their doors to the Western powers and had begun to modernize their countries politically and economically, under unequal treaties. But Korea did not even seem to be aware of the massive changes that were taking place just beyond her borders. For that reason, children suffered without the latest advances in education, hospitals failed to utilize new equipment and technology or to learn from modern research, and practically no advances took place

³Ki-baik Lee, A New History of Korea (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1984), pp. 309-311.

⁴Ibid., p. 295.

in the fields of agriculture and industry. The Korean way of thinking during this period was very conservative, and women made no advances toward equality.

But on the other hand, it is surely natural that the Korean government should try to preserve its sovereignty in the face of foreign encroachments. The geographical location of Korea and its history of repeated foreign invasions promoted a policy of national seclusion that isolated the peninsula from the rest of the non-Chinese world. This is similar to the policy followed by Japan between approximately 1630 and 1862 known as national seclusion, or sakoku. The policies of both countries were the result of both political and social forces active in the region at the time.⁵

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Korean government officials from top to bottom were corrupt, squeezing money from the people. Public offices and titles were sold like commodities. Thus, the Korean ruling class can be characterized as a decayed by-product of the authoritarian Confucian government. The government was financially irresponsible. Government officials were dealing with situations they had never faced before. They had no training or experience in international relations.

Moreover, the poor people suffered economic deprivation and exploitation by the rich. Oppression and poverty

⁵Lee, A New History, p. 144.

fell most heavily upon the lower classes of Korean society. The nation's chronic financial crisis worsened. Japanese economic penetration was eroding Korea's economy. General political, economic, and social conditions in Korea were then conducive to the Tonghak revolt (peasants' war of 1894),⁶ and to immigration.

Korea's "feudal" system, dependent upon traditional agriculture and handicrafts by peasants "frozen" to the land, disintegrated. Among many reasons for this disintegration were that some peasants were acquiring wealth, some had left the land to work as non-agricultural laborers, others simply bought their freedom, a few obtained free status by virtue of military valor or similar exemplary service, and the situation for agriculture was in a decline when compared with the quickly-rising commercial sector. All of these factors were strongly influenced by foreign countries' presence in the region, and these factors resulted in a series of rebellions.⁷

In the mid-1800s, Tonghak, or "Eastern Learning," began to be propounded by its founder, Ch'oe Che-u (1824-1864). Although he asserted he had taken the best precepts of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism so as to oppose "Western Learning" (Catholicism), his doctrine included

⁶Nahm, Korea: A History, p. 173.

⁷Lee, A New History, p. 251.

elements from Catholicism and also embraced features of popular shamanistic beliefs. His ideas thus proclaimed an equality for all human beings that transcended social status or class. The fundamental premise was that each man, already potentially immortal, was linked to God through his soul.

The Tonghak revolt of 1894 was not simply a religious movement, but a social movement as well, one concerned primarily with the peasantry and the betterment of the conditions in which the villagers lived. Tonghak teaching urged that the nation be strengthened and the livelihood of the people be ensured, and it called for reform of the corruption-ridden government. The revolt led to a Japanese invasion, which in turn resulted in the Sino-Japanese War. Tonghak gained favor during periods of high nationalism because it was an indigenous Korean religion.⁸ In some respects it might be compared with the ideology of Hung Hsueh-chuan and the T'ai-p'ing Rebellion during the nineteenth century.⁹ This ideology also gained favor because of government corruption and oppression and an attitude of suspicion toward foreign powers.

In addition, because it was fought on the Korean peninsula, the Sino-Japanese War uprooted a large number of

⁸Woo-keun Han, The History of Korea (Seoul: The Eul-Yoo Publishing Company, 1972), pp. 354-357, 458.

⁹Franz Michael, The Taiping Rebellion (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1966), p. 5.

Koreans from their ancestral land, and many of them moved to major port cities or population centers in hope of finding employment. Unemployment became a very serious problem in these areas. The peasants knew nothing but farming.

In short, during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Korea was in turmoil, especially in its political, economic, and social situations. Internally, the Korean government had managed to close the nation's doors from the outside world, to keep its own culture and tradition. After reluctantly opening its doors in 1876, the government did not know how to cope with the foreign countries. Korea was dependent upon the great powers, and was buffeted like a leaf in the wind. Even worse, the Korean government was riddled with corruption and was lazy about taking care of its people. So the government encountered anti-government movements like the Tonghak revolt.

Externally, Korea was forced to open her doors. Then foreign powers intruded their influence into the peninsula. Korea started to suffer from unequal treaties like the Kanghwa Treaty with Japan in 1876. Afterwards, Korea became an arena for power struggles with Japan, China and Russia as prime competitors. As a result of the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese Wars, Japan occupied Korea. After 1906, Japan implemented its colonial policy, at some times more strongly than at others, and in 1910 by outright annexation.

The Japanese encountered the greatest mass resistance from the Korean Independence Movement in 1919. The culture of Korea in this period featured an extreme nationalism. The independence struggle was conducted in parts of Manchuria, China, with Shanghai as the center of the struggle, as well as in California and Hawaii, where the leaders enjoyed freedom of expression without suffering the immediate consequences of their actions.¹⁰

It is apparent, then, that the relationships between Korea and foreign countries forced her to modernize. Until the Kanghwa Treaty, Korea was isolationist and conservative. Opening her doors was the turning point in realizing how narrow Korea's eyesight had been toward the world. Korea began to open its eyes through its new open-door policy in the late nineteenth century.

That was the steppingstone to change Koreans' way of thinking, as well as their lives and circumstances throughout the whole country. It was a very important turning point for both Korean national history and the history of Korean immigration to America.

¹⁰Han, History of Korea, pp. 340-341.

CHAPTER II

FIRST KOREAN IMMIGRANTS IN AMERICA: 1872-1902

The immigration of Korean people to other parts of the world outside Asia is a recent development in the long history of Korea. The history of Koreans in America can be divided into three periods. The first immigrant period was from 1872 to 1902, during which time a Korean diplomatic mission, political refugees, students, and a small number of merchants came to the United States. The official immigration period (during which more than seven thousand Koreans were recruited to immigrate and went to the Hawaiian Islands as plantation laborers) was from 1902 to 1945, when Korea was liberated from Japanese rule. The majority arrived during the first three years of this period. The third period is from 1945 to the present, during which time many came to the mainland from Hawaii or directly from southern Korea.¹

¹Warren Y. Kim, Koreans in America (Seoul: Chin Chai Printing Co., 1971), p. 10.

In a telephone interview on February 8, 1991, with Mr. Bong-youn Choy, author of Koreans in America, Mr. Choy stated that the late Warren Y. Kim, one of his old friends, was one of the early Korean immigrants to Hawaii. Kim was also a chief editor of Korean National Herald, published in Hawaii (now defunct). Mr. Choy stated, "He [Kim] published Koreans in America and documented these periods through

The first Korean immigration to the United States took place in 1872. More precisely, the first "waves" were not immigrants themselves, but definitely prepared the way for immigration. These Koreans left their homeland because of a mixture of motives, as students, ginseng merchants, on diplomatic missions, and as political refugees. This group included the first group of Korean students in the United States. At that time, a few young men came here for the purpose of pursuing higher education, with the expectation of returning to their own country. They wished to obtain technical training that might be used for the advancement of their countrymen in Korea. Among these students were future leaders who devoted their lives to fostering Korean independence. Mr. Ki-sic Kim was one of these. He later went to Shanghai, China, and became a vice-chairman in the Provisional Government of Korea which was established there.²

They were followed by more students, most of whom were encouraged by American missionaries in Korea to pursue further education involving Western technology, life and thought at American colleges and universities. After completion of their study in the United States, most returned to Korea,

personal research, including his own experience and memory." Mr. Choy was consulted because there is no record of immigration from Korea to the U.S. prior to 1948 in Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970, published by U.S. Bureau of the Census in 1975.

²Ki-baik Lee, A New History of Korea (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 406.

although a few remained in America. Those who finished or failed their studies were requested to return to Korea.³ They all became important figures in Korean life, both among immigrants and in the homeland.

In 1881, several Korean ginseng (insam) merchants came to the United States via China in order to sell their product and other Asian herbs to the Chinese in San Francisco. According to Hyung-chan Kim and Wayne Patterson:

The first group of Korean ginseng merchants in Hawaii arrived in 1899. The first individual Korean merchant registered as Korean was Paik Jang-hing, who landed in Hawaii in 1898. Kim Il-yoo and Young Paik-hin arrived in Honolulu on January 15, 1900.⁴

These merchants left Korea because they wanted to better their individual (or private) economic conditions. But their numbers were too small to be designated as an immigrant contingent and they were sometimes registered as Chinese.⁵ The lack of accounts detailing their lives is typical of the merchant class among many immigrant communities.

Korean ginseng has been famous throughout the entire Orient from as early as the Three Kingdoms period in Korea

³Steve S. Shim, Korean Immigrant Churches Today in Southern California (San Francisco: R and E Research Associates, 1977), p. 2.

⁴Hyung-chan Kim and Wayne Patterson, eds., The Koreans in America (1882-1974) (Dobbs Ferry, New York: Oceana Publications, Inc., 1974), p. 2.

⁵Ibid.; Illsoo Kim, New Urban Immigrants: The Korean Community in New York (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 20.

