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REMARKABLY ORDINARY, AN ORAL HISTORY:
EXAMINING THE MICRO EFFECTS OF FAMILY REUNIFICATION
ON THE LEE SIBLINGS AND THEIR SPOUSES

by

CAROL JOO LEE

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies
in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Abstract

Remarkably Ordinary, an Oral History: Examining the Micro Effects of Family Reunification on the Lee Siblings and Their Spouses

by

Carol Joo Lee

Advisor: Monica Varsanyi

Family reunification accounts for a majority of entry mechanisms by which current Korean immigrants arrived in the U.S. The peak Korean immigration period from the mid-1970s to the late 1980s saw a dwindling of skill-based immigration and a rapid increase of immigrants who arrived through family preferences as a direct result of the Immigration Act of 1965. Despite there being ample studies and aggregate data on the post-1965 immigrants from Korea, not enough micro-level research has been conducted on the ways in which the family reunification provisions affected individuals, their brothers and sisters, and the inter-family dynamic both prior and post immigration. This lacuna in individualized and inter-personal analyses from the perspective of the immigrants led to a lack of more nuanced understanding of "individual migration behavior" in family reunification scholarship. The aim of this paper is to bridge this gap by assessing legal, material and emotional processes during the pre-departure (preparation) period and different family cohorts that emerged during the post-arrival (adjustment) period. The examination of the effects and affects of immigration policies also shed light on the intersection of law and personal choice. By utilizing oral history as main methodology, the narratives that emerged from personal recollections and "embodied knowledge" became the basis for humanizing the immigration multiplier theory. Furthermore, the immigration genealogy of one extended family and the new family dynamic that was born out of their chain migration provided novel ways to explore some of the conventional myths surrounding the family structure as a wellspring of support and intimacy, and its influence on the economic success of Korean immigrants.

Keywords

Family reunification, Korean immigration, post-1965 immigration, immigration multiplier, individual migration behavior, narrative analysis, immigrant narrative, oral history

Acknowledgement

This paper would not be possible without the generosity of time and memory of my relatives and my parents who became participants in this research. Their remarkably ordinary acts of immigration to the United States inspired me to learn more about the history of immigration laws in this country and appreciate their contribution to Korean Americans and culture becoming more accepted and celebrated over the past decades. Their identities are often defined by their profession in mainstream America and their struggles and achievements blur into statistics in immigration scholarship. But their lives as individuals are much more nuanced and contoured, and their presence is integral – more than they realize – to the transformation of America as the country we now know and is becoming. To that end, their lives are nothing less than remarkable.

With much gratitude, this thesis is dedicated to:

Rosa and Henry Cho;
Choo Ja Lee and her memory of Kwang Moo Dan;
Soon and Young K. Choi;
Yong Jae and Kwang Sook Lee;
Young Hee and Kee Hyun Kwon;
Chang and Hae Sook Lee;
Katarina Lee and Sung Woo Hong;
Sonhui Lee and Taesoo Kwon;
and finally
Song Jae and Son Sook Lee.

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Chapter 1: Introduction & Methodology

Oscar Handlin has said the history of America is history of immigrants (Handlin 2002:3). Like the tens of millions who have entered America from both coasts and across polar borders since its making, my family became immigrants in America and with that ordinary action our family history was altered in ways that was not fathomable half a century ago. One by one my aunts, uncles, and my own parents arrived in the United States and stayed – shedding their identity as citizens in their native South Korea and becoming immigrants.

The family that began as three multiplied under the family reunification provisions in the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. Through sponsorship and chain migration nine Lee siblings, their spouses, parents and children, and later their children, all 56 of them, now came to call America their home. The re-establishing of an entire extended family structure in the United States is an outcome that now seems inevitable but was not a given. The ennead of siblings and their spouses arrived in the U.S. at different junctures in their lives with varied aspirations and expectations, and staying in the U.S. was not always the plan. But family made accepting disappointments easier and gave justification to their compromise.

The family history that we now embody, the one that the first generation tells their children and their grandchildren will only be able to glean gossamer-like impressions of began in 1947 when Korea was poor and its fate was precarious with a man I never met. He's the eldest brother of my first uncle by marriage. When my uncle Henry's brother sailed across the Pacific Ocean to study in America, sent by his father in the hope of being spared of the impending war in

1947, he was one of roughly 6,000 Korean students who came to the United States seeking higher education between 1945 and 1965 (W. Kim 1971).

Twenty three years later, in January 1970 when my eldest aunt Rosa and her husband Henry just made out of a blizzard in Seoul and landed in California, they were among 9,314 other Koreans who immigrated to America that year (Min 2011a). They removed the thermal underclothing that kept them warm against the blustery cold of Korea during a layover in Hawaii and set out to visit Henry's eldest brother whom he had not seen over two decades in Los Angeles. After a brief reunion Henry and Rosa continued on to Philadelphia, where other members of Henry's family awaited them and the first place they called home in America. The rest of the extended family arrived between 1979 and 1987 with spurts between 1980-1981 and 1985-1987 overlapping with the peak Korean immigration years of 1976-1990. In 1986, the year my own family immigrated to the United States, we were among 35,557 Koreans who sought similar fate (Min 2011a).

The pull of the immigrant's family members already in the United States was a weighty factor in their decision to uproot themselves as was the case in my own family. Nevertheless, this motivation for immigration and the multi-faceted nature of family reunification processes have not been as thoroughly analyzed as other classical push-pull factors. Additionally, reunited extended family in the U.S. was a much more complex unit than previously understood. Family reunification is often seen as a mechanism to bolster the economic standing of immigrants but that is just one piece of the puzzle. As such, this thesis aims to explore how the personal decision making process collided with familial bonds and responsibilities and the ways in which it dovetailed with geopolitical and economic ties that were almost a century old in the making.

This research also provides a basis for assessing how the inter-family dynamic can influence the immigrant's "individual migration behavior," as coined by Lee et al. (2005:613), before and after immigration. Moreover, the methodology of oral history as told by the family members and the subsequent narrative analysis offer an insight into how the Lee siblings and their spouses came to embody the Immigration Law of 1965 and help us see the immigration multiplier theory in a more humanized way. By presenting a nuanced understanding of the cumulative effects of family reunification, the paper tries to demonstrate the intersection of law and will, and the resulting changes that were both small and seismic.

The U.S.-South Korea Linkage

The history of Korean emigration is intricately linked to the country's history of political turmoil, loss of sovereignty and impoverished economy. The first Koreans to arrive in the United States were Christian missionaries who came as part of a religious exchange following the signing of Shufeldt Treaty (Treaty of Amity and Trade) between the weakened and debt-ridden Joseon Kingdom and the United States in 1882, which marked Korea's first alliance with the Western world (Ch'oe 2007; E. Lee 2016:138). For the next 20 years until the first mass emigration of laborers began in 1902, the only Koreans who were able to reach the U.S. shores were political refugees fleeing Japanese colonialism, students of Christian faith, and a small group of diplomats and ginseng merchants (Houchins and Houchins 1974; W.Y. Kim 1959). Emperor Kojong issued an edict to establish Suminwon, the country's first iteration of the

Department of Immigration, in 1902 after being persuaded by Horace Allen¹, a physician who became the first medical missionary in Korea and later American Ambassador to Korea (Houchins and Houchins 1974; Ch'oe 2007). Allen had Kojong's ear and made a point to remind him of the prestige of labor ties with the U.S. by highlighting the ban on Chinese migration. This development is viewed by some scholars as a scheme to the extent that Allen orchestrated his advice to the emperor in concert with the Hawaiian Sugar Plantations Association in an effort to facilitate the importing of cheap labor (Houchins and Houchins 1974).

Another historical fact to consider is the ineffectiveness of the Korean government under Japanese control during this time making emigration only possible with the Japanese sanction. Nevertheless, it did not last long. Three years later when Korea formally became a Japanese protectorate in 1905, an embargo was placed on emigration "in order to prevent Koreans from competing with Japanese laborers already in Hawaii and to keep an ample supply of Koreans at home to support Japanese expansion projects" (E. Lee 2016:138).

Over 7,000 Koreans arrived in Hawaii to work on sugar plantations between 1902 and 1905, but during the Japanese protectorate period from 1905 to 1910, virtually no Koreans were legally able to leave the country (Houchins and Houchins 1974; Ch'oe 2007). Moreover, halfway across the globe, the United States mandated a rule not to recognize Korean passports under an agreement with the Japanese government further attributing to the decline of emigration (Houchins and Houchins 1974).

¹ Allen also founded the first Western royal hospital, Chejungwon, which expanded into a modern facility with a medical school through funding by Louis H. Severance in 1903 and came to be called Severance Hospital at Yonsei University where my uncle Young received his medical training before coming to America.

The annulment of Korean passports also coincided with passing of the Immigration Act of 1907 which curtailed transmigration of Asians from Hawaii to the mainland and restricted entry for any migrant without a valid passport. They were explicit efforts to bar all Asians from entering the country. Then in 1910, when Korea was finally annexed by Japan and came under Japanese Rule until 1945, perhaps grown nervous by the brazenness of the Japanese military and its expansionary ambitions, the United States began providing asylum to Korean students, who arrived via Shanghai and declared themselves stateless political refugees (Houchins and Houchins 1974; Ch'oe 2007).

The United States admitted 541 Korean students between 1910 and 1919 (Houchins and Houchins 1974). Among them were four of the most significant independence movement activists – An Chang-ho, Kim Kyu-sik, Pak Yong-man and Syngman Rhee² (Houchins and Houchins 1974). They rallied other Korean patriots to raise money and organized to attract the attention of the international governing bodies. In an attempt to quell the growing anti-Japanese activism by Korean men overseas, the Japanese government began issuing exit permits to Korean women desperate enough to sign marriage contracts. From 1910 until 1924, the year the Johnson-Reed Act barred all Asians from entering the U.S. and its territories, over 1,000 Korean women made their way to Hawaii and became what's commonly known as picture brides for the single Korean men on the island (Houchins and Houchins 1974; W.Y. Kim 1959; H. Kim 1980).

The enactment of the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924, the nation's most restrictive immigration bill to date, marked a new era of the United States shutting its doors to immigrants. Thus between 1924 and 1944, the combination of the implementation of national origins quotas

² He later served as the first President of South Korea from 1948 to 1960.

and wholesale exclusion of peoples from Asian countries under the new law, World Wars I & II, the Great Depression and general unrest world over brought migration to a mere trickle during this period. At the end of World War II when Japan surrendered in 1945, Korea was split into two at the 38th parallel. With this inauspicious turn of events the U.S. military became a permanent presence in South Korea which still remains to date. As a result, the traumatized and poverty-stricken Koreans got to witness America's might and wealth from close proximity and began looking to the United States for a piece of the American Dream for themselves en masse.

Despite the exclusionary law still being in place, Koreans began migrating to the United States again in 1945 when the military ties between the two nations eased restrictions for Korean students who wished to study in American colleges and universities (Yoon 1997). Subsequently, when the McCarran-Walter Act was passed in 1952, it had a monumental impact on Asian immigration in the U.S. although it may not have been evident at the time. The ban on Asians was abolished and Asian descendants could become citizens for the first time in American history. Effectively, the 1952 law loosened the hinges on the gate that kept Koreans away for decades for it to be flung wide open once the liberalized immigration law was finally passed in 1965. As a consequence, Koreans who were already in the U.S. obtained citizenship and began sponsoring their sisters, brothers and parents under the new family reunification provisions in numbers that well exceeded expectation.

Following the enactment of the Immigration Law of 1965, Koreans known as the post-1965 immigrants came by the tens of thousands to the United States during the 1970s and the 1980s. Eventually over the next two decades they made up the third largest immigrant group in the U.S. after the Mexicans and the Filipinos (Barringer et al. 1993; Arnold et al. 1989).

Several push factors propelled Koreans to leave their country and seek their fortunes in the U.S., such as political unrest under the military dictatorship, poverty of economic opportunities, and graduate education. But what facilitated the mass immigration of Koreans who for the most part did not possess specialized skills during this period was family preferences and non-quota immediate family status that were used as main entry mechanisms (Min 2011a). Cementing its massive impact and subsequent controversy, by 1987, the family reunification provisions accounted for nearly 70 percent of all legal immigration in the United States (Arnold et al. 1989).

Methodology

Oral history was the main methodology used in this research project and the participants' accounts provided primary source material. The goal was to interview the first generation immigrants of my family members who were adults thus had agency in the decision making process prior to immigration. My family in the United States consists exclusively of my paternal side and my father is one of nine siblings who made America their home between 1970 and 1987. There were 17 participants in total – nine siblings and eight of their spouses. Unfortunately my grandparents and my aunt Choo Ja's husband Kwang Moo passed away in 2008 and 2015, therefore could not be interviewed. However, anecdotal memories of them by different relatives were integrated into the research, especially aunt Choo Ja's accounts of her late husband.

All the interviews were conducted on an individual basis by phone using audio only and were recorded with their consent, and each session lasted on average an hour and a half. The participants spoke Korean except for uncle Taesoo who spoke English, and their responses and anecdotes were later translated into English by me. The questionnaire focused on the period

between petition and departure in Korea and one year after arrival in the United States. The objective was to assess the family reunification process on a micro level and what effects, if any, having a large family had on the individuals and their ability to make decisions and find their footing in the new country. Having to rely on memories of occurrences that took place over 30 years ago, at times participants' accounts on the same event diverged slightly from person to person, especially when it came to chronology and years. Some offered vivid recounts of that life-altering period and others were more stoic and factual in their answers.

Throughout the paper I refer to the participants as “siblings and their spouses,” “family members” or “immigrants,” or by their first and middle name together (i.e. Kee Hyun and Sung Woo) as is the common practice in Korean culture unless they go by their first name only (i.e. Soon and Young), or combined name (i.e. Sonhui and Taesoo), or by their baptized name (i.e. Rosa, Henry and Katarina). A naming convention of giving a string of sons or daughters the same middle name used to be a popular practice in Korea as is the case with the three brothers Song Jae, Yong Jae and Chang Jae (he later just went by Chang). Nevertheless, the fact that their wives Son Sook, Kwang Sook and Hae Sook share the same middle name is a mere coincidence.

As in the oral history tradition, my first and foremost aim was to honor my participants' voice and let their remembering – interpretation of their experience and embodied knowledge as oral history scholar Nyssa Chow calls it – guide the theoretical framework (Smithsonian Institution Archives). The data collected aided in analyzing the ways in which the family reunification provisions of the 1965 Immigration Law manifested on individual and familial levels. I examined the legal, material and emotional processes the family members underwent

during the pre-departure (preparation) period and struggles and challenges during the post-arrival (adjustment) period.

My primary interest as a researcher was to formulate as faithfully as possible how the siblings and their spouses embodied the Immigration Act of 1965 – although this would not be how they characterize their immigration experiences – beyond statistics and stereotypes. In order to achieve this I alternately employed micro-coping and telescoping methods, zeroing in on their lived experiences then stepping back to contextualize against historical statistics and changes in laws. At the end, I arrived marveling at how a multitude of immigrants like them came to constitute a fifth of the overall U.S. population growth that make up 22 million and growing Asian Americans by 2020 (Tavernise and Gebeloff 2021; Budiman and Ruiz 2021). In 1965 when the law was passed, they were a catch-all group so insignificant and undervalued that Lyndon B. Johnson was compelled proclaim, “This bill that we sign today is not a revolutionary bill. It does not affect the lives of millions. It will not reshape the structure of our daily lives, or really add importantly to either our wealth or our power.³” Arguably, no other presidential understatement was as proven otherwise as this opening argument by Johnson.