(57 B.C.-688 A.D.). Korea is the prime source of the world's supply of the best ginseng, as the climate is thought to be most suitable. Traditionally, ginseng has been regarded as a magic panacea for ills ranging from insomnia and toothache to malaria and even epilepsy. It was also thought to prolong life.⁶ Merchants, therefore, found a ready market for their product among all East Asian immigrants to Hawaii, as well as on the mainland.

Korea, "the Hermit Kingdom," was the last nation in Northeast Asia to open her doors to the United States. The Korean-American Treaty, the first official treaty Korea ever concluded with a Western nation, was signed in 1882. The treaty, also known as the Chemulpo Treaty or, more correctly, the Treaty of Amity and Commerce, contained the following provision that has proven to be particularly relevant to Korean immigration to the United States:

Subjects of Chosen [Korea] who may visit the United States shall be permitted to reside and to rent premises, purchase land, or to construct residences or warehouses, in all parts of the country. They shall be freely permitted to pursue their various callings and avocations, and traffic in all merchandise, raw and manufactured, that is not declared contraband by law.⁷

⁶Edward B. Adams, Korea Guide (Seoul: Samhwa Printing Co., Ltd., 1977), p. 329.

⁷Foreign Relations of the United States (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1884), pp. 242-243; Henry Chung, Korean Treaties (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1919), pp. 197-198.

Thus, the legal basis was prepared for the immigration of Koreans to America.

Soon after the ratification of the treaty, a team of Korean diplomatic envoys, headed by Min Yong-ik, visited the United States during 1883 and 1884 on a goodwill mission.⁸ The diplomats met Vice-President Chester A. Arthur, and made a nation-wide tour before returning to Korea on May 31, 1884. The first Korean legation was established in Washington, D.C., also in 1884.⁹

One of the members of the first goodwill mission, Yu Kil-jun, stayed in America. In 1884, he enrolled at the Dammer Academy in Massachusetts to study Western civilization and the American political system. Upon returning to Korea, he wrote a book entitled Soyu Kyon Mun (What I Saw and Heard in My Visit to the West), in which he described briefly the people, civilization, and various government structures of the West.¹⁰ Many Korean intellectuals read the book and were inspired to go to the West to learn about other nations. Even today, the book is required reading in Korea's secondary schools, where students learn of its

⁸Won-moo Hurh and Kwang-chung Kim, Korean Immigrants in America (New Jersey: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1984), p. 39; Horace N. Allen, Korea: Fact and Fancy (Seoul: Methodist Publishing House, 1904), p. 163.

⁹Horace N. Allen, Things Korean (New York & Chicago: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1908), p. 159.

¹⁰Kil-jun Yu, Soyu Kyon Mun (What I Saw and Heard in My Visit to the West), trans. Hun Chae (Seoul: Taeyang Sojok, 1973), p. 22; Lee Houchins and Chang-su Houchins,

historical importance. This writer attended secondary school in Korea, and found it to be required of himself and peers.

Although the treaty between Korea and the United States paved the way for Koreans to immigrate, few took advantage of the opportunity. The actual immigration had to wait until the first large wave of Korean immigrants reached Hawaiian shores in 1903.¹¹

After the Korean-American treaty, Christianity quickly flowered in Korea. It made significant contributions toward the modernization of Korea. Many Western ideas, other than religion, were adopted. "The missionaries have assisted the natives to better their condition by the introduction of improved tools and agricultural implements, in the use of which they have instructed them," declared Horace Allen.¹² New concepts of equality, human rights and freedom, participation of both men and women in religious activities, the launching of group activities, and the establishment of schools were all important factors contributing to modernization. Henry Chung concludes, "The missionaries built an excellent system of schools and medical facilities and

"The Korean Experience in America," Pacific Historical Review 43 (1974): p. 130.

¹¹Kim, Koreans in America, p. 10.

¹²Allen, Things Korean, p. 172.

gained, at the same time, large numbers of converts, particularly from the upper classes."¹³

One Korean group, the Korean Progressive Party, believed in reforming the Korean system away from its conservatism. The leaders had been exposed to Japanese progressive ideas regarding international relations and decided that this was the direction Korea should take. They ran headlong into the ruling party's conservatism and determined that a revolution was the only course of action that would turn their reform movement into the policy of the land. The attempt failed, scattering their leadership.

After an abortive, anti-conservative and pro-Japanese political coup by the leaders of the Korean Progressive Party attempting to overthrow the Korean monarchy in 1884, three political refugees found asylum in the United States in 1885.¹⁴ The youngest of the three political refugees, So Chae-p'il (Philip Jaisohn), graduated from Johns Hopkins Medical School. He became the first Korean to obtain an M.D. degree and spent most of his life in the United States. He later emerged as a leading activist in the Korean independence movement against Japan. He founded the Independence Club in Korea and headed zealous efforts to introduce

¹³Henry Chung, The Case of Korea (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1921), p. 175.

¹⁴Andrew C. Nahm, Korea: A History of the Korean People (New Jersey: Western Michigan University, 1988), p. 156.

Western civilization into Korea. He was a prominent and respected leader both in Korea and in the Korean community in the United States, especially California.¹⁵

Ironically, the other two refugees were Pak Yong-hyo and So Kwang-bom, both of whom had visited the United States as members of the first Korean mission, 1883-1884. Perhaps as a result of that exposure to Western democracy, they evidently began to question the appropriateness of the Korean government they had previously represented.¹⁶

Whereas So Chae-p'il remained in the United States, Pak Yong-hyo and So Kwang-bom eventually went home.

In the late nineteenth century, a few Korean people, mainly students, ginseng merchants, members of diplomatic missions, and political refugees, left for America by way of Japan or China. Actually, for most of these people it was simply a matter of travel, rather than immigration, because most of them wanted to return to Korea after achieving their own goals. In some cases, though, they remained.

The first actual Korean immigration thus took place in 1872, in a situation of internal and external turmoil, by people who were under pressure from the political, social,

¹⁵So Chae-p'il, So Chae-p'il Pagsa Chasojon (Autobiography of So Chae-p'il), trans. To-tae Kim (Seoul: Ulyu munhwasa, 1981), pp. 248-251; F. Ohlinger, "The Independence Club," The Korean Repository 5 (August, 1898): p. 282.

¹⁶Bong-youn Choy, Koreans in America (Chicago: Nelson Hall, 1979), p. 72.

and economic conditions in Korea at that time. We should place much value on this first step to America and the role of these pioneers in the Korean community in the United States. They paved the way for the next Korean immigrants to come to America and played a very important role as leaders and guides in their transition.

We certainly can say that they were at the forefront of Korean immigrant history, although their numbers were small and sometimes insignificant in American society. The majority of those who stayed tried to find an alternative to the suffering from internal and external hardships in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which resulted especially from the Korean occupation by Japan.

CHAPTER III

KOREAN IMMIGRANTS IN HAWAII: 1902-1945

The first official Korean immigration to the United States began in 1902, when more than one hundred Koreans went to the Hawaiian Islands as plantation laborers. They were soon followed by thousands more. However, for the time being, the Korean Foreign Office prohibited all overseas immigration in 1905, when Japan assumed control under the protectorate.¹ Most of the original immigrants came to Hawaii to stay only temporarily. They wanted to return to their homeland as soon as they made enough money or when the political climate of the Korean peninsula permitted them to go back (when Japanese domination ended).²

There is a challenge, however, to the notion that early Korean immigrants were sojourners who were interested only in making money with which to return to Korea to live out their lives in wealth and comfort. According to Hyungchan Kim:

[m]any Korean immigrants came with the purpose of staying in Hawaii and making it their home. They did not think they could return to their unstable

¹Eui-young Yu, "Koreans in America: An Emerging Ethnic Minority," Amerasia Journal 4 (1977): p. 118.

²Bernice Bong Hee Kim, "Koreans in Hawaii," Social Science 9 (Oct. 1934): p. 410.

country and feel safe and secure.³

Additionally, some unhappy Koreans who did not find Hawaii to be a paradise began to plan and scheme for their return to Korea. Between 1904 and 1907, over one thousand Koreans returned to their native land because of bewilderment and hardships from their difficult and primitive life.⁴ Those who settled down on the Hawaiian plantations formed self-governing social organizations known as Dong-Hoe, or village councils.⁵ The councils were organized as a means of maintaining law and order among the Korean immigrants. Koreans on each plantation elected a headman, called the Dong-Chang. Law violators or disorderly persons were punished in conformity with rules set forth by the Dong-Hoe.⁶

The early Korean immigrants to Hawaii concentrated on how to survive by physical labor, how to educate their children without losing their Korean heritage, and how to help restore national independence.⁷

On the matter of racial discrimination by whites, Koreans were advised to tolerate it, because they believed

³Hyung-chan Kim, "Koreans in the United States," in Dictionary of Asian American History (1986), p. 14. No original sources cited.

⁴Yu, "Koreans in America," p. 119.

⁵The origin of Dong-Hoe goes back to the Silla Kingdom (57 B.C.-668 A.D.) in Korea.

⁶Kim, "Koreans in Hawaii," Social Science 9: p. 410.

⁷Ibid., p. 411.

they were helpless human beings living in the white people's society. The Korean community leaders in Hawaii purposely did not take action against discrimination because they did not wish to harm their chances of getting American support for the cause of Korean national independence.⁸

To understand the cause of the immigration of Koreans from the beginning of the twentieth century, Korea's geographic and historical character must first be studied. During the early years, most immigrants came from the northern provinces in Korea, the bulk of them from Pyongan and Hwanghae provinces in northwest Korea.⁹ There were three reasons for this. First of all, during the Yi dynasty (1392-1910), northern Koreans were discriminated against by the southern yangban (noble) ruling class and were also denied high positions and power in the government.¹⁰ Such discriminatory policies eventually led to a revolt against the central government. This meant that northern Koreans became less conservative and comparatively receptive to new ideas, while the traditionally conservative southerners wanted to retain the status quo. Therefore, more northerners than southerners accepted Christianity, and more northern

⁸Mary Paik Lee, Quiet Odyssey (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990), pp. 101-109.

⁹Hyung-chan Kim and Wayne Patterson, eds., The Koreans in America (1882-1974) (Dobbs Ferry, New York: Oceana Publications, Inc., 1974), p. 124.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 125.

Koreans than southerners joined in the immigration to Hawaii.¹¹

Secondly, northern Korea is mountainous, with rich natural resources (which became industrially important after 1945), whereas southern Korea is predominantly an agricultural area with rich land. Historically, because of the shortage of cultivated land, northern Koreans developed a more flexible social structure. Southern Koreans retained a more rigid, feudal, family-centered social structure.¹²

Thirdly, both the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895 and the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905 were fought mostly in the northwestern region of the peninsula. The wars destroyed not only national independence but also property. The suffering northern Koreans desperately needed a new place to live, and immigration to Hawaii provided them with hope for a better life.¹³

On the other hand, Hyung-chan Kim has suggested that Korean immigrants to Hawaii came from various parts of Korea. He points out that "No one district or province could be singled out as the predominant geographic area of origin of Korean immigrants. The geographic distribution of Korean immigrants to Hawaii in terms of their place of residence

¹¹Ki-baik Lee, A New History of Korea (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1984), pp. 263-264.

¹²Ibid., pp. 306-310.

¹³Ibid., pp. 329, 366.

before immigration was distributed over the entire Korean peninsula."¹⁴ But his claim is highly debatable.

Perhaps the most significant common characteristic of Korean immigrants who came to Hawaii was that a majority came from rural districts and not from urban areas of Korea. Less than half of the Korean immigrants were city-dwellers in the Seoul-Inchon-Suwon area, perhaps the most urbanized district of Korea at the time, and a few others came from population centers scattered throughout the Korean peninsula.¹⁵

But Wayne Patterson, author of The Korean Frontier in America, argues that

The majority of the early immigrants were common laborers who had lived in cities prior to their immigration, although many of them might have been uprooted from the rural areas . . . by war, drought, famine, and oppressive taxes, disease and other calamities and forced to seek employment in various cities.¹⁶

We now turn to the push-pull factors (those which tended to push people toward leaving Korea and pull them toward the U.S.) involved in the Korean immigration to Hawaii from the beginning of the twentieth century. Five factors

¹⁴Hyung-chan Kim, "Koreans in the United States," p. 14.

¹⁵Lee Houchins and Chang-su Houchins, "The Korean Experience in America," Pacific Historical Review 43 (1974): pp. 552-553; Ronald Takaki, Strangers from a Different Shore (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1989), p. 53.

¹⁶Wayne Patterson, The Korean Frontier in America: Immigration to Hawaii, 1896-1910 (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988), p. 104. No original sources cited.

encouraged it: political instability, economic disasters, social upheavals, religious persecution, and lack of educational opportunities.

One possible reason for immigration may be traced to nationalistic feelings related to reforming the home government or opposing the Japanese takeover of Korea. The venality of the Korean government must be added. Heavy taxes and institutionalized governmental corruption accompanied by extortion and graft further added to the discontent of the people.¹⁷

The Korean people had either been totally denied their rights or had not fully enjoyed them under the Japanese rule over Korea. But most Korean immigrants to the United States learned that they should be entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, according to the American Declaration of Independence. These rights are inalienable for all people according to that document. Once they had tasted its benefits, Koreans acquired an appetite for freedom.

In addition, Horace N. Allen, one of the trusted advisors of the Korean king, also encouraged Koreans to immigrate to Hawaii.¹⁸ Allen told the Korean king that immigration to Hawaii would relieve some of the burden on the

¹⁷Patterson, Korean Frontier, pp. 79, 112; Sohn Powkey, Kim Chol-choon, Hong Yi-sup, The History of Korea (Seoul: Korean National Commission for UNESCO, 1970), p. 281.

¹⁸Horace N. Allen, Korea: Fact and Fancy (Seoul:

government of feeding the starving people. He also hinted that the immigrants might be able to send money back to their families in Korea. This would certainly help the domestic situation and would lessen social unrest.¹⁹ In fact, Hawaii represented a haven from Japanese imperialism and the corrupt Korean government for most of the Koreans at that time. They came to Hawaii for political freedom or in quest of democratic ideals. For example, Mary Paik Lee's father, Paik Sin Koo, left for political reasons:

Towards the close of the Russo-Japanese War, the Japanese had commandeered my family's house, along with the houses of my neighbors, for quartering soldiers; uncertain of the future, my family decided to leave for Hawaii.²⁰

After Korea opened its doors to foreign powers in the late nineteenth century, the peninsula became a semi-colony of Japan and the West. The native handicraft industries and the primitive agricultural economy faced bankruptcy and the national treasury became empty. In 1901, in addition, a famine caused nationwide distress, followed by an unusual drought, followed by floods.²¹ And in 1902, cholera epidemics added to the burdens, as did a plague of locusts.²²

Methodist Publishing House, 1904), p. 229; Homer R. Hulbert, The Passing of Korea (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1906), p. 141.

¹⁹Patterson, Korean Frontier, p. 19.

²⁰Lee, Quiet Odyssey, p. 42.

²¹Houchins and Houchins, "Korean Experience," p. 132.

²²Ibid., p. 151.

As a consequence, Koreans were confronted with poor crops and economic hardships. The Korean government imported large amounts of grain from foreign countries, but many people faced starvation. By then, the Korean government was willing to relax its traditionally tight restriction on immigration.²³

We should note the fact that "[m]any of the Korean immigrants did come from the lower strata of the Korean social spectrum. They have consisted of people whose opportunities and status in their home countries were marginal."²⁴

The great number of Korean immigrants came to Hawaii for better economic opportunities. They lived there in hope of making a quick fortune and then returning to Korea rich and respected. This was the second factor producing the waves of immigration.

The third factor influencing immigration was the fact that Hawaiian plantation owners needed inexpensive laborers. With the annexation of Hawaii by the United States in 1898, the importation of Chinese labor and official contract labor came to an end. This caused East Asian immigrants, mostly Chinese and Japanese, to shift from one plantation to another in an attempt to obtain higher wages and better

²³Yun Yo-jun, "Early History of Korean Emigration to America (I)," Korea Journal 14 (June 1974): p. 22.

²⁴Patterson, Korean Frontier, p. 104. No original sources cited.

working conditions. Japanese plantation workers' strikes became common. Many workers simply quit their jobs and left for urban areas or went to California. The plantation owners then decided to recruit the cheaper Korean laborers in order to meet the labor shortage on the one hand and to check Japanese predominance on the other.²⁵

A fourth factor of influence on immigration was the influence of the American Christian missionaries. They had encouraged and persuaded Korean Christians to depart from their homeland, which was deeply imbued with the Confucian culture of ancestor worship. The Reverend George H. Jones, an Inchon area minister, told his fellow Christians and the Korean people that America was a Christian country and that Hawaii was the paradise of the Pacific where the weather was good and working conditions excellent. If one wanted to, one could work all year around. He was particularly persuasive.²⁶

Other missionaries, like Dr. and Mrs. Horace G. Underwood, who had founded some schools and institutions in Korea, and the Rev. Henry G. Appenzeller, a minister credited with founding the first hospital in Korea, encouraged Koreans to immigrate to the Hawaiian Islands because they believed it was an opportunity for the Koreans to better themselves

²⁵Lee, Quiet Odyssey, p. 40.

²⁶George H. Jones, "The Koreans in Hawaii," The Korea Review 6 (November 1906): pp. 401, 403.

financially and acquire knowledge of Western civilization.²⁷ Many Korean immigrants were already Christians before they decided to come to Hawaii. For example, "The first company of emigrants from Korea numbered 70, among them being 28 Christians from the churches in the West Korea District."²⁸

The desire of Korean Christians for religious freedom was another reason for immigration. To be sure, the Christians represented only a small minority breaking with tradition, but persecution of those who followed "heterodox" religions had occurred not long before. The conceptual basis for rejecting "heterodoxy" was that Chu Hsi Neo-Confucianism was the sole valid system of belief recognized by the Korean government. Therefore, any other ideology must be kept from Korean shores,²⁹ and, as a persecuted religious group in Korea, there was an incentive for Christians to immigrate.

Within six months after the Korean immigrants landed in Hawaii, the first Korean church was established. The first church service was held under the leadership of Kim Li-je on July 4, 1903, on a sugar plantation in Mokuleia,

²⁷Horace G. Underwood, The Call of Korea (New York & Chicago: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1908), pp. 333-334.

²⁸Henry G. Appenzeller, The Korea Mission of the Methodist Episcopal Church (New York: Open Door Emergency Commission, 1903), p. 42.

²⁹Woo-keun Han, The History of Korea (Seoul: The Eul-Yoo Publishing Company, 1972), p. 265.