Who They Are

The siblings and their spouses came mostly from urban areas of Incheon and Seoul, where the majority of post-1965 immigrants came from (Yoon 1997). My father’s family, the Lee’s, was rooted in Incheon for generations. As a port city an hour west of Seoul facing the Yellow Sea, Incheon’s geography was strategically primed to be a locus for historically

³ “Remarks at the Signing of the Immigration Bill, Liberty Island, New York,” Oct. 3 1965. The entire speech can be found on The American Presidency Project web site at UC Santa Barbara.

significant events. In 1950, it was at the Port of Incheon that General MacArthur carried out his famous landing of American troops that turned the tide of the Korean War. A half century earlier, in 1902, the first mass migration took place from an Incheon harbor when a ship carrying 102 emigrants, comprised mostly of local men, sailed to Hawaii (Choe 2007; Houchins and Houchins 1974). Incheon in the 1970s and the 1980s was fast becoming urbanized but there were still large swaths of rural and farming areas.



The Lee Family (1959): (back row, l-r) Choo Ja, Rosa, Song Jae; (second row, l-r) Soon, mother Jung Rae Huh, father Kwang Soo Lee, Yong Jae; (third row, l-r) Young Hee, Chang

Kwang Soo Lee and Jung Rae Huh, the father and mother of the siblings, were urban dwellers who owned a shoe store as well as a small farm and orchards where a hodgepodge of vegetables, strawberries and peaches grew by hired hands. There were nine children in all – six girls and three boys. Kyung Ja (baptized Rosa later) born in 1941 was the oldest. She was followed by another daughter Choo Ja, son Song Jae, my father, daughter Soon Ja (Soon), son

Yong Jae, daughter Young Hee, son Chang Jae (Chang), daughter Kyung Hee (baptized Katarina later) and finally Sonhui, the youngest born in 1961. Four out of six sisters – Rosa, Soon, Young Hee and Katarina – married men from Seoul – Henry, Young, Kee Hyun and Sung Woo. The others all found spouses who were also from Incheon.

The immigration of the entire Lee clan was 17 years in the making and as such the siblings and their spouses arrived under variegated economic, educational and generational circumstances. The average age of the siblings and their spouses when they came to the United States was 31 years old and the average number of years they have lived in the U.S. is 37 years. Out of 18 of them, eight were in their 20s, seven in their early 30s – most between 31 and 32 – and three were in their 40s. Choo Ja and Kwang Moo, who arrived last in 1987, were the oldest at 44 and 47. All but Sonhui and her husband Taesoo, who returned to Korea for Taesoo's work, have been living in the U.S. permanently and consistently. Having immigrated 51 years ago, Rosa and Henry have been in the U.S. the longest. The youngest Sonhui and her husband Taesoo have spent the least number of years in the U.S. at 28 and 24 years since they've been living in Korea for the last 10 years. The oldest five siblings – Rosa, Choo Ja, Song Jae, Soon and Yong Jae – were married with at least one child at the time of immigration. The others – Young Hee, Chang, Katarina and Sonhui – were single but all returned to Korea and found spouses who later joined them in America.

During the years between 1965 and 1990, 25 percent of overall post-1965 Korean immigrants in the U.S. had completed high school education, 12 percent received some college education, 23 percent had college degrees, and 13 percent had acquired graduate-level education at the time of their arrival (Yoon 1997). Among the participants, all men have gotten at least one

year of college education. Only three – Henry, Young and Taesoo – completed advanced or graduate studies and pursued careers in their respective fields later in the U.S. The three brothers Song Jae, Yong Jae and Chang received some college education in business, chemistry and economics without obtaining degrees. Song, the eldest son, ran his own business in beekeeping and manufacturing bee houses in Korea. Yong Jae had a small furniture factory next to Song's. Their wives Son Sook and Kwang Sook had office jobs but both became homemakers after marriage. The youngest brother Chang went to college for one year then enlisted in the military. Hae Sook who became Chang's wife was a kindergarten teacher in Korea. Once in America, all three brothers and their wives wound up in dry cleaning business.

About half of the women finished high school and only two out of the five who did go to college pursued careers in their chosen fields in Korea but only Young Hee continued her work as a nurse in the U.S. albeit intermittently. The older sisters Rosa, Choo Ja and Soon were homemakers in Korea. Rosa and Soon attended college and Soon was as an elementary school teacher for a few years until she got married. Their husbands, Henry and Young, who completed internships in Korea had plans to continue their medical training in America. Choo Ja's husband, Kwang Moo, ran a freight delivery company then when he came into an inheritance of properties after his father died, he focused on real estate.

Young Hee's husband Kee Hyun studied public administration in college and worked in advertising for Hyundai Motors, one of the prestigious chaebol⁴ companies in Korea. After graduating from high school, Katarina taught night school, a government subsidized continuing education facility where factory workers could study toward a high school diploma. Sung Woo,

⁴ A large family-owned business conglomerate in South Korea.

who became her husband, had gone to a small college in Seoul and worked for a while in a gold wholesale market. The youngest Sonhui was a recent fashion school graduate and Taesoo who became her husband was planning to pursue a PhD in organic chemistry in the United States. Sisters Choo Ja, Young Hee, Katarina and their husbands also went into dry cleaning business once they became immigrants.

Table 1: Immigration Statistics of the Siblings (and Spouses) in the Order of Birth

| | Names of Sibling & Spouse | Arrival Date | Age at Arrival | Current Age | Total Years in U.S. |
|---|--|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 | Rosa Cho & Henry Cho (1st born daughter & husband) | January 1970 | 28 & 31 | 79 & 82 | 51 |
| 2 | Choo Ja Lee & Kwang Moo Dan (2nd born daughter & husband) | June 13, 1987 August 29, 1987 | 44 & 47 | 78 & 81 | 34 |
| 3 | Song Jae Lee & Son Sook Lee (3rd born son & wife) | June 19, 1986 | 41 & 39 | 76 & 74 | 35 |
| 4 | Soon Choi & Young K Choi (4th born daughter & husband) | March 15, 1980 | 32 & 32 | 72 & 72 | 41 |
| 5 | Yong Jae Lee & Kwang Sook Lee (5th born son & wife) | August 21, 1981 | 31 & 26 | 70 & 65 | 39 |
| 6 | Young Hee Kwon & Kee Hyun Kwon (5th born daughter & husband) | March 1981 March 10, 1985 | 28 & 31 | 68 & 66 | 40 & 36 |
| 7 | Chang Jae Lee & Hae Sook Lee (6th born son & wife) | January 9, 1979 December 21, 1985 | 23 & 25 | 65 & 61 | 42 & 36 |
| 8 | Katarina Lee & Sung Woo Hong (7th born daughter & husband) | June 9, 1981 August 29, 1987 | 24 & 31 | 62 & 64 | 40 & 34 |
| 9 | Sonhui Lee & Taesoo Kwon (9th born daughter & husband) | June 1983 July 1987 | 23 & 26 | 60 & 60 | 28 & 24* |

* Been living in Korea for the last 10 years.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

For over a century nearly two million Koreans have touched down on the American shores in search of political freedom, education, work, spouses and kin. Since the first large-scale emigration of Koreans to Hawaii in 1902, a confluence of push-pull factors, changing U.S. immigration and Korean emigration policies, and economic and military ties of the two countries have propelled Koreans to leave their motherland for the United States en masse. But, arguably, none had more profound legacy than the family reunification provisions in the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965.

According to the 1989 immigration multiplier analysis by Arnold et al., “a large majority of all immigrants to the United States currently are admitted as a result of their family connections to U.S. citizens or permanent resident aliens” (1989:814). Already in 1987, more than 70 percent of all U.S. immigrants had used one of the four family preference categories as an entry mechanism. Furthermore, Arnold et al. predicted that the immigrant’s siblings and their families will make up the largest proportion of all future immigrants to the United States (1989).

Nonetheless, despite there being voluminous scholarship on post-1965 Korean immigrants in the United States, not enough micro-level research has been conducted on the ways in which the family reunification provisions affected individuals, their brothers and sisters, and the inter-family dynamic both prior and post immigration. While there is ample aggregate data on the educational and socioeconomic backgrounds of the immigrants who used family preference to enter the United States (Yoon 1997; Lee et al. 2005; Min 2011); how family reunification became the cornerstone of the 1965 immigration bill (C. Lee 2015; Yang 2020; J.

Park 2018); and a posteriori analyses and controversies surrounding family preferences (Arnold et al. 1989; Goering 1988); a gap exists on “individual migration behavior” as suggested in the 2005 hypothetical analysis on the economic outcome of the United States if Koreans had not immigrated (Lee et al. 2005:613).

Over the last five decades the Korean population in the United States jumped from a little over 70,000 in 1970 to nearly two million in 2020 with the 15 years between 1976 and 1990 as the peak of Korean immigration that saw an average of 30,000 new arrivals each year (E. Lee 2016: 299; Min 2011b; Budiman 2021). As such, among the post-1965 immigrant cohort, the 1970s and the 1980s Korean immigrants were critical in instantiating the U.S. Korean population boom. The vital role family preferences played in the rapid increase of Korean immigration especially during those two decades begs a closer examination of the “individual migration behavior” and the motivation that drove the decision making process to immigrate and join their siblings in a new country across continents beyond the push-pull theories.

A strong correlation exists between family reunification and family as one of the central themes of Korean immigration narrative. The post-1965 Korean immigrants – of the 1970s and 1980s in particular – were often petitioned by their U.S. citizen siblings through fifth preference and came with their families (Arnold et al. 1989; Yoon 1997). They became one of the links in chain migration and added to the expansion of the family already in the U.S. Consequently, the reconstructed family foundation provided financial and psychological benefits to the new and earlier arrivals alike (Kim and Naughton 1993; Hurh and Kim 1984a; Park et al. 1990:90). Thus there is a tendency to attribute the economic success rate of Korean immigrants to the values

placed on family unity in Korean culture (Foner 2000:96; Waldinger 1995:265-81; I. Kim 1981:145; Light and Bonacich 1988:143; Park et al. 1990:67-77).

Be that as it may, the Korean immigrant family dynamic is much more complex than the conventional portrayal as the sum of traditional values and economic achievements as I discovered in my research. Taeku Lee asserts that “the success of Korean Americans is neither unambiguous nor uniform” and this observation can apply to the patterns of Korean immigrant families as well (2012:47). I also concur with Lee’s assessment that classical characterization of Korean immigrants are “stereotypes about Korean cultural and family values” (2012:47). The family, as I found, remained reunited despite tension and conflicts. A large extended family like mine was also inclined to splinter into multiple cohorts by arrival periods and levels of acculturation. In this regard, even though there’s much emphasis on family structure in the Korean immigrant scholarship, many unexplored facets still remain.

Broadly, the Korean immigration scholarship is divided into three groups: First Wave or Early Period (1903–1944), Second Wave or Intermediate Period (1945–1964) and Third Wave or Post-1965 Period (1965–present). The historiography of early Koreans in the United States – the genealogy of Hawaiian labor migration in particular – is the most common form of analysis for the first wave of immigrants as extensively documented by scholars Lee and Chang-su Houchins and Yǒng-ho Ch’oe. Insofar as this was a period defined by great political upheaval in Korean history marked by the fall of Joseon Kingdom under Japanese aggression, the emigration pattern is intricately linked to the policies, or rather restrictions, the Japanese government imposed on the Koreans as their subjects (Houchins and Houchins 1974; Ch’oe 2007).

The Intermediate Period of Korean immigration from 1945 to 1964 is characterized by two major events that solidified the multi-pronged U.S.-South Korea linkage that continues to this day – the surrender of Japan at the end of World War II and the military involvement of the United States in the ensuing Korean War. These seismic developments supplanted Japanese imperialism on the Korean Peninsula with the softer U.S. imperialism in the form of their perpetual military presence and economic and cultural hegemony (Cumings 1997:300-10; Min 2011b; Hurh 1998; Yoon 1997; J. Park 2018). Consequently, the U.S.-South Korea military alliance that transpired during this era brought new kinds of Koreans to America which became the bedrock for the dramatic surge of Korean immigration during the next wave (Hurh 1998). Moreover, the McCarran-Walter Act of 1954 abolished the quota system and allowed existing Asian descendants to become naturalized citizens priming them to sponsor their family members once the 1965 law came into effect.

The military linkage between the United States and South Korea played a critical role in bringing Koreans to America during both Second and Third Waves of Korean immigration. The “War Brides Act of 1946” and “An Act for the Relief of Certain Korean War Orphans” in 1955 transplanted approximately 6,000 Korean women married to American servicemen and 5,000 children who were orphaned during the Korean War, a majority of them biracial babies that were abandoned by both parents (Min 2011b; Oh 2015; Yoon 1997). As a result of the “War Brides Act,” women made up the largest subgroup and once they became eligible many sponsored their family members to join them in Meegook, the Korean name for America which means “beautiful country” (E. Lee 2016:268; Yuh 2005:43-47).

The other major Korean group of the Intermediate Period, as mentioned earlier, comprised of around 6,000 students seeking graduate education (Hurh 1998:39; W. Kim 1971:26). Most of them were men and unlike the pioneer migrants at the turn of the century who were agricultural laborers, they were the sons of elite families in Korea. After receiving their diplomas many did not return to Korea for prestigious positions as expected (Yoon 1997). Instead they stayed in the U.S. and became professors as my uncle Henry's four older brothers did (Min 2011b). After receiving their tenures, Henry's brothers settled in Los Angeles, Queens, NY and Ohio, and as Yoon contends, like the thousands in their cohort, "laid a foundation for chain migration for succeeding waves of Koreans" (1997:64-65)

The majority of current Korean immigrant population in the United States is the result of the 1965 Immigration Law (Arnold et al. 1989). As such, the Post-1965 Period, Third Wave, by far is most scrutinized and has yielded a great deal of scholarship. The changing push-pull factors have had a major impact on the Korean immigration trends in the U.S. since 1965. Min and Foner attribute the surge of immigration in the 1970s and the 1980s and the subsequent decline in the 1990s to substantial economic and political transformations that South Korean underwent over these three decades (Min 2011a; Foner 2000:26).

During the years immediately following passage of the 1965 Immigration Law, there was an overrepresentation of college graduates and professionals in the Korean immigrant cohort. Imbricated with lack of jobs, low living standards and political unrest under the military dictatorship was a high supply of college graduates that exceeded the "demand for such a highly educated labor force" (Yoon 1997:67). This imbalance resulted in an average of 28 percent unemployment rate for male college graduates in Korea between 1965 and 1980 (Yoon 1997;

Foner 2000: 25). It also left many medical and engineering professionals to look to the United States where they were welcomed due to a shortage in those fields in the late 1960s through the early 1970s (Yoon 1997; Min 2011a).

Resulting preoccupation of scholarship for many immigration researchers became the high propensity of entrepreneurship among Korean immigrants, even citing it as the “most recognized accomplishment of those Koreans arriving after 1965” (Kim and Naughton 1993:182). There are several theories on why this came to be. As mentioned above, Yoon and Foner agree that the imbalance in the well-educated Koreans and jobs congruent to the supply is a contributing factor. The irony is that while Yoon (1997) was referring to a push factor in Korea that sent thousands of college educated Koreans to the United States, Foner (2000:90) was speaking of the reason why Koreans once they became immigrants had little option but to go into small businesses. The challenges Korean immigrants faced in finding work that’s commensurate with their education can be attributed to several factors including dismissal of Korean professional certificates by U.S. companies thereby being shut out of American corporate opportunities, limited knowledge of the English language, unfamiliarity with American culture, and personal preference (Foner 2000:90-91; Kim and Naughton 1993; Hurh and Kim 1984b:77-90; Waldinger 1995).

Another theory posited by Kim and Min is that almost 40 percent of Korean men were involved in managerial or business transaction-related positions prior to immigration making their occupational background predisposed for incline towards entrepreneurship once they were in the United States (1993; Min 1986-87). Nonetheless, despite their considerable “human capital,” based on the 1980 PUMS, Korean men in the U.S. – both immigrant and native-born –

found themselves at a disadvantage compared to the white men of similar or lesser degree of professional or educational achievements (H. Park 1990). Overall, they had a harder time getting hired and made less money than their white counterparts (H. Park 1990).