Oahu.³⁰ Gradually most of the Koreans became church-goers. The Rev. George H. Jones stated that one third of all the Koreans in Hawaii were professing Christians, and they dominated the life in the camps on the sugar plantations in Hawaii.³¹

A final reason why some of the immigrants left Korea for Hawaii was the opportunity to get a better education for themselves or their children. An overwhelming majority of the almost seven thousand Korean immigrants in Hawaii, with few exceptions, were not educated or of a socially prominent class. Though almost all of these immigrants were illiterate, they knew that education provided a road to economic independence. The quest for education for their children was one of the motives for leaving Korea. At the same time, the parents wanted to make certain that their Korean culture was inculcated in their children.³² However, one author, Ronald Takaki, offers an opposing view saying that "About 70 percent of [Korean immigrants in Hawaii] were literate."³³

The Korean immigrants came from diverse strata. Some were political refugees from Japanese rule, some were

³⁰Warren Y. Kim, Koreans in America (Seoul: Chin Chai Printing Co., 1971), p. 38.

³¹George H. Jones, "The Koreans in Hawaii," The Korea Review 6 (November 1906): pp. 402-404.

³²Houchins and Houchins, "Korean Experience," p. 136.

³³Takaki, Strangers, p. 53.

laborers and farmers, many were students, and there were picture brides planning to marry earlier male immigrants. Most of them landed in Hawaii before 1945. Others went directly to the mainland of the United States, especially to California.³⁴

A few hundred Korean immigrants left as political refugees, escaping from Japanese-government persecution. During the Japanese occupation, young Korean political activists in the struggle against Japan fled Japanese oppression. Coming to Hawaii via Manchuria or Shanghai, they arrived with neither passport nor visa. They were illegal immigrants. Because they were political refugees, they claimed exemption. Their contention of oppression was usually accepted. Afterwards, many anti-Japanese activists remained in the United States for freedom from possible persecution by the Japanese authorities at home. Most political refugees, such as Rev. Lee Dae-wil (David Lee), were engaged in the Korean independence movement in the United States against Japanese colonial rule, and assumed leadership roles in the newly established Korean communities in the United States.³⁵

After Korean independence from Japan in 1945, some people, like Syngman Rhee, went back to Korea. But others

³⁴Syngman Rhee, "Neutrality as Influenced by the United States" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1911), p. 110.

³⁵Ibid., p. 118.

stayed in the United States mainly for a better economic life. The various roles they played were mainly within their local communities in America.

Many of the Korean immigrants who came to the Hawaiian plantations were laborers, farmers and peasants. Among them, farmers comprised the majority.³⁶ The immigrants found that the advertisements recruiting workers for Hawaii suggested an attractive alternative. The prospect of work in the plantation fields seemed better than the immediate situation at home. The Korean immigrants to Hawaii could not have any criminal record or record of unreliability, and had to be in good health to be recruited.

One active recruiter was David W. Deshler. He started to recruit Korean immigrant laborers in 1902, including farmers, on behalf of Hawaiian plantation owners. He began to do this because a business friend owed Deshler's stepfather, George K. Nash (governor of Ohio), a favor. This business friend, Horace N. Allen, was the American minister to Korea, and made this business opportunity available to Deshler as a means of repayment. Deshler organized branch offices of his company in Pusan, Inchon and Seoul. In the meantime, the Korean government made a public announcement

³⁶Yun, "Early History," p. 23; Takaki, Strangers, p. 274.

to encourage people to go.³⁷

In 1902, the first shipload of immigrants set out from Chemulpo (Inchon), Korea. Because Korea lacked modern medical facilities at this time, formal physical examinations of the Koreans were performed by Japanese physicians at Kobe or Yokohama, Japan.³⁸ Some of the group failed to meet the physical qualifications. The remaining immigrants sailed for Hawaii on the merchant ship S.S. Gaelic, which arrived in Honolulu in 1903. Korean immigration to Hawaii was routed on steamship lines by Deshler at the time. Yo-jun Yun writes:

These ships were not passenger ships but were freighters. Men and women were put into the same cabin. This was another new experience to those who had just left a society in which even a seven year old boy was not allowed to share a seat with a girl his age. However, they had to adapt quickly to this new situation of group life of men and women in a narrow cabin, while divesting themselves of the Confucian idea of distinction between sexes.³⁹

A few Koreans were barred from landing because their eyes were found to be diseased. The remainder, after resting a few days in Honolulu, were sent to work at the Waialua sugar plantation at Mokola, Oahu.⁴⁰

³⁷Fred Harvey Harrington, God, Mammon, and the Japanese: Dr. Horace N. Allen and Korean-American Relations, 1884-1905 (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1944), p. 186.

³⁸Allen, Korea: Fact and Fancy, p. 230.

³⁹Yun, "Early History," p. 24.

⁴⁰Allen, Korea: Fact and Fancy, p. 231.

According to Kim, more than eight thousand Korean immigrants arrived in Hawaii on different ships between 1902 and 1945. However, of these, some failed to pass their physical examinations and were sent back to their homeland. Therefore, about seven thousand Koreans landed in Hawaii before the liberation of Korea from Japanese rule.⁴¹

The lives of laborers in the strange land of Hawaii were lonely, dull, and monotonous. The work day on a plantation followed the same pattern day in and day out, six days a week and seven days during harvest time. They worked with their hands from dawn to dusk in the plantation fields and spent their nights in the camps. The conditions on the plantations were deplorable for any workers--extremely hard work under the hot sun for low wages, no chance for promotion, and communal living quarters isolated from the outside world. The author of Quiet Odyssey, Mary Paik Lee, was born in Korea in 1905. When she was five years old, she emigrated with her family to Hawaii. A year and a half later they moved to California. She wrote about her early Hawaiian life:

When I asked father years later if we had eaten bananas in Hawaii, he replied that although a big bunch of bananas sold for five cents, my father could not afford to buy any. Since we had arrived with only the clothes on our backs and our bedding, we never had enough money left over to buy bananas. We lived in a grass hut, slept on the ground, and had to start from scratch to get every household

⁴¹Kim, Koreans in America, p. 10.

item. . . . We never had enough money for a normal way of life.⁴²

The plantation owners did not provide amusements or sports facilities for their employees. The employees' only recreations were drinking, gambling, and fighting with each other. They were treated not as human beings but as a means of production. But they could not complain because nobody would listen.⁴³

Even though plantation life for the early Korean immigrants was back-breaking physical labor, the quality of life in Hawaii did get better. George Jones states:

At first the Koreans in Hawaii had some difficulty in adjusting themselves to their surroundings. Everything was new and strange and they had to learn how to handle themselves. They did not know how to live, but it did not take them long to learn how to do so. They had to learn what to wear and where to get it, what to eat, where to buy it, and how to cook it; how to work and how to take care of themselves. They came to wear American clothing, eat American food, and act as much like Americans as they can.⁴⁴

As time passed, most of them were able to adjust to their new life. It should be noted here that the Koreans went to Hawaii as free laborers, and not as contract laborers, unlike the early Chinese and Japanese immigrants. The Koreans were not bound by any contract to work for any

⁴²Lee, Quiet Odyssey, p. 8.

⁴³Steve S. Shim, Korean Immigrant Churches Today in Southern California (San Francisco, California: R and E Research Associates, 1977), p. 5.

⁴⁴Jones, "Koreans in Hawaii," pp. 402, 404.

company.⁴⁵ The general wage scale slowly increased. The returns from their labor became larger. These Korean workers were willing to do without small items in order to save a little money toward the purchase of land. Some bought farm lands with their accumulated capital and began to operate their own farms with members of their families.⁴⁶ A few Koreans opened small family-operated shops or businesses or purchased real estate. Later many of them ran rooming houses and bought homes and apartment buildings. But most of the Koreans were handicapped by lack of sufficient capital and language skills to start any large business.

Approximately three hundred Korean students with passports from the Japanese government came to Hawaii and the United States mainland in order to study at American educational institutions. They travelled from Shanghai or Manchuria, often with letters of personal reference from American missionaries.⁴⁷ Most of them attended American colleges. Students who arrived in the United States had been carefully screened and they were forced to return home when they discontinued or completed their advanced studies.

⁴⁵S. F. Moore, "One Night with the Koreans in Hawaii," The Korea Review 3 (1903): p. 532.

⁴⁶G. H. Jones, "Koreans Abroad," The Korea Review 5 (1905): p. 450.

⁴⁷Houchins and Houchins, "Korean Experience," p. 558.

Consequently, the majority of these students returned to Korea after the completion of their studies, although some remained. One student who remained in Hawaii was Ahn Chang-ho, a young reformer and patriot. In 1943, Ahn organized a long-term national independence movement and formed the Young Korean Academy in San Francisco.

A few other students who became active leaders of the Korean community in America were Yun Ch'i-ho, Pak Yong-man, and Syngman Rhee.⁴⁸ Yun later became one of the leaders of a small and only moderately successful reform movement in Korea. He served in Korea as president of the Independence Club, founded by So Chae-p'il in 1896.⁴⁹ Pak, another reformer, served a prison term for anti-government action during Japanese rule. He advocated independence through armed conflict and was in direct opposition to Rhee, who advocated diplomacy. Pak believed that Korean national independence could never be achieved except through direct military action against the Japanese. Meanwhile, Rhee had been released from jail after having served seven years for anti-government activities while under Japanese rule, and had come to the U.S. in 1905 for study. Before 1945, he sometimes went to Hawaii, promoting Korean independence.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 549; Woo-keun Han, The History of Korea (Seoul: The Eul-Yoo Publishing Company, 1972), pp. 463, 472, 474, 485.

⁴⁹F. Ohlinger, "The Independence Club," The Korean Repository 5 (August, 1898): p. 285.

He supported educational and diplomatic means to achieve national independence, whereas others supported military action.⁵⁰ He later became the first President of the Republic of Korea (1948-1961). These Korean leaders made a contribution toward the eventual independence of their homeland both in America and in Korea.

The majority of the nearly seven thousand immigrants who entered Hawaii were bachelors. But there were no available Korean women in Hawaii and interracial marriage was unthinkable at this time. Thus the marriage problem was not only an individual problem but also a social issue within the Korean community in terms of population increase and individual happiness.

Finally, someone suggested the idea of picture brides: sending the bachelors' pictures to prospective brides in their home towns, and letting the girls choose their mates. This was already being done by both the Chinese and Japanese immigrants. The plan was approved by the plantation owners, and the United States immigration authorities agreed to grant the brides permanent residence. Between 1910 and 1924 more than eight hundred picture brides came to Hawaii.⁵¹ A few of the brides refused to land, and some of them returned to their homeland because they discovered their

⁵⁰Rhee, "Neutrality," p. 103.

⁵¹Kim, Koreans in America, pp. 22-23.

bridegrooms were older and much uglier than they had expected. Unfortunately, many men had sent deceptively young pictures of themselves.⁵²

A rapid progress of the Korean community in Hawaii, in terms of quality as well as quantity, began about the time of the arrival of the picture brides. When the picture brides settled in Hawaii, the Korean community gradually changed from a rural society to an urban one. The brides encouraged their husbands to change their occupations, and many of the plantation workers moved to urban areas, particularly to Honolulu. The arrival of the brides provided a major incentive for Korean men to leave the fields and seek urban employment. Their mobility and their search for both economic advancement and social improvement did not bind them to the plantations.⁵³

The immigration of Koreans to the Hawaiian Islands was a major event in the long history of Korea. The adventure of sailing across the Pacific to settle in a totally strange land provided Korean immigrants with an opportunity to see the world beyond the Hermit Kingdom, where their ancestors had lived for centuries. They also advocated military action against the Japanese or pro-Japanese and sent money to Korea to support the independence movement.

⁵²Shim, Korean Immigrant Churches, p. 5.

⁵³Houchins and Houchins, "Korean Experience," p. 150.

Therefore, the immigrants contributed to that movement in their home country, opening a new era in modern Korean history.

Immigration to Hawaii between 1902 and 1945 was very different from Korean immigration to the United States, especially in California, after 1945. Early immigrants were peasants and laborers who had lost their means of livelihood in Korea as a result of continued bad crops, inflation, and exploitation by corrupt government officials. In contrast, the more recent immigrants to the United States are well educated and skilled in their professions. Whereas immigration at the turn of the century was mainly motivated by the impoverished economy of the country, recent immigration has resulted mainly from military tension and political and social unrest in Korea. However, the two waves of immigration have two aspects in common: 1) they were products of changes in Korean society, though the changes differed in nature; and 2) the overwhelming majority of Korean immigrants left because of a combination of bad conditions in Korea and good prospects in the United States. The desire for a better life became the primary reason for immigration there.

CHAPTER IV

KOREAN IMMIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES: THE TRICKLE BECOMES A FLOOD

Most Koreans who have come to the United States came to California after 1965, and so their experience will form the bulk of this chapter. But we will begin with the ones who came before that.

Before 1902, the first year of officially recorded Korean immigration to Hawaii, a very few Koreans were scattered here and there in the United States, especially in California and Hawaii. Most of those in California were living in the San Francisco area. The majority were engaged in selling ginseng to the Chinese residents there. Some were students or political refugees. Their story has already been told.

After 1902, many Koreans who were living in Hawaii, like Mrs. Mary Paik Lee's family, moved to California, mainly due to economic conditions and lack of advancement in Hawaii. Mrs. Lee's family landed in San Francisco on December 3, 1906, looking for a better place to live.¹ Like many Koreans, they became farm workers in California. Some of

¹Mary Paik Lee, Quiet Odyssey (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990), p. 12.

them went to places like Riverside to pick oranges.²

Others worked in Oregon and elsewhere, especially in railroad construction and mining. Many Koreans went to the San Joaquin Valley and to Sacramento. In addition, San Francisco and Los Angeles became focal points of Korean social, religious and political activities.³

During this time, some Koreans, like the historian Bong-youn Choy, came directly to the United States from Korea.⁴ Most of them, like Choy, were students or political refugees. Their numbers were never great.

In the cities, Koreans worked as waiters, kitchen helpers, janitors and house-cleaners. Gradually some Koreans started small family-operated businesses of their own: grocery stores, laundry shops and vegetable markets.⁵

Although more recent Korean immigration to the United States has found Koreans distributed more broadly among the states, with communities in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Oregon and Washington, D.C., the largest number of recent immigrants are found in California, and they will be the focus of this chapter.

Though some Koreans in California worked on railroad construction and mines, the great majority of them became

²Ibid., p. 19.

³Bong-youn Choy, Koreans in America (Chicago: Nelson Hall, 1979), p. 105.

⁴Ibid., p. 326.

⁵Ibid., p. 125.

farm workers.

From 1916 onward, Korean farm laborers cultivated many acres, and their average income was high. A Korean farmer named Kim Jong-lim became a successful rice producer, and his nickname in the Korean community was "rice king." In the San Joaquin Valley of Central California, a few Koreans began developing their own orchards, vineyards, nurseries, and fruit-packing plants. This also took place in the community of Willows. These became very successful because there was an available wholesale market for these products run by Koreans in Los Angeles. In the 1920s, agricultural production was high, but the price of rice went down sharply during the depression and most of the Korean farmers lost money.⁶

The current wave of Korean immigration to America began with the Korean liberation from Japanese rule and increased with the passage of the 1965 Immigration Act, signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson.⁷ The law brought about fundamental changes in American immigration policies, thus affecting not only the nature of Korean immigrants

⁶Lee, Quiet Odyssey, pp. 52, 72, 74.

⁷Stephen Thernstrom, ed., Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1980), s.v. "Koreans," by Hyung-chan Kim; James P. Allen & Eugene J. Turner, We the People: An Atlas of America's Ethnic Diversity (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1988), pp. 188-189.

coming to America, but also their ability to adapt to and assimilate in American society. The law did away with the national origins' quota system which had been the basis of the American immigration policy since 1924, and which had discriminated against Asian immigrants, including "numerical limitations on individual foreign states."⁸ In its place, the law created a new national policy by setting a world quota to enter the United States every year. The law made provisions for spouses, children, and parents of American citizens to come as non-quota immigrants without numerical limitations. This law has been largely responsible for the tremendous increase in the number of Koreans coming to the United States since 1965.⁹ Against uncertain conditions such as a divided North and South Korea, and South Korea's repressive police state, many Koreans took advantage of the United States' more liberal immigration laws. In the late 1960s and the 1970s, Koreans began to move to the United States for political as well as economic reasons.¹⁰ Since 1945, a large number of Korean immigrants to California have come both from Hawaii and directly from South Korea.

⁸United States Code Annotated: Title 8 Aliens and Nationality, sec. 1152(a). (Minnesota: West Publishing Co., [1970]), pp. 152-155.

⁹A table appears in Appendix.

¹⁰Steve S. Shim, Korean Immigrant Churches Today in Southern California (San Francisco, California: R and E Research Associates, 1977), p. 18.

Those who moved to Hawaiian cities and to California, and other areas, were engaged as manual laborers first. In California, employment opportunities were restricted for Koreans. The greatest barriers were language and cultural differences, as well as discrimination. General housework, and other underpaid jobs involving hard physical labor were available. But eventually Koreans managed to open small businesses, such as grocery stores, laundry shops, vegetable shops and barber shops.

The largest number of Koreans in the United States have made California their home, settling in and around Los Angeles, the San Francisco Bay Area, and the Central Valley towns, including Sacramento. Los Angeles has the largest Korean community in the United States. New Korean immigrants have a tendency to settle in urbanized and industrialized areas.

Plantation workers came to California from Hawaii mainly because of better economic opportunities. Of this we will see more in the next chapter. For those coming from Korea, immigration sources were varied, including professionals, students, brides of American servicemen, children adopted by American families, and kinship-centered immigration.

Immigration law has shown preference for skilled workers and professionals. Consequently, the recent Korean

immigrants have included many professionals, such as medical doctors, scientists, and teachers. The largest categories were physicians, surgeons, and nurses. Other professions who made significant contributions to the immigrant tide were engineering and education.¹¹

Recent Korean immigrants have generally come from the college-educated upper-middle or middle classes rather than from the farming and working classes. The majority of them were highly educated in their home country, not like the first generations in Hawaii. Unlike the elder immigrants, most of whom were not well-educated, low-skilled, and poor laborers, a majority of new immigrants are well-educated, skilled, urban middle-class Koreans.¹²

Still many students come to the United States to continue their education. They have crossed the Pacific Ocean in order to receive a higher education at American universities or institutions.¹³ After they finish, many of them stay in the United States. One Korean student, Jae-su Kim, who graduated from San Jose State University in Business in May 1989, stated in an interview:

I came to San Jose to study about four years ago.
When I came here for the first time, I could not

¹¹Illsoo Kim, New Urban Immigrants: The Korean Community in New York (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 24.