The aforementioned variables prohibited many Korean immigrants from transferring their professional experiences after arriving in the United States so they resorted to opening their own businesses (Foner 2000:96; Waldinger 1995:275-79). By the early 1980s Korean immigrants had surpassed other immigrant groups in self-employment rate. Moreover, the amount of gross receipts from Korean owned businesses grew from \$5.5 million in 1977 to \$2.6 billion in 1982 (Kim and Naughton 1993; Light and Bonacich 1988:149). Finally in 1990, it culminated in Koreans in the U.S. achieving the highest rate of small business-ownership among any racial or ethnic groups in the country (Kim and Naughton 1993).

There were other external forces which contributed to the conditions conducive to a high number of Koreans in the U.S. becoming entrepreneurs as well. The landscape of immigrants and immigrant economy was beginning to transform substantially starting as early as the late 1960s. The European descent old guards reluctant to deal with growing minorities and crimes in urban areas resulted in out-migration of white shopkeepers (Kim and Naughton 1993; Waldinger 1995:265-281). And “the sons and daughters of Jewish and Italian storekeepers had better things to do than mind a store, and their parents, old, tired, and scared of crime, were ready to sell out to the newcomers from Korea” (Waldinger 1995:276). By the time Koreans began arriving by the tens of thousands in the 1970s and the 1980s, grocers, delis, fish markets and dry cleaners were ripe for changing hands as it happened to my own family members.

As stated earlier, family structure and traditional values have often been touted as essential factors in Korean immigrants' ubiquity and success rate in small business-ownership (Foner 2000: 96; Kim and Naughton 1993; Hurh and Kim 1984a). Korea historian Bruce Cumings was even moved to proclaim that "Those Koreans who find their fortunes in America are beneficiaries of a large economic unit called the family" (1997:334). As Koreans began to immigrate as nuclear families and joined their siblings and parents in the U.S., the post-1965 immigrants were able to rely on extended family for financial support, labor solutions and "psychological intimacy" (Kim and Naughton 1993:187). Although this is largely true, I argue that family was also a double-edged sword that worked like an albatross to those who came out of sense of obligation, as well as a crutch that kept them from pursuing their own interests and nudged them toward following the business model of the earlier arrivals.

Yoon makes an important distinction that the Korean immigrants who came after 1970 were unlike the previous cohorts (1997). This is a significant assertion that recognizes the segments of people who were reaching the United States were no longer majority lone students, workers, women married to American servicemen, or adoptees. They were "permanent immigrants, not sojourners like their predecessors. As a result, they immigrated as nuclear families and the family unit could be maintained intact" (1997:65). And this cohesion of the family was exactly what the lawmakers like Representative Michael Feighan from Ohio had in mind when he negotiated for more family preferences and visa allocations in the 1965 Immigration Law. He argued, persuasively, that family reunification should be central not only to American immigration policy but American values and national identity as well (C. Lee 2015).

Nevertheless, the kinds of families that politicians like Feighan had in mind back in 1965 did not resemble families like mine. Despite the abolishment of national origins quotas and implementation of liberalized provisions, as immigration scholars have suggested, the intended immigrants targeted to benefit from the Immigration Act of 1965 were families of European descent (Reimers 1985:61-91; Hurh 1998). What many didn't foresee, including the legislators who were against the previous race-based version and President Johnson who signed it into law on October 3, 1965, was how far-reaching America's involvement in the world affairs was and that the country has steadily become, inadvertently or not, an empire since the Second World War (J. Park 2018:28-48).

As John S.W. Park argues, the United States being a reluctant empire may have underprepared Americans "to comprehend how so many parts of the imperial sphere were now coming toward them, in the form of hundreds of thousands of immigrants" (2018: 32). The American military's continued presence after the wars in Asian countries, in particular South Korea, Vietnam and the Philippines, were "substantial signs that, after 1965, non-Europeans would in fact take advantage of the opportunity to come to the United States" (J. Park 2018:31).

In *One Mighty and Irresistible Tide* (2020), Jia Lynn Yang presents in minute detail of the saga of reforming the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924, a law born out of a fear of an onslaught of southern and eastern Europeans fleeing to the United States after the First World War. With passage of the Immigration Act of 1965, national origins system was finally repealed and a minimum of 20,000 visas to all countries were allotted: "Rather than prioritizing highly skilled immigrants, as the McCarran-Walter Act had done, the new law gave far greater preference to families trying to reunite (Yang 2020:259)." Feighan and his fellow pro-origins quotas politicians

fought to make sure family preferences received nearly 75 percent of the visa share in an effort to maintain the Eurocentric ethnic makeup of the country (C. Lee 2015; Yang 2020:250).

In the end there were four categories of family immigration that congressman Feighan negotiated and got. And among them, the fifth preference for sibling sponsorship received 24 percent of the visas, the largest in all combined preferences, and inspired a pet name “Brothers and Sisters Act” for the 1965 Immigration Law (Joppke 1999:28; C. Lee 2015). For this research, I examined in detail the processes of family reunification through these preferential mechanisms given its importance in my own family’s immigration and the impact it had on the overall Korean immigration to the United States. Additionally, through a narrative analysis, I tried to humanize the law and its effects on the people whose lives were immeasurably altered by it.

As previously identified, the majority of current immigrants in the U.S. have come by sponsorship through one of the family preferences. In particular the fifth preference was most heavily utilized for sibling-sponsored immigration (Arnold et al. 1989). Consequently, the fifth preference became a political “lightning rod” in the ensuing years when immigration reform resurfaced as a political hot button issue (Goering 1988:85). As Goering contests, “the ‘explosiveness’ of immigrant admissions as well as concern over growing immigrant backlogs” became the new preoccupation for the lawmakers who wanted to do away with the fifth preference altogether (1988:87).

The legislative goal for the 1988 Congress was “increasing the flow from European countries and concomitantly reducing it from Asia and Latin America” (Goering 1988:93). The lawmakers who were alarmed by the inflow of non-European immigrants did little to conceal their true intention as Senator Ted Kennedy illustrated in his introduction to the 1987 bill he co-

wrote with Senator Alan Simpson. He commented on the 1965 bill as having had “inadvertent restriction on immigration from the ‘old seed’ sources of our heritage.”⁵ Although Goering does his best to counter the race-tinged claims by politicians characterizing them as baseless, efforts to curb Asian and Hispanic immigration were well underway (1988).

By focusing on the “role of meaning construction,” Catherine Lee examines the ways in which white politicians like Feighan and Kennedy tried to adopt “family” as a foundational concept for the immigration bill as well as national identity (2015:530). She argues that in defining what constituted family and prioritizing different family members, “immigration stakeholders talked about what a family is, whose families deserved protection, and which families were legitimate as they regulated the entry of new would-be immigrants” (C. Lee 2015:530). The irony of course is regardless of how fastidious the policymakers were in their attempts to “re-construct” their ideation of family, the U.S.’s geopolitical meddling has sowed seeds elsewhere in the world.

Arnold et al. claimed in their immigration multiplier analysis that as of 1986 the average Korean immigrant had an upwards of 17 relatives eligible for family preference petition and by far the siblings and their families made up the “largest component of potential future immigration to the United States” (1989:830). However, they also qualified that not all those who fit the criteria will actually decide to immigrate to the U.S. Especially in the case of Korea, the economic upturn that began in the late 1980s, the relative political stability after the country’s first free election in 1987, and the increases in the standard of living have made immigration less attractive to Korean citizens (Arnold et al. 1989).

⁵ “Opening Statement of Senator Edward M. Kennedy at Hearing on Legal Immigration Reform.” Oct. 23, 1987. Washington, D.C.: Senate Subcommittee on Immigration and Refugee Policy.

Both Arnold et al. and Goering have methodically analyzed the impacts of family reunification on macro levels to understand the long term legal and demographical ramifications and to counter falsehoods that family immigration is putting strain on the system. Their researches are indispensable yet there's hardly any narrative that emerges from the perspective of the immigrants. Moreover, the period between the 1970s and the 1980s that heralded chain migration of an unprecedented number of Koreans to the United States begs closer examination in order to understand how the family reunification provisions played out on micro levels.

The legal, material and emotional processes experienced by the intending immigrants, the interplay between family members, and the lasting impact on the entire family structure are aspects of family reunification that deserve further analysis. In addition, as important as sending and receiving factors are the reasons for staying because not all Korean immigrants considered going to America an act of permanency and what made them stay despite their original intentions played a consequential role in shaping the diaspora. By exploring the effects, as well as affects, of family reunification and the resulting new family dynamic, this paper aims to fill the lacuna in understanding the intersection of law and personal choice in the decision to leave one's homeland and stay in the host country.

Chapter 3: The Process of Family Reunification

The 1950s laid the groundwork for the newly constituted immigration process to take full effect by the end of the next decade. Blindsiding the lawmakers however, the people who showed up in large numbers after the 1965 Immigration Law was passed were Asian and Hispanic, not European descendants. Three of Henry's older brothers arrived after 1952, the year "Asia-Pacific Triangle" clause in the Immigration Act of 1952 (McCarran-Walter Act) allotted 2,000 visas to Asian immigrants (Yoon 1997). It was a fraction compared to 154,277 visas available to individuals of European descent but a progress nonetheless (Yoon 1997). In addition, Asians could now become naturalized citizens for the first time. Henry's second brother who came in the 1950s as a graduate student was by now a citizen and sponsored Henry in 1967 as soon as he could under a new family preferential provision. Rosa met Henry in 1967 and while they dated for five months before getting married she had little knowledge of his family in America or that she would soon be joining them.

Why They Left

"...I thought I could restart my life." - Chang

Like Rosa, her husband Henry also comes from a large family and is the fifth of eight children. A rarity for the time, his family began their emigration long before the 1965 Immigration Law came into effect. Henry's dream was to practice medicine in America like his younger sister. They were in a way part of a movement of highly trained professionals in Korea making an exodus to America in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s. As Kim and Naughton

point out many who left were in the medical specialization “attracted by expanding U.S. health-care field” (1993:182). Henry was also looking forward to joining the rest of his family in the U.S. being the last one left in Korea. Rosa followed Henry dutifully but with a heavy heart: “I felt sad. My husband had all his family here but I didn’t have anyone so I was not excited.”

Nine years later, Rosa’s little brother Chang became the next sibling to immigrate to America. Looking back, he simply said the reason was for a better future, a sentiment often echoed by the siblings as well as the majority of Korean immigrants. Korea’s political and economic instability was one of the main push factors that attributed to the big surge of emigration during the 1970s and the 1980s. “There was a big discrepancy between America and Korea,” Chang recalled the hardscrabble conditions of Korea, then drew a contrast against the mightiness of the U.S. the way many Korean immigrants tend to do, a national habit born out of looking to America as an economic, military and cultural model since the Korean War. “Korea was a poor country whereas America was the wealthiest country. I was alone and single so I thought I could restart my life.” Chang’s younger sister Katarina who arrived two years later remembered the pervasive malaise in Korea that made her eager to come to America also: “It was after the assassination of the president so there was a lot of political turmoil and student protests. I thought America would be more free and safe, and people talked about the American Dream so it felt like anything was possible there. So I was looking forward to going to America.”

Soon and Young arrived in 1980 with their two young children, four and a half years and 10 months old, for Young’s medical study: “The plastic surgery field was brand new in Korea and even in America it was relatively new. I figured if I trained in America and returned to Korea I’d have more opportunities and be more valuable.” The following year Soon’s younger sister

Young Hee arrived alone and intent on continuing her work as a nurse. She had heard that it was not difficult to find nursing jobs in the U.S. so she thought she could at least take care of herself once she landed a job.

Within months Young Hee's older brother Yong Jae came with his wife Kwang Sook and their 2-year-old daughter. Yong Jae had originally begun the immigration process together with his younger brother Chang but deferred his immigrant visa in order to get married first. However his plans were derailed when his future father-in-law refused to allow marriage if Yong Jae were to take his daughter to America, so instead he started a small wood shop building furniture with the idea of settling in Korea. Unfortunately, in 1980, after just two years in, he lost the factory in a fire. Dismayed and financially destitute, he and his wife decided America was the best option and this time the father-in-law concurred.

"Back then everyone in Korea wanted to go to America" was a notion overwhelmingly shared by the siblings and their spouses. Despite it being an obvious hyperbole, many in Korea were desperate to leave. The per capita income in Korea in 1980 had increased to \$1,355 from \$251 in 1970 but it was still a fraction of America's \$7,787 (Min 2006). The low standard of living in Korea, characterized by lack of job opportunity, and political insecurity stemming from the military dictatorship that lasted from 1960 to 1987 were the two major push factors that propelled Koreans to choose immigration to America in the 1960s through the early 1980s evidenced by the siblings and their spouses (Min 2011b). Nevertheless, not all siblings felt compelled to move to the United States.

The eldest son Song Jae and his older sister Choo Ja, the last siblings to arrive in 1986 and 1987, exhibited a bit more ambivalent attitude towards U.S. immigration. Part of the reason

might be that they had waited six and seven years between petition and visa whereas the others only had to wait a year or so and during that time their enthusiasm for immigration may have waned. Additionally, in the mid-1980s, Korea began undergoing major transformations. A new democratically elected president in 1987 ushered in a new era of political stability. And the 1988 Olympics elevated the country's status on the international stage and brought in an influx of global investment signaling a hopeful economic outlook (Min, 2011a; Yoon 1997).

“I didn't particularly want to immigrate until it was suggested to me,” remembered Song Jae of feeling indifferent. “My business wasn't very successful so I was dissatisfied in that regard but for the most part I was happy living in Korea. So the six years we waited didn't seem long or made me anxious.” Song's wife Son Sook however was more eager to try out America because while Song's business was floundering she would hear from her in-laws on their visits to Korea that the American economy was good and their business was doing well: “So I figured if we went to America and worked hard we might fare better economically.”

For Song Jae and Choo Ja the main impetus for immigration was the fact that the majority of the family was now in America, especially their parents. They confessed to have felt no pressure to follow the others to America from the family, but internally the necessity to join the family seemed to have played a significant role in their decision to leave. For Choo Ja who was most wary of the idea of immigration, the pull of her parents was potent: “There was no pressure but if it were just my siblings here I might not have come but both of my parents were here so that affected the decision.”

The situation of Choo Ja and her husband Kwang Moo was unique in that unlike most Korean immigrants, they saw little incentive in leaving Korea other than being near Choo Ja's

family. They belonged in the slim margin of the Korean upper middle class and had no financial worries. Instead, they anticipated their life would be downgraded if they went to America.

Remembering the discussions she and her husband had over immigration, Choo Ja said, “My husband came because of my decision to join the family but he didn’t want to come. We were not that young, had no skills, and didn’t speak the language so he felt the burden of financial responsibility.” She continued to recount as though the conversation and the tension were still fresh in her memory. “When I first brought up the idea of going to America he told me, ‘We can go but don’t expect to live as well as we do here.’ And he was right. We never had a house again after we left Korea.” In the end, they also factored in better educational prospects for their three adolescent children and with great trepidation decided to make the transition.

Another anomaly was the baby of the family Sonhui who came in 1983 upon graduating from a fashion institute. She was supposed to come with her older sisters Young Hee and Katarina a couple of years earlier but had insisted on remaining in Korea to finish college. Like her brother Chang she was just 23, the youngest age in the family to immigrate. But the Korea Sonhui experienced was almost a different country from the one Chang had left four years ago. She was a typical college student who enjoyed hanging out with her friends in cafés and shops while living with her second sister Choo Ja, who was more like a mother than a sister, and her family in their mansion in an affluent part of Incheon: “I didn’t want to go. I preferred Korea because all my friends were here but I knew I had to go. The majority of my family had already immigrated by the time I graduated from high school and the others were in the process of leaving. I didn’t have a choice because I couldn’t live by myself in Korea.”