¹²Ronald Takaki, Strangers from a Different Shore (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1989), p. 437.

¹³Hyung-chan Kim, The Korean Diaspora (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 1977), p. 73.

adjust to the campus life as well as American life. I had a hard time to catch up with my lectures, including English. In fact, I could not even understand my first class at all. I decided to go back to Korea whenever I had severe pressure from school. Though I had a hard time, I am getting used to adjusting to American society. In addition, I want to study more for a doctoral degree in my field.¹⁴

Large numbers of Korean women followed their American husbands to America after marrying American servicemen stationed in Korea. Many women saw marriage to American soldiers as their ticket out of poverty in Korea into relative wealth in America. Upon arrival in America, however, they confronted problems associated with interracial marriage, language difficulty, employment, differences in dietary and other cultural habits, and, finally readjustment in case of divorce from their American husbands.¹⁵

Besides this, thousands of children, who were either orphaned during the Korean War or born of Korean women and American soldiers and later deserted by their parents, were brought to the United States to be adopted by widely scattered American families. These families were typically middle-class, white, and Protestant in American rural areas or small towns.¹⁶

¹⁴Interview with Mr. Jae-su Kim, San Jose State University graduate, Santa Clara, on April 15, 1990.

¹⁵Won-moo Hurh and Kwang-chung Kim, Korean Immigrants in America (Cranbury, New Jersey: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1984), p. 51.

¹⁶Thernstrom, ed., Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups, s.v. "Koreans."

We are now increasingly aware that kinship-centered immigration will become the main avenue for entering the United States. A high proportion of Korean immigrants bring their entire families once they have acquired American citizenship or become permanent residents. In this process, a kind of chain reaction of kinship-centered immigration occurs. This partly explains why almost all Korean immigrants are looking forward to the day they receive citizenship or their permanent residence. In response to their demands, many Korean organizations, including Korean-American Community Services, Inc., of San Jose, have opened citizenship classes.¹⁷

An elderly Korean immigrant, Kyu-sun Cho, stated in an interview:

I think the majority of Korean immigrants came to the United States through their families or relatives. Consequently the many first-comers had serious problems with the late-comers, because the late immigrants tend to depend on the first immigrants.¹⁸

In addition to those who came to the United States because they had other relatives residing here, others came for a variety of work-related reasons. The Hawaiian

¹⁷Interview with Mrs. Sue Y. Kim, Executive Director of Korean-American Community Services, Inc., on March 16, 1990, at Korean-American Community Services, Inc., of San Jose.

¹⁸Interview with Mr. Kyu-sun Cho, a retired small businessman, who came to the U.S. to enjoy his retirement, in San Jose, March 17, 1990.

Islands served as a stepping-stone for Korean laborers entering California. Western businesses recruited Korean laborers in Hawaii to work in California on the railroad and in mines. Koreans from Hawaii came to California because the companies needed manpower and offered slightly higher wages than Hawaiian plantation owners. Most Koreans who immigrated to California from Hawaii were lured by promises of better pay and working conditions. In addition, Koreans heard that California's climate was similar to Korea's and not like the semitropical one in the islands.

Job opportunities for Asians were better and more varied in California. Many immigrants living in Hawaii were especially attracted by the rice farms in California, thinking the work would be more familiar and less strenuous.¹⁹

Many Koreans are continuing to leave their homeland and settle in the United States, especially in California, for political freedom and out of opposition to the current regime, in order to avoid another military conflict which they are convinced will soon break out between North and South Korea, for greater economic opportunity, because of social instability caused by population growth, or for better educational opportunity in the United States.

One reason for immigration was the political unrest and repression caused mainly by ex-president Park Chung-hee

¹⁹Lee Houchins and Chang-su Houchins, "The Korean Experience in America," Pacific Historical Review 43 (1974): p. 137.

in 1961 and Chun Doo-hwan's assumption of power by coup d'etat in 1979. Probably the greatest increase in immigration other than 1965, when it had become easier, occurred the year Park entrenched himself in total power, in 1972. He did not allow South Koreans to exercise basic human rights. Certainly the recent Korean immigrants seemed to consider safety and security important enough to leave their ancestral homes.²⁰

At the same time, anxieties about the prospects of another Korean War and fear that it is imminent have contributed to the exodus of Koreans to the United States. South Korea's two giant Communist neighbors, the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China, have been competing with each other in attempting to dominate the Peninsula by aiding the North Korean Communist regime. In addition, we have seen a prelude to the withdrawal of American forces from South Korea, and the failure of the American policy in Vietnam,²¹ leading to concerns over U.S. intentions and its ability to defend against any potential North Korean aggression.

Discontented Koreans, especially those from the upper or upper middle class, high-ranking government officials,

²⁰Andrew C. Nahm, Korea: A History of the Korean People (New Jersey: Western Michigan University, 1988), pp. 457, 465.

²¹Korea Central Daily (San Francisco, California), February 15, 1990.

businessmen, professionals, intellectuals and independent proprietors, were most sensitive to the unstable military situation and left the country.

Tension is, however, lessening and lessening all over the world. There is a move toward democratization in Korea, which is taking place at the same time that we are seeing progressive reform in the Soviet Union, a bloodless unification between East and West Germany, and many other changes worldwide which appear to be democratic.

The lure of American economic life also attracted many Korean immigrants. Most of them came to the United States for economic betterment as well as political freedom. They clearly left their homeland due both to political pressures and for better economic opportunities. Although daily living was indeed difficult for them in America, it appeared to be easier to make money and to become rich than in Korea, and the opportunities, especially economic ones, were greater.

With the accumulation of capital, both from their own labors in the United States and from money they had when they arrived, most Koreans opened small businesses like restaurants, shoe stores, liquor stores or groceries.²² In general, the Korean business establishment in America is still in a beginning stage in terms of capital investment,

²²Allen and Turner, We the People, p. 189.

of business experience, of management, and of marketing. Most of the businesses are family-operated and most, especially the food-retail businesses, draw their customers from the Korean community. Most Korean businessmen are afraid of going into business with non-Koreans or non-Orientals because they lack experience in dealing with other races and also because of language difficulties.²³

According to Mrs. Sue Y. Kim, many Korean businesses are just now learning the importance of expanding from being ethnically-oriented to being American-oriented so that trade can be drawn from the American people at large. This is especially true for restaurants, she says, which often find themselves catering to a completely Korean clientele and therefore unable to run their businesses in a profitable manner because of the limited market size of the Korean community.²⁴

A population explosion has recently emerged as an urgent problem confronting Korean society. To mitigate this increasing population pressure, the Korean government decided to export its surplus people. Immigration was an extension of the domestic population-control policy.²⁵ Other things done to discourage large families also affected

²³Choy, Koreans in America, p. 133.

²⁴Interview with Mrs. Kim, March 16, 1990.

²⁵Kim, New Urban Immigrants, p. 195.

immigration, since extra taxes were imposed on large families.

In Korea's society of extended families, a rising young employee was apt to be squeezed out of a company or business to make room for a relative of the owners. Many well-trained young Koreans immigrated because there was little future in working in another family's business. It was also nearly impossible for a well-trained young Korean to begin his or her own business, due to the difficulty of capitalization.

In addition, there has been a concern for the children's future. Education for Korean children in the United States was an equally important reason for their immigration. With educational opportunities in Korea limited and expensive, children there, as elsewhere, who do not gain a good basic education have greater difficulty in facing economic competition. For those students who find a spot in a Korean school, the quality of education is good, but there simply are not enough positions available for all children to attend school in Korea, and poor children cannot afford to go. This situation has been improving in Korea since the 1960s, but university education is still largely unavailable and is highly competitive.

Mrs. Ok-rim Pak, a 50-year old woman in Los Angeles, stated:

I came to the United States in 1988 mainly to educate my children. In fact, it was difficult for them to go to college or university in Korea, partly because of both economic difficulties and competitive applicants. Now I do not worry too much about my children's education, but other problems, which never happened in my country-- language barriers, cultural shock, and hard work-- do worry me. But I do not care because of their better education.²⁶

Traditionally, many Koreans in America as well as in Korea have sacrificed themselves for the next generation. For those who still maintain a close tie to their traditional roots, failing to do so is unacceptable behavior within Korean society at home or abroad.

²⁶Interview with Ok-rim Pak, Korean immigrant, conducted in San Jose on April 8, 1990. Mr. and Mrs. Pak have both worked as laborers in Los Angeles.

CHAPTER V

THE KOREAN COMMUNITY IN CALIFORNIA

From the outset, Korean communities in California, like those in other areas in the United States, centered around Korean churches, schools, and organizations. The nature of the Korean community has changed from being country-centered to being city-centered. The purposes of the community have also changed from support of national independence to the protection of the welfare of fellow countrymen, the promotion of economic development, and participation in Korean rights issues in American politics. Each of the above institutions has its role to play in serving these purposes. We will examine churches first.