Aside from improving their economic situation, the siblings also had plans, albeit vague, of going back to school. Chang and Katarina, having had their education cut short in Korea due to military service and unfavorable financial circumstance, carried dreams of enrolling in college with them to the U.S. But as recent immigrants they soon realized material needs and familial duties would have to take priority and once again they had to put their education on hold. Eventually they both were able to attend community colleges to learn English and take a couple of classes here and there, but, ultimately, time and means did not permit them to study in a focused way towards a degree. Soon who followed her husband to America for his medical career also had hopes of studying more having been an elementary school teacher back in Korea. However, that wish was short lived as raising children and supporting her husband's professional endeavors became a priority over her own personal growth in order to achieve financial security and stability at home.

With the exception of Choo Ja and Sonhui, most came willingly but the decision to immigrate wasn't necessarily an easy one. Even Chang who was anxious to start a new life in America was conflicted. After all, he said, "it was a different country where I didn't speak the language." Rosa, being the first in her family to leave and pregnant with her second child, also found it daunting. For the siblings who made the decision easily, being single helped and the fact there already was family support in place reassured them. "I already had family here or they were in the process of coming so it felt natural. There was no reason for me to stay behind," recalled Katarina. For Yong Jae, it was especially an easy decision after the fire: "I had lost everything. I asked my wife and she also agreed, then the rest of her family was okay."

As for the spouses – whether already married or marrying knowing the possibility of immigration – moving to America did not become a catalyst for conflict. In the case of married couples, all spouses readily agreed with the exception of Kwang Moo. For the single siblings who had to return to Korea to find spouses, three out of four found partners who were already thinking of going to America on their own for education or career related reasons. Kee Hyun, Young Hee’s husband, was weighing the possibility of working at a U.S. branch of the company he was working for. Katarina’s husband Sung Woo had been contemplating a jewelry appraiser certification program in Manhattan. Sonhui’s husband Taesoo was preparing to apply to American universities for a PhD program. Hae Sook, who became Chang’s wife, on the contrary, had no plans to go to America and was reluctant to the idea. She had a job she liked and had clear career plans for herself. To assuage her hesitation, Chang proposed a 5-year trial period to decide whether she liked living in America or not and that became a persuasive factor.

Petitioning

“Brothers and Sisters Act”

Ironically, in retrospect, Michael A. Feighan, a Democrat Representative from Ohio who was a proponent of the national origins system was largely responsible for putting family reunification front and center of the 1965 immigration bill. He maneuvered to alter Senator Ted Kennedy’s proposal of evenly splitting visas between family reunification and special skills to 74% toward family preferences and 26% for skill-based preference and refugees (C. Lee 2015). He passionately argued that the “integrity of the family and the sanctity of the home” are not just

virtues to be vaunted by American citizens but integral to the nation's strength and stability (C. Lee 2015:542).

Feighan, a member of the right wing, transferred this principle to the immigration policy believing the country would be better served with newcomers of families rather than separated individuals. He also believed those families would come from Europe as they had done during the Great Migrations of the past century. In his effort to give families a preferential treatment over skilled professionals, Feighan argued for expanding family reunification preferences to the chagrin of many of his colleagues and President Johnson (Yang 2020: 250). In the process, the fifth preference for brothers and sisters of U.S. citizens ended up with the largest share, 24% of the total number of visas, thus inspiring the label of "Brothers and Sisters Act" for the new immigration law (Reimers 1983; C. Lee 2015; see table 2).

The Lee siblings were the manifestation of the "Brothers and Sisters Act." Five out of Rosa's eight siblings – three brothers and two sisters – immigrated under fifth preference sponsored by her who was a U.S. citizen by 1976. Essentially three entry mechanisms were employed to bring the entire Lee family and spouses from Korea, including second preference, which was also utilized in a prolific way: First was fifth preference through Rosa. Second was second preference by the siblings' father, a lawful permanent resident (LPR), who petitioned the youngest three daughters and his wife. It was also used for sponsoring the spouses by the siblings who arrived as single green card holders and later got married in Korea, except for Chang being a U.S. citizen whose wife qualified as non-quota immediate family. Lastly, the third mechanism, an outlier, was an I-20 education visa used by Taesoo, Sonhui's husband, to enter America as a student in 1987.

Table 2: Breakdown of Family Reunification Provisions in the 1965 Immigration Act

| | |
|--|--|
| Total Preferences | 290,000 |
| Per-country limit | 20,000 |
| Unlimited | Immediate family members (spouses, children, and parents) of U.S. citizens |
| Family Preferences | 74% of total preferences |
| 1st Preference | Unmarried sons and daughters of U.S. citizens 20% (58,000) |
| 2nd Preference | Spouses and unmarried sons and daughters of permanent resident aliens 20% (58,000) |
| 4th Preference | Married sons and daughters of U.S. citizens and their spouses and children 10% (29,000) |
| 5th Preference | Brothers and sisters of U.S. citizens and their spouses and children 24% (69,600) |
| Skill-based Preferences and Refugees | 26% of total preferences |
| 3rd Preference | Members of the professions of exceptional ability in sciences and arts and their spouses and children 10% (29,000) |
| 6th Preference | Skilled or unskilled workers in occupations in which labor is in short supply and their spouses and children 10% (29,000) |
| 7th Preference | Refugees 6% (initially 10,200, increased to 17,400) |
| Source: C. Lee, "Family Reunification and the Limits of Immigration Reform: Impact and Legacy of the 1965 Immigration Act," 2015 | |

After Henry’s older brother petitioned Rosa and Henry in 1967, their immigrant visas were issued within a year but Henry was serving out his military term at the time and their immigration had to be postponed. According to the law, Korean males could not leave the country until they’ve completed the three-year compulsory military duty. In 1970, within months of Henry’s discharge, Henry and Rosa finally left for America with their 2-year-old daughter.

Five years after their arrival Henry had secured a residency at the state hospital and the family had settled in Clarks Summit, a small town northwest of Scranton, Pennsylvania. During this time Rosa's father came to visit from Korea and she got a glimpse of what it might be like to have her own family nearby. So with the yearning for family the seed of sponsoring her own family of eight siblings and parents was unexpectedly planted, out of loneliness.

"I was so happy to have him here so I asked if he'd like to stay," Rosa recalled the conversation she had with her father 45 years ago. "He was fifty-fifty – torn between staying in America and going back to Korea." Her father relented and stayed in the United States long enough to receive his green card under non-quota immediate family through his daughter in 1977. Rosa then began inviting her siblings one by one starting with her little brothers Yong Jae and Chang in 1977. Yong Jae believed his sister wanted to invite the young and single brothers first so they could come and build a base for the rest of the family. Petitioning continued with Rosa's younger sister Soon, her husband and their toddler in 1978 next, followed by Choo Ja, the sister just below Rosa, her husband and their three children, and finally younger brother Song Jae, his wife and their two children in 1980. The youngest three sisters, Young Hee, Katarina and Sonhui, were all sponsored by their father in 1979.

Once the petition was filed in the United States, over in Korea many used brokers specializing in immigration to help them guide through the required documents and expedite the process. Those who took it upon themselves first had to obtain emigration documents at the Korean Ministry of Affairs. Anyone leaving the country first had to be cleared by the Korean government of criminal records, outstanding debt, or completion of military service. The U.S. petitioners then had to provide proofs of financial "fitness" to support their family members who

were arriving. “[When] my father petitioned me my big sister and brother-in-law helped with the proof of income,” recalled Young Hee whose father was a green card holder but had not yet established residence in the U.S. The last step before visa approval was a pre-departure interview at the American Consulate. Katarina remembered how it had the potential to be a thorny last hurdle between you and the American Dream: “If you got someone who was difficult you might not pass but I was doing everything by the book so it went smoothly.”

Table 3: Immigration Chronology and Entry Mechanisms of Siblings & Spouses

| | Name of Sibling & Spouse | Arrival Year | Entry Mechanism | Sponsor |
|----|---|---------------------|----------------------------------|--|
| 1 | Rosa Cho & Henry Cho (1st born daughter & husband) | 1970 | 5th Preference | Henry’s 2nd brother (citizen) |
| 2 | Father | 1977 | Immediate Family | Daughter Rosa (citizen) |
| 3 | Chang Lee (6th born son) | 1979 | 5th Preference | Sister Rosa (citizen) |
| 4 | Soon Choi & Young K Choi (4th born daughter & husband) | 1980 | 5th Preference | Sister Rosa (citizen) |
| 5 | Young Hee Kwon (5th born daughter) | 1981 | 2nd Preference | Father (LPR) |
| 6 | Katarina Lee (7th born daughter) | 1981 | 2nd Preference | Father (LPR) |
| 7 | Yong Jae Lee & Kwang Sook Lee (5th born son & wife) + Mother | 1981 | 5th Preference 2nd Preference | Sister Rosa (citizen) Husband (LPR) |
| 8 | Sonhui Lee (9th born daughter) | 1983 | 2nd Preference | Father (LPR) |
| 9 | Kee Hyun Kwon (Young Hee’s husband) | 1985 | 2nd Preference | Wife Young Hee (LPR) |
| 10 | Hae Sook Lee (Chang’s wife) | 1985 | Immediate Family | Husband Chang (citizen) |
| 11 | Song Jae Lee & Son Sook Lee (3rd born son & wife) | 1986 | 5th Preference | Sister Rosa (citizen) |
| 12 | Choo Ja Lee & Kwang Moo Dan (2nd born daughter & husband) | 1987 | 5th Preference | Sister Rosa (citizen) |
| 13 | Taesoo Kwon (Sonhui’s husband) | 1987 | I-20 visa | PhD Program |
| 14 | Sung Woo Hong (Katarina’s husband) | 1987 | 2nd Preference | Wife Katarina (LPR) |

Then the waiting game began. Despite all the petitions being filed in the span of four years between 1977 and 1980 their wait periods thus their arrival years varied in ways that could not have been anticipated by the family members. Yong Jae and Chang, who were petitioned under fifth preference in 1977, and Young Hee, Katarina and Sonhui under second preference in 1979, all remembered their wait periods to be under a year. But the lag in immigration processing for fifth preference siblings began to show as early as 1978. Soon and her husband Young expected to wait just few months and Young even terminated his medical training in preparation for the move but few months stretched to one year and six months and by the time they received their visas they had a second child. For perspective, in 1970, family reunification provisions accounted for 25 percent of legal permanent immigration but by 1980 that number had jumped to 40 percent (C. Lee 2015).

Furthermore, between 1978 and 1980, a dramatic surge of applicants created extensive backlogs in immigration processing which led to even longer wait periods for Song Jae and Choo Ja. Their children were kindergarten age when the process began and by the time of their departure six and seven years later, they were entering puberty. Song recalled waiting indefinitely and also thinking it could be any day: "I thought [we'd have to wait] maybe two to three years because when my brothers left that's how long it took." For Choo Ja and her family the wait dragged on an extra year due to a post office mishap in America.

The Korean immigration in the United States had increased rapidly between 1976 and 1990, averaging 30,000 per year, until it began to slow down in 1991. And so it happened that 1986 and 1987, the years Song Jae and Choo Ja arrived, saw the highest numbers of Korean immigrants to the U.S. on record at 35,776 and 35,849 and they remain as the peak of U.S.

Korean immigration to date (see table 4). In 1986, Korea was one of the top three immigrant sending countries that accounted for 38 percent of the fifth preference backlog of 1.2 million people worldwide waiting to come to the U.S. (Goering 1998). In 1989, the longest backlog was seven years for brothers and sisters under fifth preference which was congruent with the longest wait period of the Lee siblings (Arnold et al. 1989).

Table 4: Number of Korean Immigrants (by Country of Birth) to the U.S., 1965-2009

| Year | Number of Immigrants | Year | Number of Immigrants |
|------|----------------------|-------|----------------------|
| 1965 | 2,165 | 1988 | 34,703 |
| 1966 | 2,492 | 1989 | 34,222 |
| 1967 | 3,956 | 1990 | 32,301 |
| 1968 | 3,811 | 1991 | 26,518 |
| 1969 | 6,045 | 1992 | 19,359 |
| 1970 | 9,314 | 1993 | 18,026 |
| 1971 | 14,297 | 1994 | 16,011 |
| 1972 | 18,876 | 1995 | 16,047 |
| 1973 | 22,930 | 1996 | 18,185 |
| 1974 | 28,028 | 1997 | 14,239 |
| 1975 | 28,362 | 1998 | 14,268 |
| 1976 | 30,803 | 1999 | 12,840 |
| 1977 | 30,917 | 2000 | 15,830 |
| 1978 | 29,288 | 2001 | 20,742 |
| 1979 | 29,248 | 2002 | 21,021 |
| 1980 | 32,320 | 2003 | 12,512 |
| 1981 | 32,663 | 2004 | 19,766 |
| 1982 | 31,724 | 2005 | 26,562 |
| 1983 | 33,339 | 2006 | 24,386 |
| 1984 | 33,042 | 2007 | 22,405 |
| 1985 | 35,253 | 2008 | 26,666 |
| 1986 | 35,776 | 2009 | 25,859 |
| 1987 | 35,849 | Total | 1,002,966 |

Sources: Min, 2011b; INS, Annual Reports, 1965-1978 and Statistical Yearbook, 1979-2001; Office of Immigration Statistics, Yearbook of Immigration Statistics, 2002-2009.

Preparing

"We brought nothing but our bodies." – Yong Jae

More than just legalities immigration is a multi-layered, amplified moving – the resetting of one's life filled with uncertainties, not knowing how much of the old functions and features from the prior life would still be useful or remain. To this extent, it is an event fraught with logistical, material and emotional preparations, and this was especially true during the early years of post-1965 immigration before globalization and the Internet. Both money and bags the immigrants could bring were limited. When Rosa and Henry came in 1970 the cap on currency allowed without having to declare to the customs was \$200 per person. For the two of them and their 2-year-old daughter they brought \$600. In 1979 when Chang came the limit had increased to \$2,000 and he was able to bring that much. On the contrary, Yong Jae and his wife Kwang Sook who came two years later after a fire misfortune barely made it out of Korea. Between the two of them and their daughter they had \$150 total, put together with a gift of \$50 from the mother of one of Kwang's friends and \$100 that someone else had given them. "There was maybe a limit of \$2000 you could bring with you but we didn't even have that," Yong recalled. "We scrambled to come up with enough money to pay for our plane tickets."

By 1985 the monetary limit had further increased to \$10,000 yielding a bit of financial cushion for the immigrants who had the means. Kee Hyun, Young Hee's husband, who had an enviable job in Korea as an adman at a big automobile company, was able to bring enough money to buy a new car when he arrived in the United States. Taesoo, Sonhui's husband, who came in 1987 as a PhD student also did not face financial challenges having extended his

contract with the company he had worked for in Korea with the promise of returning after his study. In addition to the \$900 a month in stipend from the university, he had secured a salary plus \$500 in monthly living expenses which was not bad for a graduate student.

Even though there was a limit of two bags per person, for many of the siblings, there wasn't much to pack, especially if they were single. For Chang, one was more than enough. Many of them had been waiting for a year or two for the immigration to finalize so they had time to prepare incrementally. "We heard from my sisters-in-law that they were taking comforters so we shipped our bedding and some pots," remembered Rosa. Linens and china that were part of the wedding dowry were a priority for the married. Hae Sook brought her favorite blanket which she still has. So did Kwang Sook: "I packed my favorite blankets including a mink blanket, pillow shams – all the items that I brought with me when we got married – and some dishes. I still have them. We didn't do any special shopping. There was no money so it didn't even occur to us." The single siblings filled the bags mostly with their clothes and some books, and whatever room still left was taken up by hard-to-find items requested from America, such as red chili powder, dried anchovies and even tatami mats as Sonhui had to bring for her mother.