As mentioned earlier, many Koreans who went to Hawaii were Christians. When the first large group of Korean immigrants arrived in Hawaii, there were among them many who had already embraced Christianity as their religion.¹ Before Korean independence, the church played an active role in supporting patriotic political propaganda, as well as aiding financial and diplomatic efforts to restore Korea's independence. Recently, however, Korean churches have

¹Hyung-chan Kim, The Korean Diaspora (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 1977), p. 47.

served the immigrant community as social and cultural centers as well as religious centers.² Korean churches set up orientation programs, and pastors rendered counseling services regarding welfare and domestic problems. Korean churches also continued to play a major role by providing Korean immigrants and their descendants with opportunities to gather to exchange information, to share the Korean heritage, to speak their native tongue, to strengthen their sense of identity, to satisfy their spiritual needs, and to be helped in adjusting to their new environment. Korean immigrants attend church primarily for religious reasons, secondly for psychological comfort and peace of mind, and thirdly because of the social need of meeting people.³

In addition, the Korean immigrant churches have played an active role in educational and journalistic efforts to maintain and perpetuate Korean culture on American soil. Churches are the center of the Korean community and appear to be one of the integral parts of the Korean immigrant's adaptation.

Korean communities have established Korean language schools in Los Angeles, Sacramento, San Francisco, and

²Kim, Korean Diaspora, p. 60.

³Won-moo Hurh and Kwang-chung Kim, Korean Immigrants in America (Cranbury, New Jersey: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1984), p. 31.

San Jose, as well as several other towns in California and Hawaii.⁴ These schools are usually sponsored by Korean churches or community leaders with the teachers' salaries paid from tuition. Many immigrants have sent their children to these Korean language schools, where children are taught traditional Korean values, customs, culture, history, and geography, as well as language at the schools. According to one Christian, Mi-ae Yi, from Korean Emmanuel Presbyterian Church in San Jose:

My church has had a Korean language school every Friday for our second generation. Even though there are more than 20 Korean churches in San Jose, it is hard to find a Korean language school here. We only teach Korean language, but I think the language class will be helpful for young generation to understand Korean customs, culture and history as well as their native language. The more they learn Korean, the better they understand their parents, family and the Korean community. In the end, they will realize that their origins are from Korea, not America. I hope this kind of program will be increased.⁵

Unlike church-related Korean language schools, the San Jose Korean School was established in San Jose thirteen years ago. Mr. Chae-jong Yu, headmaster, described his school.

San Jose Korean School was established on September 1, 1978. I came to this school about three years ago and I had been a supervisor of instruction in primary schools in Korea for a long time. My school is open every Saturday from 9:30 to 12:30. All the teachers in our

⁴Hurh and Kim, Korean Immigrants, p. 48; Helen Lewis Givens, The Korean Community in Los Angeles (San Francisco: R and E Research Associates, 1974), p. 17.

⁵Interview with Mi-ae Yi from Korean Emmanuel Presbyterian Church in San Jose on February 5, 1991.

school have both license and experience. Because they have experience, they know how to teach and how to treat their students. Our curriculum is Korean language, Taekwondo (Korean martial art) and music, especially Korean songs. In Korean language class we also teach Korean history, tradition and culture. This school is far different from Korean language schools run by churches. Once in a while, we take a field trip or have an athletic meeting. The students learn not only by the book but by practical training. As headmaster of San Jose Korean School, I hope my school plays an important role not only for the students but for the Korean community in San Jose.⁶

These Korean language schools and other Korean schools have played an important role in helping older Korean immigrants and their children to adjust themselves into a land strange to them. These schools have made shocks, such as differing languages and cultures, less terrifying. The most important reason for these schools as far as the older generation is concerned is to teach Korean culture and tradition; but many of the younger generation tend to disregard these teachings and want to join with other ethnic groups in American schools.⁷ The elders do not want their children to forget Korean traditions, even though they live in the United States. This is the first sign of intergenerational conflict in the Korean-American community.

Korean organizations have represented the interests of Korean residents in the United States. These

⁶Interview with Mr. Chae-jong Yu, headmaster of San Jose Korean School on February 6, 1991.

⁷Ibid.

organizations have had noble objectives: to promote educational and business development in the Korean community, to protect freedom among Koreans, and to assist members of the Korean immigrant community to realize their potential in becoming equal and participating members in American society. Korean organizations help by acting as employment referral centers, conducting English language classes, teaching driver education, and assisting in the establishment of small family-operated businesses. Certain organizations provide free meals for senior citizens or sponsor programs like sports, games or tours for isolated newcomers.

In this connection, it can be pointed out that Korean-American Community Services, Inc. (KACS) of San Jose has been working for immigrants rendering services in such areas as welfare guidance since 1979. According to the executive director of KACS, Mrs. Sue Y. Kim:

Korean-American Community Services, Inc., was established in 1979 and is the only Korean community-based non-profit organization in Santa Clara County. KACS provides bilingually and biculturally oriented multi-service programs to meet the needs of the Korean immigrants in the County. . . . Over the past ten years, KACS has successfully responded to the needs of the target population with an expanding program. Roughly, its purpose and goals are divided into two areas: One is to develop and implement an array of human services which will contribute to the well-being of the Korean community. Secondly, it is to promote cultural integrity especially among our youth, productive life for the adults, sense of dignity of the elderly, and a positive link between the Korean community and American

society at large.⁸

In San Francisco where many Koreans have concentrated, such an organization, run by the Korean Center, Inc. (KCI), has been very successful since 1974. According to two staff members of KCI, Eun-suk Choung and Yun-hye Pak:

Korean Center, Inc., was established in 1974 in San Francisco. The purpose of KCI is to assist Korean-Americans to realize their full potential through education, training, and cultural and social services. These services are also provided to other Bay Area residents who need and want them. We have classes in English Language, citizenship, computers, typing, Korean Language and job skills training programs, and a counseling program for youth. The job skills training programs consist of training in computers, typing English, and accounting in daily classes. During FY '89-90, after the training programs, the job placement rate was 90% and a total of 59 participants were served, going to, for instance, Bank of America as a payroll clerk and the U.S. Naval Base as a clerk-typist. The counseling service has broadened to offer assistance in problems ranging from family crises to career choices. Recent immigrants come in all shapes, sizes and ages. And these days an increasing number are senior citizens. With this in mind, the senior program was created to provide social service assistance and activities to elderly Koreans. The request for language assistance is the most frequent request for assistance. In addition to language assistance, hot nutritious meals are provided by the daily meal program for seniors. Finally, we help ease Koreans' transition into their new American lives.⁹

Organizations abound in the Korean community. However, most deal with only a few issues which are vital to the

⁸Interview with Mrs. Sue Y. Kim, Executive Director of Korean-American Community Services, Inc., on March 16, 1990 at Korean-American Community Services, Inc., of San Jose.

⁹Interview with Eun-suk Choung and Yun-hye Pak, staff members of Korean Center, Inc., in San Francisco on January 15, 1991.

improvement of the lives of Korean immigrants in America. Some others are the Youth Guidance Center in Los Angeles, and the Korean Women's Society in Los Angeles, San Francisco and other places. Few seem comprehensive enough in their organizational philosophy and purpose to encompass all of the needs of Korean residents, particularly the needs of recent immigrants who lack social services of many kinds.

Korean communities in the United States have many problems such as lack of funds or irregularities in community elections, depriving Koreans of an opportunity to extend themselves into the mainstream of American society. Koreans have seen this in their own community and have developed a distrust of one another, a very divisive and destabilizing factor which has prevented further integration into the greater American society.¹⁰ Time and energy have been wasted on the resolution of these problems, whereas they might have been better spent on developing an organized political power-base. For example, according to the Korean Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) News, March 3, 1990, "A certain community election in the Bay area was fraudulent, so the voters should vote for a president again." This news item led to discussion in the Korean community about the need to avoid such situations in the future.

¹⁰The Korea Times San Francisco (San Francisco, California), March 5, 1991.

Specifically, the communities have faced leadership problems. Although their objectives were noble, high-minded leaders who were willing to work together at the expense of their personal interests have been rare among Koreans in America. A staff member of KACS, Mr. Jong-hwan Oh, pointed out, "It is quite clear that without new intellectual leadership, the Korean communities cannot make real progress toward a healthier and better society."¹¹

¹¹ Interview with Mr. Jong-hwan Oh, at Korean-American Community Services, Inc., March 23, 1990.

CHAPTER VI

KOREAN IMMIGRANTS' PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

Most Korean immigrants had not prepared themselves for a new life in the United States. Therefore, they faced many hardships and problems, such as a language barrier, cultural conflict, generation gaps, and racial discrimination, as well as employment discrimination.

Most Korean immigrants did not speak English well since they did not have many opportunities to learn the English language while living in Korea. The language barrier is a hurdle also for those who learned some English before leaving their homeland. Despite their high level of educational background, a majority of them have suffered from an inability to express themselves and articulate their ideas in English and express their values to the majority society.¹ For example, this writer studied English more than ten years in Korea since junior high school. Unfortunately, like most Korean students, he learned the language by the book, not by practical training in speaking, writing, and listening. Even though he graduated from university in Korea, he has

¹ Steve S. Shim, Korean Immigrant Churches Today in Southern California (San Francisco, California: R and E Research Associates, 1977), p. 15.

had a hard time expressing himself, as well as catching up on his classes in America.

The problem of language exists for the immigrant in relation to both the society and their own children. It prevents full communication with different groups. Korean immigrants are unable to communicate adequately with other groups. Most members of the younger generation do not speak their ancestral tongue, while many of the older generation do not speak English. Rather than becoming Korean-Americans, many of these people feel they must be either Korean or American, as they cannot fit in both societies.

As Korean immigrants have sought employment, the main problem has been a lack of communication skills. The problem hampers the adult's ability to obtain a good job, as well as depressing the child's performance in school.² All over, the language barrier sets them apart from the American world in general day-to-day living.