For the late immigrants like Choo Ja, Song Jae and their spouses there were more to do since their lives in Korea were entrenched with more trappings. They had houses to sell, business affairs to tidy up, and furniture and a household full of belongings to sort through and decide what to dispose of, what to give away, and finally, what was essential enough to be jammed into one of the two bags. "We just brought whatever we were using," Song jogged his memory of packing 36 years ago. "I don't remember buying anything new to bring – just some clothing, bedding. But my wife even packed a desk lamp. Oh, and I brought some cassette tapes too."

Conflicted about leaving, for Choo Ja the entire ordeal was trying: “I went shopping for some new clothes and duvets but I didn’t get the same joy I used to feel from buying something nice.”

A range of emotions layered differently at different junctures were felt by the siblings and their spouses not only from the thought of moving to a foreign country but also from living in limbo while waiting. Soon in particular remembered those feelings vividly: “I wanted to come as soon as possible. I didn’t like being neither here nor there. Since we decided to come I was anxious to get here and get started, whatever that may be.” During this period, she also had to fend off voices that cast doubt on her decision. “My friends were discouraging of me leaving. They’d say, ‘Your husband’s soon going to be a doctor here so why leave and make things harder.’ But I thought it was the right thing to follow the path my husband chose and be by his side.” Under more dire circumstances Yong Jae also felt impatient to start anew once he made up his mind to try his luck in America. “There was no preparation. I wanted to leave as soon as possible,” he recalled. “There were many complications that arose after the fire so I was anxious to tidy up those problems and go to America. We brought nothing but our bodies. We basically shoved our clothes and maybe some dishes into the two bags that we were allowed to bring and that was it.”

The would-be immigrants felt some combination of anxiousness, excitement and fear on the eve of their new life in a new country that many Koreans could only dream of going. Kee Hyun remembered being “anxious about embarking on a new chapter” and summed up what almost everyone felt: “I was filled with half fear and half anticipation – leaving everything I had known behind, including family, friends and colleagues and wondering whether I’ll be able to adjust well to the new environment.” There was a sense of levity and stoicism too. Katarina felt

happy at the prospect of joining her family and Song Jae was “neither sad nor happy,” instead he felt light and thought, he was “on the verge of a new chapter in life.” Nevertheless sadness was pervasive for the spouses who were leaving their families behind. “We made the rounds to say goodbye to friends and relatives, and the closer it got to the date it started to sink in and I got sad,” Son Sook recalled her last days in Korea. “My parents, especially my mother was very sad, and my father wished me to prosper and be well.” Sonhui was sad because she preferred to stay in Korea where her friends were: “My friends threw me a lot of going-away parties. At the time it was a rare thing for Koreans to travel abroad so my friends were envious.”

For some though, sadness was tempered by believing their absence would be temporary. Young and Soon always had clear plans to return to Korea after his training in plastic surgery and gave themselves five or so years in the United States. Young Hee’s nursing license gave her confidence to decide if she didn’t like America she would go back to Korea. Thinking in short terms allowed Hae Sook who was giving America a 5-year trial period to hold on to the belongings she could not bring because she thought she’d “return to them eventually.” Contrarily, those who knew they were leaving permanently felt the weight of its significance. “We knew we were leaving for good and I didn’t have any thoughts of returning because we had nothing left in Korea and all my family was in the U.S.,” Song Jae remembered the resolve he felt as he prepared to leave. “I would’ve felt like a stranger in Korea. I no longer had a foundation.”

When the siblings were immigrating the Internet and affordable air travels were faraway fantasies. “Air fares were really expensive back then so the common belief was that once you left for America there was no coming back,” explained Yong Jae reinforcing the perception of many Koreans at the time that air travel and trips abroad were something reserved for the rich. And to

this extent, they assumed immigration meant that once someone left Korea that was the last time you saw of them. It was a bittersweet moment wherein the leavers experienced a mixed emotion of excitement, anxiousness and sadness, and the senders a confluence of feeling happy, and perhaps even envious, for their daughter's, son's, sister's, brother's and friend's new opportunities, and broken heartedness. As such, when Rosa was leaving for America her parents genuinely believed they would not see her again for a long time, if not ever. "Back then you could only write letters, phone calls were too expensive, so I felt very alone in a foreign land," remembered Rosa. "I think my parents also felt the same way. They'd say, 'when will we see you again?' or 'likely we'll never see you again.'" They could not have anticipated that in a few years time Rosa would pay for her father's air fare for him to visit her in Scranton, Pennsylvania, he would become a green card holder, and in due time their entire children would come to the United States and create a family unit that is large enough to be a community unto itself in a place called Connecticut.

Arriving

"... even the air felt strange." – Son Sook

After a near decade long gap between 1970, the year Rosa and Henry arrived with their daughter, and 1979 when Chang arrived alone as a 23-year-old, in quick succession, the rest of the siblings arrived in two clusters – in the early 1980s, then in the mid-1980s with the final arrival of four family members in 1987. Until the mid-1980s direct flights from Seoul to New York were scarce and expensive leading many of them to have layovers in Hawaii or Anchorage.

As a result, those far-flung places became first points of entry into the U.S. where almost half of the siblings and spouses declared their presence by filling out the 6059B customs form. Later arrivals who came after 1985 had the convenience of flying directly to the JFK airport in Flushing, New York but missed out on seeing another, more exotic part of America. Their green cards arrived in the mail after a couple months making it official that they were now lawful permanent residents of the United States, or resident aliens as they were called back then.

Rosa does not remember the exact date she arrived in America, just that it was sometime in January in 1970 and on the day she was supposed to leave there was a blizzard which grounded all flights and delayed her departure until the next day. But almost like a dream, once the flight took off the snowy winter in Korea faded into memory and she and her family found themselves in the tropics of Hawaii where the plane made a layover before continuing onto Los Angeles where the weather was just as wonderful. “I saw all kinds of flowers in the streets and was very impressed because in Korea there were hardly any flower beds,” Rosa recalled being enchanted by the luxury and bounty of Southern California. “It felt like another world.” Like Rosa, many others had clear memories of the weather because it became their first visceral impression of America. “It was clear both in Korea and here. But what I remember distinctly is how even the air felt strange,” said Son Sook. “It wasn’t neither good nor bad, just different. It was June and it was warm and beautiful, and it smelled different.”

Some of the women in particular had vivid memories of what they wore the day they arrived having bought special garments for the occasion. Katarina, for example, wore a checkered blouse in red, white and blue because those colors represented America: “I went shopping in preparation for coming to America thinking I needed to look fancy although I found

out after that America was pretty casual.” Choo Ja wore a two-piece skirt set she bought specially for the trip, but in retrospect had similar misgivings as Katarina, “I wore a pleated skirt for comfort but if I had known better I’d just worn a track suit.” For some the memories of what they wore and the weather intertwined. Soon, who came in March, recalled the outfit she wore in impressive detail: “It was warm in Korea so I was wearing a silk blouse and skirt set and a trench coat without lining.” Upon landing she realized the temperature was much lower in America and that they were all underdressed for the Appalachian cold of Scranton. “I dressed my son in a sport jacket and my daughter in a dress. But when we arrived there was so much snow and it was freezing, and Pennsylvania where we went was even colder.”

From the airport the siblings and spouses were picked up by their earlier arrival siblings. In 1970 when Rosa and Henry touched down in Philadelphia, Henry’s older brother-in-law came to the airport as he was the only one with a car in the family. Airport pickups were coordinated so that the new immigrants would arrive on a weekend or a day off as not to disturb the work schedule in America. And when an entire family was coming it was also to ensure more than one car was available so they can fit the multiple “immigration bags” as well as all the family members. When Song Jae and Son Sook left Korea with their two children they made sure it fell on a Saturday. “We planned it so that we would arrive on Sunday so that it would be convenient for my brothers-in-law to pick us up at the airport,” recalled Son Sook. Song Jae’s younger brothers Yong Jae and Chang met them at JFK in two cars – a station wagon and a delivery truck – to make sure they’d be able to bring all eight enormous pieces of luggage filled with Song Jae and his family’s entire compacted life from Korea.

Between 1979 and 1983 there were four anchors where the early arrival siblings and spouses moored themselves. First was Poughkeepsie, NY where Rosa's family lived when Henry had an internship at a hospital upstate New York. When Chang arrived in 1979 he first stayed with Rosa, Henry and their three children in Poughkeepsie then followed them to Scranton, PA when Henry was offered a residency at the Clarks Summit State Hospital shortly thereafter. Chang lived with Rosa's family until he left to join the U.S. Army just a couple of months into his new life in America. Rosa and her baby brother Chang didn't know each other all that well given the 16-year age gap between them – when Rosa got married Chang was still in middle school. Therefore, the two months Chang stayed with Rosa was a rare opportunity that allowed the two siblings to get to know each other. Chang remembered looking out after his eldest sister and her three children while Henry was away at his new residency and as for Rosa, she fondly recalled how good he was with her children and teaching him how to drive. "Of course now he's a much better driver than I am," remarked Rosa as she reminisced the brief time they spent together over 40 years ago.

When Soon, Young and their two children arrived in 1980, Rosa and Henry hosted them in their new home in Scranton, PA, which became the second anchor, for three months until Young got an internship at a hospital in Mt. Vernon, New York. "I was desperate to get back on our own feet," Soon recalled experiencing both discomfort and gratitude while staying with Rosa and her family. "I felt burdensome to my sister and brother-in-law, as well as thankful." Young Hee arrived in 1981 and stayed with her sister Soon and brother-in-law Young in Mt. Vernon. Within months younger sister Katarina and their father joined them, making Mt. Vernon the third anchor. After a few weeks of their arrival Young was offered a residency at the Yale-New Haven

Hospital in Connecticut and together they relocated to a New Haven suburb, and once more Soon and Young provided a home for the newly arrived and now an extended family of seven lived tightly together.

In the summer of 1981 yet more family members arrived from Korea – Soon’s mother, younger brother Yong Jae, his wife and daughter – and they all congregated in Soon and Young’s two-bedroom apartment in Hamden, CT, now the fourth anchor. Shortly before, Chang had driven up from Louisiana looking to join the family after being on his own in the South for a couple of years. Now a family of 12 – nine adults and three little children – were packed into a small apartment in a low-income building desperate for work and room to spread out. “It was a ground floor apartment so the floors were damp but we slept anywhere we could – on the living room floor, sofa, wherever,” recounted Yong Jae of the challenges the family faced during this inchoate stage of immigrant life.

Despite the challenging conditions however, there was also a bond that formed from going through a hardship together. “But we have a lot of good memories of that place,” Yong Jae made a point of adding. From this point on, until brothers Yong Jae and Chang were able to establish financial independence and get the family situated in a new home, the family’s residency, as well as livelihood, were reliant on Young’s hospital work and salary. The rest of the siblings and spouses who arrived in the mid-1980s also gravitated to CT because that was now the base. Serendipitously or by fate, the happenstance of Young’s residency in New Haven created a lasting legacy, for this was the only reason Connecticut became the main settlement hub for the majority of the Lee family.

Imagined vs. Reality

“I heard from my father that America was like heaven.” – Sonhui

America in the minds of the siblings and their spouses before leaving Korea was a country of abundance in every way – food, money, natural resources and power. Their positive views were informed and influenced by the stories of their family members, Hollywood films as well as America’s involvement during the Korean War which was especially poignant and potent for the older generation of intending immigrants. Most of them were born during the 1940s and 1950s (Henry who is the oldest was born in 1939) and many of them were children or babies when the Korean War broke out. For these immigrants, the American military support during the war and the ensuing geopolitical ties between the two countries, such as the establishment of U.S. military bases throughout South Korea, the ubiquitous presence of American GI’s on the streets, and the facilitation of wholesale import of American cultures – from movies and TV shows, music and magazines, to hamburgers and candy bars – made a big impact on their opinions of America and imprinted images of America as a mighty and magical place.

“America was Korea’s ally during the war and aided in its recovery, so from that vantage point America seemed mighty, a great country in every way – economically, globally, politically,” described Young of the perception many in Korea had of the United States. “A rich and great country – that was the impression we had at the time. I think most Koreans thought this because no other country helped Korea as much as the U.S.” For Son Sook, a run-in with a G.I. in schoolyard as a little girl etched a lasting impression of Americans as kind: “When I was six or seven, I saw a lot of American G.I.s near where I lived. One morning I was playing in the

schoolyard alone and out of nowhere this American soldier walked up to me and handed me a box. I had no idea what it was so I ran home with excitement to see what was in it. My mother and I opened the box together and inside we found cookies, fruit flavored chewing gum, rainbow colored jellies, crackers, jam and small sausages. I didn't know at the time but it was a C-ration." Son Sook's excitement was still palpable as she recalled the memory of this bewildering day from her childhood. "You can imagine how ecstatic I must've been. I'd never seen such food, never mind eaten them, before in my life." For Yong Jae, "America was the most powerful country in the world so anything seemed possible." It was a sentiment felt by most.

On the contrary, Hae Sook, Sonhui and her husband Taesoo, who were born in the early 1960s, had more ambivalent views towards America. The Korea where they came of age was different from their siblings' or even spouse's to the extent that Korea was more economically stable and they grew up when American culture was more seamlessly integrated as though it were their own. They were young, barely in their 20s, having fun and felt free. "I didn't idealize America," remembered Taesoo. "Although Korea was under military dictatorship at the time we had freedom to do what we wanted to do." Sonhui, who resisted going to the United States, heard her father say that America was like heaven after he returned from his trip when she was in high school and it piqued her curiosity: "I wanted to see it for myself whether it was really like heaven." Nonetheless the America she found upon arrival was far from "heaven." Her family's home was shabby and crowded and not elegant like her sister's back in Korea. Additionally, she had to work at the dry cleaners with her family whereas in Korea she didn't have to worry about money. She did however find the drive-throughs at banks and fast-food restaurants impressive,

something unthinkable in Korea. “This is how things are done in an advanced country,” she thought to herself and wrote about it to the friends back in Korea.

Choo Ja, having lived in a big house and hosted her parents and siblings whenever they came for visits from America, had heard all the challenges they faced as immigrants when she was still in Korea. “I was aware of how things worked in America and what it would take to live there through them,” she wryly recalled. “Therefore I anticipated that it might not be what I want especially because my family was financially comfortable in Korea. The outlook wasn’t particularly rosy.” Apart from Choo Ja’s apprehension, more came to America with high hopes inspired by Hollywood movies and various other forms of American culture they consumed in Korea. They expected to find a country that was refined, grand and glistening with only big mansions or skyscrapers. Young Hee who was most career-minded out of all the women however viewed America in terms of opportunities in the job market for women. “There were a lot of limitations for women in Korea at the time. The common notion was that once a woman got married she’d quit her job and start taking care of the house and children,” she described. As a trained nurse her hope was to continue her work in America, so she focused on work culture. “To me, in America even old people could work and there were more chances for women.”

Once they arrived in the United States and were able to see the country for themselves the glossy ideals they carried with them quickly started to fall away. What they experienced on the ground was a reality that revealed dualities. They saw the seedy sections in big cities like Philadelphia and New York and poor neighborhoods near the army base in Louisiana. “When we went to Philadelphia for my husband’s ECFMG (Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates) exam we had to drive through an unsavory section of the city,” Soon recalled. “In that

moment I thought it was the same everywhere, that dark and light co-existed. My fantasy of America was burst then.” In Mt. Vernon, Young prohibited his wife and sisters-in-law from going outside alone saying it was too dangerous for them. In New Haven, Hae Sook was advised to carry a \$20 bill by her husband in case she got mugged.

In their first impressions, as Soon would say, the siblings and spouses also found the light side of America which were pleasing. They were impressed by the lush flora of Los Angeles, peace and quiet of upstate New York, the sparsely placed houses in Connecticut, and the general sense of vastness they did not experience in Korea, as well as the leisurely lifestyle that came with seemingly having everything in abundance. Kwang Sook was surprised to find the same plants and trees that she grew up with were also in America, even dandelions, which made her think “it wasn’t all that different from Korea.” Song Jae found the people, including the police, friendly and spent time in the Green in New Haven with his young son talking with strangers. For Henry it was a dream come true to be in the same country as his family at last and studying medicine in the United States.

But some found the country and its customs just strange, even repellent. “I immediately felt like a foreigner in a new country,” Choo Ja remembered the uncanniness she felt. “I didn’t really like it.” The sounds were foreign and they tried to decipher them as though they were coming from a different species and learned that Americans had different habits. “At the grocery store I would constantly hear people say ‘excuse me’ and it confused me because they said it even when they didn’t even actually bump into you,” Son Sook remembered finding this behavior by Americans odd because Koreans didn’t act this way around other people in public

places. “Then I figured it out and thought it was a bit much. But they don’t say ‘excuse me’ so much any more.”

After arrival, Young was in for a rude awakening when he realized that his medical credentials from Korea were practically useless. He had already completed the U.S. accredited medical program in Korea but most hospitals only accepted American certified credentials for residency. Through his older classmates Young was aware of the changes in the rules to some extent while still in Korea but he was not expecting a near total rejection. The health care boom in the 1960s that placed foreign doctors in high demand had given way to the job scarcity during the mid-1970s financial crisis. In an effort to ease the competition in the sagging job market Congress passed the Eilberg Act and the Health Professions Educational Assistance Act of 1976 (Yochum and Agarwal 1988).

They were reflexive measures intended to curtail occupational immigration and medical professionals were negatively impacted by the new mandate of employment with U.S. companies prior to immigration for visa approval. Additionally, physicians and surgeons were removed from “eligible categories of labor certification” with the help of lobbying by medical professional associations which rendered credentials of immigrant doctors like Young invalid (Yoon 1997:68). Regardless of his permanent resident status, Young had to brunt the blows of the new modifications in the law as a foreign doctor and found himself at a career crossroads that he did not anticipate with the weight of providing for the family growing everyday.

Choo Ja did not warm up to America with time passing. Her discomfort of being a foreigner in a strange country persisted. “I may have gotten more used to the surroundings but the gaze was the same as before,” she recalled. “Just like I looked strange to Americans, to me

Americans were strange.” Having been a fairly carefree college student in Korea, Sonhui struggled greatly with adapting to her new environment and social status when she first came to the United States before she was married to Taesoo. She dreamt of returning to Korea everyday but couldn’t find anyone in her family to feel sorry for her. "Nobody understood or sympathized with me. They’d just say you can work and make money, stop being resentful and nostalgic about Korea,” she said candidly. Katarina who was just two years older than Sonhui had an entirely different disposition and quietly took on whatever responsibilities thrown at her for the familial survival in America. The sharp contrast between the two sisters confused the family and made them think Sonhui was acting immaturely.

It is understandable however that someone college age would rebel against immigrant work ethic and collective mentality. Sonhui went on to explain the resistance she felt about being part of a marginalized immigrant life after experiencing a vibrant life of a regular 23-year-old in Korea: “I got really depressed because I couldn’t even talk to my family about it. I also couldn’t stand how we had to do everything together. I was at an age where I much preferred to be with my friends than family so I think that was one of the reasons. You get up in the morning, go to the store and work the entire day together, come home and eat dinner together. Even on the weekends you still do the same things with the same people.” Eventually her mood began to lift when the family’s economic situation improved and they moved into a new house. The family even started taking short trips on the weekends and she enrolled in an English language class at a nearby community college. In less than a year, however, her mother felt badly enough and sent her along when her sister Katarina and brother Chang who were of marriage age returned to Korea with the goal of finding spouses.

Finding Spouses in Korea

“We never thought marrying a non-Korean was even a possibility.” – Katarina

Arnold et al. predicted regarding the children of future immigrants of Korea “...there is considerable potential for unmarried children to get married and have families, but since a large majority will be single it is reasonable to assume when they move to the United States substantial proportion will marry U.S. residents or permanent residents” (1989:830). What they underestimated in their calculation however was how strong the pull of the homeland and their connection to the people of their native country would be for the early 1980s Korean immigrant children. The youngest four Lee siblings who were single when they came to America – Young Hee, Chang, Katarina and Sonhui – all wound up returning to Korea within two to five years with the intent of finding marriage partners.

The geography of their settlement may have contributed to their marital choices and processes given that Connecticut did not have a high Asian immigration population. In New York or Los Angeles there might have been chances to meet other Korean immigrants of their age but they hardly came across other Asians, never mind Koreans, with dating potential in their area. “I was already 27 and had not dated anyone while in America. So my brother and I went with the intention of meeting someone to marry,” Katarina described the impetus for returning to Korea. “We never thought marrying a non-Korean was even a possibility and there were no Koreans in CT where we lived.”

Even the career-driven Young Hee began thinking of marriage seriously after she met a fellow Korean nurse who helped her prepare for the nursing exam. She told Young Hee who was

nearing 30 the story of how she herself used to focus only on getting her nursing license and shunned socializing but later when she looked around all her friends were married and by the time she decided to get married in a hurry the only man left was an acquaintance of her uncle's who was 20 years her senior. This story affected Young Hee who had also made getting her nursing license in the U.S. a top priority: "I had been in America for a couple of years when I heard the story and it got me thinking that I might find myself in a similar predicament later and I began to panic."

Remarkably all of them were able to find suitable mates within a short period of time – in mere months from the first meeting to wedding – and were able to sponsor their respective spouses and bring them to America after a year or so of wait period. Except for Sonhui who met her future husband by chance, the other three were set up on blind dates. Efficiency was of utmost importance as they not only had to return to their work in America but if they stayed abroad for more than six months they risked losing their permanent resident status. While the siblings were bringing a new member to add to the ever expanding family in the United States, the spouses were leaving their own families behind. The common belief in the 1980s Korea that once you left for America you were likely not coming back made following their spouses to America not an easy choice but they did, and despite their doubts in the beginning and plans to return to Korea after a few years, they all remained.

Young Hee returned to Korea in 1983 when she turned 30 and went on several blind dates before she met Kee Hyun through an introduction by her cousin in L.A. who was married to Kee Hyun's friend. They met in the summer of 1983 and got married in February 1984. She returned to America alone in order to take the RN exam then stayed for a few months longer while her

younger sister Katarina went to Korea to find a suitor herself and looked after the dry cleaning store in her absence. Around the time Kee Hyun's spousal petition became finalized, she returned to Korea and she and Kee Hyun came to America together in March 1985. When Kee Hyun was introduced to Young Hee, despite the prestige of his job, he was burnt out and was considering other options including a transfer to a U.S. branch. After he got married as he was preparing to join his wife in America he also didn't rule out the possibility of returning to Korea or going someplace completely new.

At age 28, Chang returned to Korea in 1984 after five years in the United States to find someone to marry. "There were no opportunities to meet Korean women, especially in Connecticut," he recalled. He met Hae Sook who was 24 after two months in Korea. She was a kindergarten teacher and had plans of running her own facility someday but those plans were derailed after she met Chang. "I liked him right away. He had good *insang* (kind impression)," she remembered. As smitten as she was, she was also on the fence about abandoning her goals and family, and sensing this from her Chang put the pressure on. "He kept telling me I needed to decide soon because he needs to get back to work." Chang, in an attempt to persuade her, suggested that if she didn't like America after five years they could go live in Korea. After dating for just over a month they got married in October 1984. He returned to America in a hurry to run the two dry cleaning business he now owned, as well as not to overstay the six months limit. Hae Sook then had to wait one year and three months for the spousal sponsorship to be approved and made the trip to America alone in December 1985.

Katarina returned to Korea again in the fall of 1985, this time with her parents, when she was 28. The first time she met Sung Woo was at a relative's birthday party at the urging of her

mother's cousin. A couple of weeks later, sometime in October, she and Sung Woo were properly introduced with both of their parents present. From this point on, everything happened with great speed. They got engaged in November and were married by December 1985. "After we met with our parents, my husband came to see me every other day at 10 in the morning and we'd hang out until it was time for the last train to Seoul," Katarina recounted those few weeks of intense dating when Sung Woo had to rush to make the last train back to Seoul after bringing her back to Incheon at the end of their date. "So even though it was for a brief period we spent many hours together. And in that short time I felt like we got to know each other pretty well."

She stayed in Korea for a few more months after the wedding and returned to the U.S. the following April to avoid overstaying. Sung Woo waited a year and eight months for the sponsorship to be approved and joined his wife in America in August 1987. He had been interested in selling and appraising gold jewelry prior to meeting Katarina and planned to enroll at the Gemological Institute of America in Manhattan once he came to the United States. He also had a clear intention of returning to Korea after receiving the appraiser certificate.

When Sonhui returned to Korea in the winter of 1985 at age 25 she went to a language academy to improve her English. There she met Taesoo, a graduate student who was preparing for a PhD program in the United States and wished to be more comfortable speaking English. She already had marriage on her mind during this trip to Korea and Taesoo seemed like a good candidate. "I thought he would be a good person for me to marry since he was planning to go to America anyway," remembered Sonhui. They began dating in February and met everyday for 100 days until Sonhui had to go back to America in May to maintain her green card status and a month later Taesoo enlisted in the army. After six months Sonhui returned to Korea to reunite

with Taesoo, who was readying an early discharge having served in a six-month special program that was newly created for men who had advanced degrees by the president who had a military-age son. They got engaged in April and were married in December 1986. She stayed in Korea and lived with Taesoo and his parents for six months until she and Taesoo left for America in July 1987 for his PhD program at Brandeis University.

Chapter 4: The Process of Staying

Once in the United States, with the wait period behind, the siblings and their spouses finally began a new chapter in their lives. Aboard a 13-hour flight headed for New York with his wife and two children, Song Jae didn't sleep much preoccupied by the thoughts of what events awaited him in the new country: "I wasn't regretting leaving Korea. It was more what was ahead that filled me with half excitement and half anticipation." What awaited, the new immigrants soon discovered, was a period of adjustment and struggle. After a brief moment of relishing being reunited with family members they had not seen for many years and getting over jet lag, they faced a new reality that of a foreigner constrained by limitations of the language, mobility and cultural understanding. They now had to rely on their earlier arrival siblings for housing, getting around, enrolling their children in schools, and even learning how to buy groceries.

The Period of Struggle

"There were no guidelines for new immigrants on how to get your footing in the new country."

- Kee Hyun

The siblings and their spouses had been in the United States long enough by now for the initial culture shock and disorientation from displacement to have been largely worn off. Nevertheless, the consensus was, unsurprisingly, the first year was a period of struggle. On one hand, they were impressed by the systemic organization of American society, on the other, they felt shut out from it altogether. Not knowing the language, being away from their friends and family (for the spouses), doubting whether they had made the right decision in uprooting

themselves and their children, and not knowing how they were going to make a living all weighed heavily on them. Despite those struggles, it was also during this period that the new immigrants received a crash course in American culture and system. And they not only figured out their way around the new geography but also figured out a way to find resolve within themselves, and a way to gradually become independent from the larger family.

Chang came to the United States just three months after his discharge from the mandatory military duty. Before enlisting he had plans to return to college after his service but the immigration petition he wasn't aware of came through and he took a chance on the path he did not plan. When he arrived in 1979, America was still recovering from the oil crisis and the unpropitious combination of depressed economy, lack of the English language and his foreigner status made it virtually impossible for him to find work. He was tipped off about a loading job at a local flour mill in Scranton, PA but was told that he was too small for carrying bags of flour. Then someone told him about the benefits of joining the U.S. Army, so just five months after his discharge from the Korean Air Force he found himself on a military base again – this time as an America soldier in Fort Benning, Georgia. Later while he was stationed in Fort Lee, Louisiana he became fast acculturated in American ways: His English improved, he went to the movies and bowling with American soldiers on the weekends, and he began attending a baptist church.

When Yong Jae and his wife Kwang Sook were preparing their immigration in Korea his younger brother Chang had already left the U.S. Army and was working at a Korean-owned retail store in New Orleans and attending college in the evening. Except for Rosa's family the rest of the family in the U.S. was now living in Hamden, a New Haven suburb in CT. Young Hee, Katarina and their father lived with older sister Soon, her husband Young and their two little

children in a two-bedroom apartment getting by on Young's modest resident salary. Then Young Hee got a job at a nursing home nearby and started to contribute to the overall income. Desperate for money and independence, the father beckoned Chang to join them so he can help out the family that was reliant on Young for everything including mobility. By the time Yong Jae and Kwang Sook arrived in Connecticut with their mother and baby daughter from Korea, Chang had already driven up from Louisiana and joined the family up North.

The two brothers set out to look for work immediately with the goal of financial and housing independence from their brother-in-law Young. However, while Chang with his fluency in English and veteran status was employable, Yong Jae was not. Not one employer called him back, not even for janitorial work. Now there were 12 people living together in the same apartment and even with good camaraderie between family members it was not a sustainable situation. The family borrowed and pooled their money together to somehow buy their first dry cleaning business, coincidentally called Lee's Cleaners, in New Haven during this period. But it was just a small drop store that two people could sufficiently manage. "It didn't generate that much income and there were too many of us," Yong Jae recalled.

Kwang Sook had a cousin who was working at a U-tote-M convenience store in Houston, Texas and was told that the third shift was available. Three and a half months after their arrival, Yong Jae and Kwang borrowed money for plane tickets and flew down there in December with their 3-year-old daughter. They got hired for the second shift but often worked the third shift also. In a month's time, with no overhead because they were staying with Kwang's cousin and hours of overtime, they were able to buy a used car, an outcome they found incredulous. "We worked for a month and now we had a car. In Korea buying a car was incredibly difficult. It was

unthinkable buying even a used car after working just one month,” said Yong Jae. As he recalled he couldn’t resist comparing the high wage in America to what people made in Korea at the time. “If you worked hard you got paid fairly so it made me think America was a great country.” Nevertheless, they did run to a problem when no one would rent a studio apartment to them with a baby. So Yong Jae’s father flew down and took their daughter back to Connecticut with him. It was not ideal but felt like the only solution in order to make and save money.

Economic uncertainty and the hardship that followed weren’t the only facets of early immigrant life. Those who came to the United State with specialized skills also experienced challenges of being a foreigner in a new country. When Henry first arrived in the United States, he had plans to become a pediatricist. But the workload and the schedule of an intern proved to be too physically demanding for him. After a fainting episode during a shift he decided on psychiatry instead convinced it would take less toll on his body. Moreover, the language barrier became another challenge that was even more difficult to surmount. Although his medical trainings back in Korea, which was all done with American textbooks, had prepared him with written English, hearing and communicating were another matter.

Regardless of education levels in Korea, the lack of proficiency in the English language presented by far the greatest obstacle to all the siblings and spouses with the sole exception of Young who had an early interest in learning the language even belonging to an English language club in high school and felt comfortable in an Anglosphere. In the beginning learning English was an urgent priority and many of the family members attended English language classes. But once they acquired survival-level knowledge of the language, the demands of running a business, or multiple businesses for some, and raising children took precedence over everything else.

Katarina was used to urbanity in Incheon however crude it was in the late 1970s. But once in the United States she found herself at the mercy of her older family members for mobility and livelihood and had to come to terms with loss of independence. “I realized there was nothing I could do on my own,” remembered Katarina of her life during those early months in the U.S. She had dreamt of going back to school in America but there was no car and no money. While she lived at her sister Soon’s she could not come and go freely. Her brother-in-law was the only one with a car so after he went to work the rest of the family was stranded at home.