Cultural shock and misunderstandings between Korean immigrants and other races are also factors in Korean adjustment to American society. Cultural differences make it difficult for newcomers to adjust to American society. The family-centered, traditional Korean immigrants find the free-style, aggressive, individualistic American way of life

²The Korea Times San Francisco (San Francisco, California), February 6, 1991.

incompatible with what they were accustomed to in their homeland. The discovery that some Americans lived with a communal lifestyle came as a shock to many.³

Most Koreans were isolated by cultural shock from American society and hardly participated in general social or political issues. Thus they stand aside from the mainstream of American life.

For the most part, the Korean families start to experience their cultural conflicts when their children enter American schools and learn different traditions and another language.

Mr. Jong-hyup Jung, a graduate student at University of Pennsylvania, pointed out:

I was born in 1962 and I landed in America in summer 1989 for study. I was much influenced by traditional Korean customs and lifestyle. But the Korean customs and lifestyle are far different from those of America. Americans seem to have much more freedom than Koreans, not much restriction. In addition, they look like individualists, even egoists, to Koreans who emphasize cooperation and harmony with others.⁴

We should point out the dilemma facing the two generations, old and new. The gap between them is a problem because of the lack of communication and different cultural backgrounds between them.

³Telephone interview conducted on March 24, 1990, with Mr. Jong-hyup Jung of Philadelphia, a student there at this time.

⁴Ibid.

The different cultural background causes many difficulties. The first generation holds traditional Korean cultural values, and the father, as the head of the family, decides his children's future. The young Koreans' search for freedom has expressed itself in a seeming lack of respect for older Koreans and girls have demanded equal rights. The younger people also break away from closely knit family circles to start friendships with other people, many from different ethnic groups. One of the great frustrations of Koreans in the United States has been the break-up of the extended family, mentioned previously as the common form of family in Korea.

The gaps and conflicts between parents and children are inevitably intensified by the rapid cultural assimilation of children. We can witness a widening division between them and their parents. The elders have tried to influence the children with their native customs and ideas, and tend to disregard their children's rights. However, the younger generation has taken to American ways rapidly and tends to ignore their parent's authority.

According to Mr. Chae-jong Yu, headmaster of San Jose Korean School:

The following were and still are some of the major points of conflict between parents and children.
(1) Language. The younger Koreans can speak English better than older Koreans and tend to speak and know less of the ancestral tongue. In some families

parents and children can converse only upon the simplest matters of everyday life. (2) Filial piety. Usually the younger generation does not truly understand the meaning of filial piety, and the older generation is dogmatic in its demands and wishes. The ensuing criticisms from the older people tend to augment the misunderstanding. (3) Social freedom. The average adolescent boy and girl are left without useful guidance and receive only adverse criticisms from the older people. The Korean customs of maidenly modesty and seclusion still form the ideal of the parents and because of its inflexibility have perhaps caused more unnecessary conflicts and unhappiness than any other factor.⁵

In recent years, however, the younger Korean generations have realized some of the values of Korean traditions. It is also true that many older-generation Koreans have begun to accept some Western values and have tried to understand the younger generation's mentality.

Mr. Tuk-jong Pak immigrated to the United States with his family about three years ago. He states:

I have a son and two daughters in my family. My son is attending high school and two daughters night schools. I work for a hotel. As soon as I came to America, I realized that every member of my family was so busy that I hardly had time to talk with my children. I am a traditional Korean man, conservative and authoritarian. Even though they are all over 18 years old, I still think they are too young to decide and do something by themselves. But they do not think so. Rather, they think I am interrupting them too much. So they do not even want to listen to me. They have adjusted faster to American lifestyle than I did. Recently, I have begun to understand them. I realize they wanted to be recognized as

⁵Interview with Mr. Chae-jong Yu, headmaster of San Jose Korean School on February 6, 1991.

persons, not their parents' belongings. Then they also have tried to understand me, recognizing my position as head of the family.⁶

Another problem is racism. Racism, at least in America, is based on the assumption that white people are superior to non-whites. The economic interests of Korean people versus other people in the United States played an important role in racism. Racial discrimination against Asians, including Koreans, has hindered the establishment of Korean businesses and influenced the lives of Koreans in a negative fashion.

Racism still exists and many problems remain to be resolved. For example, high public and private positions should be more open to minority members according to their abilities. When these jobs become available to all groups, including Koreans, it will contribute to a feeling of truly belonging in the society. Equal opportunities with equal rights for minorities are essential in a democratic society.

A Korean community leader contends:

The American government, on the local, state, and federal levels, has a responsibility to provide needed services to Korean immigrants and to guide and assist them. In order to see that this occurs, Koreans must become more active in demanding equality.⁷

⁶Interview with Mr. Tuk-jong Pak, a hotel employee, in San Jose, California, on April 14, 1990.

⁷Interview with Mrs. Sue Y. Kim, Executive Director of Korean-American Community Services, Inc., on March 16, 1990 at Korean-American Community Services, Inc., of San Jose.

Unlike the first Koreans to settle in the U.S., a large number of recent Korean immigrants were virtually barred from many jobs from the beginning of their immigration, since they were not citizens. The first Koreans arrived with ready job offers. In addition, many of the newcomers today, including intellectuals, professionals, and skilled workers, still find they are unable to obtain meaningful and gainful employment in their own fields because of the language barrier, cultural conflicts and lack of training in the United States. For many, even to think of going into business is next to impossible, since most Korean immigrants have scant business experience. The traditional Confucian social setting--the scholar on top and the merchant on the bottom--has affected the production of a business class in Korea.⁸ Consequently, many Korean immigrants have had to take back-breaking jobs as physical laborers for absurdly low wages. Although there are today some Korean professionals in the United States, the majority of Koreans here are small businessmen or continue as laborers.⁹

⁸Lee Houchins and Chang-su Houchins, "The Korean Experience in America," Pacific Historical Review 43 (1974): pp. 182-187.

⁹The Korea Times San Francisco (San Francisco, California), January 1, 1991.

The unemployment rate among Koreans is very high in American cities, because few jobs are available for minority groups. Such groups have inadequate job opportunities.¹⁰

According to the Korea Central Daily, San Francisco, on March 4, 1990, what is troubling Korean immigrants most is children who lack parental care. Next are matters of employment, economic difficulty, human relationships in society, and so on. In addition, about 66 percent of them suffer from the language barrier. The newspaper also pointed out that only 4 percent of their problems are solved by social service centers like churches. Most of them endure these hardships by themselves or give up trying to solve the problems. Some of them can speak of their difficulties only to their family, relatives, or friends.

¹⁰Ibid.

CONCLUSION

Very little information is available about the first Korean immigrants in America. Most of the available literature focuses on the second and third immigration period. The first groups included a few young men who arrived in 1872 as students, unknown numbers of Korean ginseng merchants who made numerous visits to America, a Korean diplomatic mission which visited the United States during 1883 and 1884 on a goodwill tour, and political refugees who were involved in efforts to preserve Korean independence from Japan. These people should all be considered pioneers in Korean immigration to the United States.

Official Korean immigration to Hawaii began in 1902. The desire for a better life was the primary motivation of the immigrants. Most of them did not consider the United States their permanent home.

Their arrival in the United States mainland, as well as Hawaii, however, had implications far beyond the simple movement of a relatively small number of people from one country to another. Their experiences laid a foundation for scores of immigrants who were to follow in their path. Their communication with relatives and friends who remained

behind in Korea and their stories about the new land, its customs, beliefs, government and social life began to awaken curiosity among those who had been for many years isolated from the outside world.

Korea's policy of isolation created a need and a taste for change. Those who remained behind moved for change, while those who left sought a changing world outside their homeland.

Recent Korean arrivals in America have faced almost the same problems earlier immigrants confronted. But, unlike early immigrants, the new immigrants have come to the United States to live permanently and to make their home.

Since Korea was liberated from Japanese rule in 1945, especially after the Korean War, immigrants have come to the United States partly because they felt it was a safe place in which to enjoy a luxurious life. It seems that many immigrants chose America as much because it was seen as a land of opportunity as because it offered a refuge.

A large proportion of the Koreans recently flowing into the United States have consisted of professionally trained people. These new immigrants are better educated and more skilled than their predecessors were. An overwhelming majority of the newcomers have settled in highly urbanized and industrialized areas; only a small percentage

of the newcomers are engaged in farming. This is, of course, a reversal of the situation of the early immigrants. It means, among other things, that the economic life of Koreans in the United States has become diversified. Their occupations range from janitorial work to the legal and medical professions. Also, younger-generation Koreans who have adjusted to American life have become successful businessmen and professionals.

In recent years, American society has been experiencing an incredibly rapid growth of Korean communities in the major metropolitan areas in this country, and it is clear that the new wave of Korean immigrants has a socioeconomic and political impact on American society in general. Korean immigrants are becoming an increasingly visible minority in the society. But they would do better to prepare themselves occupationally and psychologically for their future life in the United States, unlike the early immigrants. In addition, they can better understand American society and adjust easily to the new land by using the information of previous immigrants who have returned home or sent word back about this country.

APPENDIX

Table--Korean Immigrants to the United States: 1948-1989
(in thousands. For fiscal years ending in year shown)

Year	Number of immigrants admitted
1948-1950	0.1
1951-1960	8.4
1961-1970	35.5
1971-1980	272.0
1981-1989	306.5
Total	622.5

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce (Bureau of the Census),
1975, 1990.

*No record of immigration from Korea prior to 1948.

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