Hae Sook imagined all of America to be like New York. Thus she was surprised to find that much of America was actually rural. The place she arrived after following her new husband to the U.S. was a sharp contrast from the bustle of Incheon she was used to. At first she found Connecticut too provincial and dry cleaning work not to her liking but soon discovered living in the suburbs and not having to work for someone else gave her peace of mind. “In America you don’t compare yourself to others like in Korea,” she said remembering what it was like to be a working woman back home in the 1980s. “In Korea you had to wear heels, put on makeup and get dressed up for work. But here I could wear shorts and slippers and no one cared. It was freeing to not compare yourself to what others do or wear and how much money they make.”

For Taesoo who began his life in America as a PhD student and a new husband in 1987, the first year was filled with challenges that were both academic and marital. He was all of a sudden thrust into an American academic environment, and like Henry although he could read and comprehend textbooks, hearing and understanding lectures were not easy and he struggled to follow. At the same time he also felt responsible for his wife. “I had to go to school so my wife was by herself a lot of the times. She didn’t know anyone so she was very lonely,” Taesoo

remembered. Having moved to Waltham, MA, they were far from the main family hub in CT which made his wife Sonhui more dependent on him. She also had certain expectations of life as newlyweds. “We were young people and should’ve been having more fun but she didn’t have any friends and I had to study. There were many arguments over these issues and it was a difficult time.”

The siblings and spouses who had children had additional concerns on top of the personal challenges they were trying to overcome. Choo Ja and her husband thought their children would receive better education in the United States and that weighed heavily in their decision to immigrate. The others assumed America being a superior country in every way to the underdeveloped and politically and economically unstable Korea the children would naturally benefit from being brought up in the U.S. However, unless they were babies at the time of immigration, the kids were going through a difficult time adjusting and understanding English in school just as adults were struggling. Both Choo Ja and Soon had independently heard their sons ages 12 and 5 say, “What’s so great about America? Why did we have to come here?” Once Song Jae and Son Sook got called into school because their son, who was 11 at the time, had covered several pages of notebook in Korean scribbles. The teacher having no idea what they meant alerted the principle. When Chang went to school in Song and Son’s place because they didn’t speak English he saw swear words that his nephew had written in Korean directed at his classmates out of frustration.

The American System

After being initiated into the “American system,” the siblings and their spouse were impressed by how well everything seemed to run and the amount of resources at disposal in the United States compared to Korea. When Song Jae attended an ESL (English as a Second Language) school during the first few months in America he noted the generous spirit of the educational infrastructure: “I was impressed by the system of providing free language courses for immigrants. It was unimaginable back in Korea.” Rosa remembered receiving complimentary baby formula and laundry service in addition to free housing from the hospital where Henry was a resident and thinking “America is really great.”

A large percentage of the 1980s Korean immigrants listed high wage levels and fair compensation for hard work as reasons for immigration to the United States in the pre-departure survey (I. Park et al. 1990). Young Hee who was most interested in continuing her work out of any other women in her family got hired at a nursing home soon after arrival. She was pleasantly surprised by the system that “limited the number of patients under your watch and gave nurses fixed responsibilities in order to avoid liability.” In the Korean hospitals she was used to, there were seemingly no set boundaries on what nurses were supposed to do. Even the wage system was superior to what she was accustomed to in Korea while the workload was less demanding: “It was much higher than Korea and you even got paid overtime which did not exist in Korea.”

Before coming to America, Soon and her husband thought he would be able to find work immediately but discovered that, unlike in Korea, there were specific timeframes for everything, which they weren’t aware of. On one hand it was frustrating and she wondered whether this cultural difference was something they could overcome. But after some time she began to see

that the “American system prioritized a strong foundation” and was able to appreciate it. Soon’s husband Young, on the contrary, was exasperated initially by what felt like inertia: “Here everything was systematic so you always had to first wait for something or make an appointment.” He also had to adjust to the incremental nature of American bureaucracy. “In Korea, everything is fast and you don’t have to make appointments for hospitals or doctors – everything is walk-in. So the new slow pace was something I had to get used to and I had to change my lifestyle pattern.”

They arrived bright-eyed and expectant, but after several months in the United States, the siblings and spouses began to see cracks in American society and realized this new country was not a utopia. Most of them had cultivated illusory ideals of America back in Korea and associated the country almost exclusively with prosperity and safety. So when they came face to face with the realities of American urban cities or rural communities there was a sense of loss of innocence. In the towns near the army base Chang noticed the people there were mostly Black or Hispanic and many were poor, a contrast from the predominantly white and affluent towns he was used to while staying with Rosa and Henry. This exposure opened his eyes to the discrepancy in quality of living between different racial groups in the U.S.

In New Haven where Yale University’s gothic architectures dominate over small city blocks, witnessing illegal activities like drug dealings and the obvious wealth gap between the Whites and the Blacks led a newcomer like Sung Woo to think “American society also had its problems.” When Song Jae started working at a 7-Eleven convenience store a year into his immigration, seeing the ceiling mirrors and CCTVs, which were all new to him, plastered throughout the store made him realize “America wasn’t as secure as he thought.” An incident

involving a blackout became an introduction to the psyche of America he wasn't aware of yet, that violence and paranoia were baked into the American system too: "Once the power went out and they were yelling at us to lock the door immediately. I thought why not just leave it open to let in fresh air but then I realized they were afraid of looting."

As vast and open America was, the irony was that many of the immigrants found their world becoming smaller and life more restrictive compared to Korea where they had friends, enjoyed active social lives, and could go anywhere freely by public transportation. Their new life in a Connecticut suburb was in some ways peaceful but in other ways insulated. Song Jae who was used to regular outings with friends now found himself just shuttling between the house, his brothers' dry cleaners and the language class. While having a large family was a source of comfort and support, it was also isolating. Son Sook's days now evolved around the extended family and became a repetition of working, having dinner together and doing it all over again the next day, and there were little opportunities to be "introduced to America." Son Sook's description of her life during those early days is a pattern all too common in the immigrant community: "We would work during the day, come home and have dinner together, then the men would drink. So there were no chances to integrate into the so-called American society."

The New Family Dynamic

As described earlier, the reason the majority of the Lee siblings and spouses came to call Connecticut their home was Young's medical residency in New Haven in the early 1980s. The apartment he rented in Hamden, CT became home for the extended family of 12. Although Young, his wife and their children left CT at the end of his residency for Wilkes-Barre, PA in

1983, the rest of the family stayed. By then they had two businesses in New Haven and a house in North Haven and the roots were established, thereby making Connecticut an unlikely home for a rambling group with seemingly never-ending supply of family members who kept rolling in from Korea. As the siblings who returned to Korea to find spouses attested, there weren't too many Asians in Connecticut especially back in those early days. Even in 1990, Connecticut ranked 24 in Korean population in the entire United States with just over 5,000 Koreans, behind Indiana, Wisconsin and Arizona (U.S. Census 2000; NAKA).

For the siblings and their spouses, having each other to rely on for emotional support and companionship was indispensable for their stability. Having wound up in a state with a small Korean immigrant population, a large family in some ways was a self-sustaining community. Once the family settled in CT, the siblings' parents became the gravitational center and a conduit for the continuum of old traditions. Song Jae and Choo Ja and their families may not have come to the United States if their parents had remained in Korea. The others who were thinking of returning to Korea after a short time may have done so more easily if the familial foundation hadn't existed.

By 1982, Chang had left New Orleans and joined the family and Yong Jae and his wife had flown back from Houston, Texas after an eight-month sojourn working at a convenience store. As a result, the entire Lee family was now congregated in Connecticut. The only ones missing were Rosa and Henry in Pennsylvania. Faced with the difficulties of finding a landlord that would rent to a family of nine, out of necessity Yong Jae and Chang decided instead to buy a house. In 1983, with the success of their dry cleaning businesses they were able to afford a modest three-bedroom house with a mother-in-law wing in North Haven, CT.

For the first few years it was a home for Yong Jae and his family, Young Hee, Chang, Katarina, Sonhui and their parents. Then as more family members arrived from Korea throughout the 1980s it became a base providing temporary housing where the new arrivals stayed until they found their footing. It functioned like a revolving door as earlier arrivals moved out into their own place to make room for the next arriving family members and it worked like that until everyone became independent enough to have their own place finally leaving the parents alone in the house by the start of the 1990s.

There is an assumption in Korean immigration scholarship that “emphasis on continuation of family roles and norms traditionally important in Korean culture” would serve as “source of psychological intimacy and support” for the new immigrants (Kim and Naughton 1993:187). Although this assessment is largely true, an undercurrent of more nuanced dynamic exists between family members. Also, a tendency for the family to become splintered into groups by their arrival periods and levels of acculturation emerges. Reunited and expanded, the Lee siblings and spouses in the U.S. spawned two cohorts of family members – early and later arrivals. They were at different stages of immigration with different sets of challenges and aspirations and it affected the family dynamic in both subtle and obvious ways and created pressure to “catch up” for the later arrival family members.

When Song and his family arrived in 1986, they lived with his parents, two sisters, two brothers and their families in the house that his little brothers bought in North Haven. Being the eldest son, seeing that his younger siblings who came to the U.S. in the early 1980s had already established themselves financially and acclimated to the American system made him anxious to be independent himself. It also bothered him when his two children had to be enrolled in school

he had to rely on his youngest brother Chang to bring them to school instead of him because he couldn't speak English and was not familiar with the system.

Choo Ja continued with her struggle to adapt to the new environment and her moods began to suffer. "I cried so much. Once we got here it hit us that we came last and were the oldest. Many days I would go out alone in the afternoon and stay out until evening just walking aimlessly making my parents worry," she recounted those early days of doubt and dread. Choo Ja was also mindful that her younger siblings had come to America when they only had to look out for themselves. She and her husband, on the contrary, were in their mid-40's with no special skills and they had three middle school-age children they were responsible for. "My parents were at their wits end seeing my husband and I having such a hard time. Finally they offered to look after the kids and told us to return to Korea. But I knew I would not be able to have a life in Korea without them."

For the siblings and spouses, living in close quarters as an extended family fostered stress they did not experience back in Korea. "All of a sudden we were living among other families under one roof so there were conflicts that arose," said Song Jae laconically as not to go into specifics. His wife Son Sook, however, had a sharper memory of the new family dynamic. "Because we were late arrivals and didn't know the American ways we had to depend on [my husband's brothers] quite a bit," she recalled. "Somebody else was in charge of buying the groceries for the whole family so I felt like a guest. My son loved bananas but there never were enough of them so I remember thinking that when I start making money I will buy a lot of bananas." The new immigrants felt their diminished statuses even among the family and it became a motivating factor to find their footing as quickly as possible.

Most of the spouses came willingly and with excitement whether they were newly married or with children including Rosa. But the sting of leaving their family seemingly indefinitely had a scarring effect on many of them. After arriving in America they spent much of the time exclusively amongst their spouse's large family whose strong bond had brought them all to the United States. There were many benefits to having a large, close-knit family which often became a source of emotional support and intimacy. But as Rosa recalled they couldn't help but feel forlorn at times and being outnumbered only highlighted the absence of their own family and made them aware the overwhelming distance between them and their own parents and siblings: "It felt like I was dropped here all alone while the rest of my family was in Korea. During the day I was busy with the kids then at night I wondered when I'd be able to see my parents and siblings again."

Son Sook was conscious of the new family dynamic she would find herself in once she came to America but tried not to let it cloud her hopeful outlook: "I knew I'd be among the in-laws and leaving my family behind so that weighed a little heavy. However, even then, as I recall, I came here with optimism." Kwang Sook who knew ahead that she and her family would be staying at her sister-in-law's was unperturbed by her future predicament. "I was prepared for living together with a large family in a small space and the discomfort that could come with it," she said. Having always lived with her husband's family after she got married however, Kwang Sook was not too concerned about getting along with the in-laws but was more mindful of becoming a nuisance. "Once my daughter, who was two and a half years old at the time, peed on my sister-in-law and her husband's bed," she recalled. "Because it wasn't my house I felt so badly and tried everything to get rid of the stain so no one would notice."

Unlike Son Sook and Kwang Sook, Hae Sook had met only a portion of her husband's family, the last remaining ones in Korea. Before coming to America she envisioned them living on their own as newlyweds and working and traveling together. "But once I came, there was no such thing as traveling and we just worked all the time," Hae Sook described the disappointment she felt after she arrived in the U.S. She was also blindsided by the size of Chang's family and their closeness. The new extended family dynamic she was thrust into was something she did not expect and needed some time to get used to. "I had no idea that we'd be living with his parents, siblings and their families. I thought naturally we'd be on our own. I soon realized how traditional my husband's family was whereas my family back in Korea was very modern."

Conversely, Kee Hyun whose parents had escaped North Korea when the war broke out and grew up without many relatives relished being part of his wife's large family and the energy that came with it: "Of course there were some inconveniences and responsibilities but because I came from a small family I welcomed it." Taesoo also like being around Sonhui's extended family in the United States when he could. Because he came in 1987 after the entire family had already arrived, many of the family members had been settled and were living comfortably by then. "[At my in-laws'] they always prepared a lot of food and the house was spacious so I had the impression they were well off," remembered Taesoo. "I went fishing with my father-in-law a couple of times on his boat, and although my life back in Korea wasn't all about survival, many in Korea still lived in poverty, so to me my wife's family, despite being immigrants, seemed like they were living well – affluent and relaxed."

Starting a new life in a new country with a new partner with uneven expectations also tested the bonds between spouses. Hae Sook was surprised to discover both generational and

cultural gaps between she and her husband. “Korea had been evolving and changing after he left but his ways were still stuck in the 1970s. On top of that I was five years younger than him, so to me his way of thinking was outdated,” she explained. “I did not pick up on those things in Korea. I only got to experience them as we started living together. In the beginning it was difficult and I doubted whether I could stay with him.” Sonhui resented being in America when she was single. But after she was married and living in Waltham, MA, where she didn’t know anyone, she experienced a different kind of longing. While Taesoo was away at school during the day she was home alone feeling “lonely and trapped.” In retrospect she wished she could’ve been more proactive about finding her own ways and interests. She added, “I don’t know... maybe it’s because it’s not my country so I just didn’t have my bearings. I took out my frustrations out on my husband so we had many arguments during this time.”

The siblings are aware of the sacrifices their spouses made for them – leaving their own families behind in order to follow them to America. “My husband left his family in Korea and was by himself so I was concerned about him adjusting to new surroundings and getting comfortable,” Young Hee expressed the sensitivity she felt around Kee Hyun when he first arrived in the U.S. The siblings are also grateful that their spouses have accepted their family as their own and treated them with kindness. If the situation was reversed they were not sure if they would be as prepared to do the same. “My husband doesn’t have family here so the only reason he’s here is because of me,” said Katarina. Knowing that her husband had always wanted to return to Korea, however, complicated her emotions. “When his parents were still alive he took his filial duties very seriously. He was even devoted to my parents so I’m always grateful to

him for that. Just as my parents are important to me, his parents are important to him, but if he had asked me to go live in Korea I'm not sure if I could have done it.”

New Work

“I thought I would do whatever it took.” – Song Jae

There's an adage that often gets repeated amongst Korean immigrants – “You end up in the same line of work as the person who picked you up at the airport.” It is a pithy way of surmising that with limited capital, proficiency of the English language and familiarity with the system, many immigrants followed the models of the earlier arrivals. A large portion of the post-1965 Korean immigrants went into a handful of small businesses that require high-intensity of labor but low-level skills like produce stores, corner delis, seafood stores, beauty supply stores, dry cleaners or, later in the 1990s, nail salons, and created a blueprint for the next wave of Koreans to emulate. And as these small business that were initially concentrated in urban areas spread into adjacent states and beyond “a dense web of trade associations, churches, and friendship and kinship ties in the Korean community has provided help with business information, loans, and staffing problems” (Foner 2000:96).

The early 1980s arrival siblings and their parents who settled in CT because of Young's hospital work scraped enough money together to acquire their first business in 1981. It was a small dry cleaning drop store on Whalley Avenue in New Haven next to a Popeye's and a gas station serendipitously called Lee's Cleaners. The siblings' father would take the bus from Hamden where they lived to a “place called New Haven” to meet other Koreans and suss out

what options might be available to immigrants like them. “There were a couple of Korean business owners there at the time – a wig shop, a jewelry shop, a small grocery store and Lee’s Cleaners,” Katarina recalled. “He heard that the owner of Lee’s Cleaners was selling his business so my family bought it in 1981. But it was a small drop store so you only needed a couple of people to work there. I became the cashier and learned alteration, and my mother ironed shirts by hand instead of sending them out in order to save money.”

When Yong Jae and Kwang Sook were working at a U-tote-M in Houston, they had sent all their savings to Chang who was working in a metal dyeing factory in CT. After eight months, a dry cleaners with machines on premises became available in New Haven and they had enough money saved between them to secure it. Within just over a year Yong Jae and Kwang Sook who came to the United States with only \$150 were now proper business owners. “My little brother and I opened the business but neither of us had any idea of how to run the machines,” recalled Yong Jae. Having bought a store that had been dormant there was no one to show how to run the machines. Also, in the early 1980s there wasn’t yet a network of Korean cleaners who could share their knowhow’s. Yong and Chang looked for a specialist who could teach them how the machines worked but it proved to be more complicated than they anticipated. “At that time, most of the dry cleaning businesses were Jewish and Italian owned. So [they] put pressure on the specialist and told him that if he worked with Koreans they’d cut him off. So we lost that guy.”

For half a year he and Chang taught themselves how to operate the machines through a manual they obtained from a trade school in New York and by tracking down a mechanic from another region in CT because the local specialists didn’t want to work with them. “The whole family was behind it and we worked really hard late into the night everyday,” Yong Jae

recounted. Those first years required an all-hands-on-deck collective struggle for the survival of the whole family. After a trial by fire, eventually the two brothers got a handle on the machines and customers started to come. “I didn’t worry too much about money because from Houston on, we were making money,” recalled Kwang Sook. Now with the success of their first proper dry cleaners, the brothers gained enough confidence to be entrepreneurs. With strong economy and steady revenue on their side, by the time Hae Sook joined her husband in 1985, Yong Jae and Chang had acquired another, even larger, dry cleaning business.

Inability to transfer their professional experiences and limited job options coupled with internal factors like poor English and cultural understanding spurred many Korean immigrants like Yong Jae and Chang to turn to starting their own businesses. Additionally, around the time the 1965 Immigration Law came into effect, the landscape of small businesses in the U.S. became ripe for changing hands from aging European owners to Asian newcomers (Waldinger 1995:265-281; I. Kim 1981:144). When the subsequent male family members – Kee Hyun, Song Jae, Kwang Moo and Sung Woo – arrived after Yong Jae and Chang opened multiple dry cleaners, they all worked at one of their stores learning the ropes or buying time until they could save enough money to start something of their own or figure out what other options were available to them. It took some of them longer to warm up to the idea of getting into dry cleaning but in time all four of them did end up opening their own dry cleaning stores.

“I thought I would do whatever it took. So in the beginning I looked at the classifieds looking for work in factories,” recalled Song Jae. Although he was 41 and not as young as most of his siblings when they first arrived, he felt like he could do anything. “But I didn’t have a car and couldn’t really speak English so my younger brothers convinced me to consider dry cleaning

so I started learning the ropes at my brother Chang's store." When Song Jae contemplated what awaited him on the flight over to America, he wasn't necessarily thinking of dry cleaning but after some time in the U.S. it became clear to him that it was now the only viable skill he had. "I realized I didn't have many choices and my financial means were limited. I was familiar with dry cleaning so I felt like it was the best option."

Song Jae took over a dry cleaning store called Martone's near Wooster Square, an Italian enclave in New Haven, in 1990. He still runs the business under the same name. Song Jae's circumstances and rationale for starting his own business can be multiplied by the thousands across the United States by other middle-aged Korean men like him even if it meant taking out big sums of loans or borrowing from relatives. And just as their generation of men who remained in Korea worked hard to lift their country out of poverty and grew its economy into world's 11th largest, their immigrant counterparts in America became the ethnic group with the highest business-ownership rate in the United States by 1990 (IMF; Kim and Naughton 1993).

Those who came to the United States seeking to advance their professional goals were met with disappointments in the beginning and had to revise their plans. As mentioned earlier, Henry had to scrap his initial plan of going into internal or surgical field due to strain on his physique. Instead he wound up pursuing psychiatry. After realizing his accreditation from Korea was useless in the U.S. – and as a result the hope of expanding his knowledge in reconstructive plastic surgery was dashed – Young looked for alternate solutions rather than going back to Korea. "I couldn't afford to start from nothing and spend another six years to get to the level that I already was in Korea when I had two young children also," Young recalled the difficult choice he faced. "I couldn't necessarily go back to Korea because there wasn't anything to go back to

and it would've been just as hard to put everything back together the way it was before we left.”

In the end, he decided to do another internship and figure out his next move.

Kee Hyun and Sung Woo began working at their brother-in-law's dry cleaners after they joined their wives in the United States. Neither of them particularly wanted to get into dry cleaning having worked for a big corporation and in jewelry sales back in Korea. It was a way for them to get acclimated to the new country and earn a little money within the confines of family instead of being thrown into a totally foreign world. While Kee Hyun learned the ins and outs of dry cleaning business he was also weighing different options including returning to his old job in Korea as he was still getting calls from the company beckoning him to come back. Sung Woo's main objective was to make enough money for the tuition of the appraiser certification program at the Gemological Institute in Manhattan. Then his plan, as always, was to go back to Korea and carry out his filial duties as the eldest son in the family.

Achievements & Disappointments

With the exception of Henry, Young, Young Hee, Taesoo and Sung Woo who came to the United States with plans to advance specialized skills or studies, most of the sibling and their spouses arrived with the intention of doing whatever it took to achieve financial stability and independence as Song Jae articulated. In that regard, many were taken aback when asked of their goals during their early period of immigration because everything they did was towards survival, not lofty aspirations. And to this extent their goals were vague, incremental and situational. Survival took precedence over everything else as Yong Jae recalled, and without specialized

skills or fluency in English doubts of whether they had what it took to rise to the occasion in a foreign country abound.

Nonetheless, when asked if they felt whatever goals they had set during the first year after arrival were achieved, most said they did although many qualified their answers by adding their goals were modest to begin with. Even when their plans got derailed and they had to find alternate solutions, in the end, they felt satisfied with what they were able to accomplish. Young who had to recalibrate his medical career ended up going into anesthesiology and later became one of the pioneers in pain management. He also invited a number of doctors from Korea to train under him at the Robert Wood Johnson Medical Center in New Brunswick, NJ and was instrumental in bringing the pain management field to Korea. Despite not being able to practice plastic surgery or return to Korea after five years as he had envisioned, to the extent that he was able to participate in advancing medicine and educating young doctors in Korea, he does not regret the detours he was forced to take in the United States and is happy with his achievements. After all, his goal when he came to America was becoming a medical professor in Korea.

After struggling with the decision to stay or leave, Kee Hyun opened his own dry cleaning store in 1987, two years after he arrived in the U.S., which turned out to be a good choice. “I loved running my own business. Sometimes I would go in even on Sundays just to look around and tidy up,” Kee Hyun said. “The thought of having my own company, business, filled me with joy.... As I near retirement I tell myself that for the last 35, 36 years I did as well as I could.” Kwang Sook also expressed satisfaction with the life she led in America: “With our business we didn’t have to worry financially. The kids, thankfully, turned out well even without much help from us. So, although our life was pretty ordinary it was a satisfying one.”

There were disappointments and regrets too. Looking back on his decision to leave Louisiana and join his family in the North, Chang said, “On one hand I was excited to be reuniting with my family but on the other I wished I could stay and finish the things I set out to do. But I felt I needed to go help out the family.” Even Kee Hyun who was happy with the life he built in the U.S. couldn’t help but think about an alternate outcome of his life. He wondered how things might’ve turned out if he had decided to study for a specialized profession such as car design, which was an interest of his, after leaving Korea rather than becoming a dry cleaner. On the contrary, Taesoo who spent his entire 20s in academia wished that he had used that time to travel and explore other options rather than dedicating his youth to multiple degrees.

Sung Woo’s disappointments cut deeper perhaps than anyone else’s. He did receive his gold appraiser certificate and graduate from the gemological institute with top grades. But ultimately he had to give up his dreams of both becoming a professional appraiser and returning to Korea. Unlike Young, there were no systemic forces at play, rather the pressure to alter his plans came from the parents on both sides. Upon graduation he was approached by one of the directors at school to open a Korean branch of the gemological institute. Every aspect of this opportunity was great since he wanted to return to Korea anyway. But to his surprise, his parents vehemently opposed him abandoning America citing that he was already living a life everyone in Korea wished for themselves. As a compromise he accepted offers to work in Manhattan but this time his wife’s parents put the breaks on the move reasoning that New York City was too dangerous for them and their new born baby.

So Sung Woo too ended up going into dry cleaning and opened his own store with his wife in the summer of 1990. “My initial goals were sidelined in that I was not able to go back to

Korea and become a gold appraiser,” he said. “So I just accepted my fate. My kids were born and even though my dreams were dashed I still had to somehow make a living so I reluctantly went into dry cleaning.” Unlike Kee Hyun who found joy in having his own dry cleaning business even after being unsure in the beginning, Sung Woo felt ill-matched with it. “He found dry cleaning too boring,” Katrina described her husband’s languishing mood while running the dry cleaning business. “So eventually he opened a jewelry shop in the Bronx in the late 90s, but after 9/11 the business suffered too much.” Eventually Sung Woo had to close the shop after just a few years. Over time, he came to accept the outcome of his decisions and forces that were out of his control, but the taste of the bitter pill still lingered. “Then I had to return to dry cleaning that I didn’t like,” he said.

More than any other siblings and spouses, Choo Ja and Kwang Moo grappled with their decision to start over in the United States and experienced the longest existential dilemma over it. The difficulty of accepting the new reality also made adjusting to the new environment almost impossible. After a year and a half of intense debates over whether to stay or leave, Choo Ja and Kwang Moo also followed their siblings’ lead and opened their own dry cleaners. But the internal turmoil continued to flare up. They used the threats of returning to Korea and selling the store as an ammunition directed at each other when the goings got tough. Ultimately they too stayed and kept the business open for another 15 years, but they did so without deriving a sense of achievement the way others did.

The women had both complex or ambivalent relationships with the idea of personal achievement. Rosa and Sonhui would admit that they did not have goals. They fell into the traditional roles as a wife and mother and accepted their responsibilities of supporting their

husbands and raising children. Soon and Hae Sook who were elementary school and kindergarten teachers in Korea both felt their “goals disappeared” when they came to America alluding that in Korea they had independent skills and dreams apart from those involving their husbands and kids. “After I got married and came to America my personal life was non-existent. My identity was erased in a way,” Soon explained. “But I did my best at each given moment and phase of my life so I don’t have regrets in that regard.”

In contrast, Son Sook and Kwang Sook who experienced economic hardships in Korea worked as many hours as their husbands once in America. Unsure if they would’ve experienced the same level of financial security in Korea as they did in the United States, they both expressed gratitude for the opportunities the country afforded them. Son Sook took over Lee’s Cleaners from her mother-in-law in 1988 and became the sole owner and worked until she retired in 2011. The business allowed her to make money independent of her husband and meet the goal of owning her own business. Kwang Sook worked alongside her husband for nearly 40 years and achieved financial success within a short period of arrival. “I’m not the kind of person to have big ambitions so I was satisfied with whatever we were able to make,” she said.

Katarina was the first woman in the family to start working in the dry cleaners alongside her mother back in 1981. She learned how to do alterations on the job and taught her sister Young Hee when she had to go to Korea to find a suitor. Then the two sisters taught the other women in the family. While their husbands worked the dry cleaning machines the women manned the register and hemmed and took in waists and replaced zippers. Katarina opened her own dry cleaners with her husband Sung Woo in 1990 after deciding against starting a beauty supply shop. Young Hee did get her nursing license around 1984 and practiced intermittently.

But once the children were born, running the dry cleaners with her husband gave her more flexibility and they didn't have to hire a nanny. So despite renewing her license every year Young Hee who was always career-minded chose being a business owner over a nurse.

Citizenship vs. Feeling American

The early post-1965 Korean immigrants demonstrated the highest propensity for naturalization compared to any other Asian immigrant groups (Barkan 1983). Out of 17 family members, all but three had become U.S. citizens. The three main reasons for obtaining citizenship for the siblings and their spouses were future social benefits, the stability of the children, and the convenience of international travels. About half of the siblings and spouses claimed they partake in the American electoral process but only Song Jae listed voting as a motivational factor in becoming naturalized. Almost all the siblings and spouses have become U.S. citizens yet just as many of them rejected the notion that they were American. Both Choo Ja and Rosa felt a strong disassociation from the only country they now have roots in. “Even if we’ve lived here for a 100 years I doubt we’d feel American,” said Rosa. Choo Ja went even further, turning the conventional notion that adaptation is a necessary step in the immigrant life: “Why do I have to feel like American? Because I’m not American I don’t want to live among them. I’m sure Americans who’ve lived in Korea for a long time don’t feel Korean.”

The sense of estrangement and displacement eased over time for the majority of the family members. However, no matter how many years or decades they’ve spent in the United States the foreignness they felt never ceased. And the degree to which they felt this foreignness affected their ability to adapt to the ways of the new country and manage melancholia that came

with culture and language barriers and being apart from their own family and friends in Korea. As Hurh and Kim claimed, the language proved to be one of the crucial variables affecting cultural adaptation (1984b). Many of the siblings and spouses made the correlation between their outsider status with the deficiency in the English language skills.

The women, especially, cited their lack of entry into American society as the reason they didn't feel American despite having been naturalized. And the main obstacle that stood in the way, according to them, was their inability to speak English. "To be honest, although I live here, receive benefits from this country, and will be buried here when I die, I feel in my heart more Korean," confessed Son Sook. She even expressed regret over not trying harder to improve her English when she was younger even if she was busy running her business. "The main reason being that because of my limited English I was not able to integrate into American society."

Some of the men – Song Jae, Young and Chang – said they felt half Korean and half American or Americanized Korean as Kee Hyun would put it. The ethnic attachment as explored by Hurh and Kim was a big part of the reason for their additive identity (1984b). Although the men deemed themselves well incorporated into American society through their work and civic engagement, in their private life they lived as though they were in Korea. The adherence to Korean food, language, culture, TV programs, and near exclusive socialization with other Koreans even outside of a Korean enclave created an illusion of living in a bubble where they only "entered" American society for work and administrative reasons.

Taesoo who currently resides in Korea described the experiences of living in the United States and Korea as not being all that different: "We were living in a small Korean society in America. Korea is just a bigger Korean society." Encapsulating the ratio of Korean and American

cultures consumed by the family members, Song said, “I watch the American local news for about 10 minutes in the morning but I watch an hour of Korean news.”

They may have become legal U.S. citizens but have not acquired “cultural citizenship,” which Ong describes as “a dual process of self-making and being-made within webs of power linked to the nation-state and civil society” (Ong 1996:738). To this extent, for the siblings and spouses their cultural allegiance still remained in Korea. There is also a nexus between ethnic attachment, cultural citizenship and the language barrier. Katarina attributed having “always lived like a Korean” to the challenges of not being fluent in English. It is interesting to note that the family members interpreted their “failure” to achieve structural assimilation – “entering American society” – as a unilateral process and put the burden on themselves when the power dynamic between the dominant society and immigrants positions them as being “pushed out” rather than “not entering.”

There’s yet another component to the embedded foreignness of the family members that is more abstract than the aforementioned reasons. It is the absence of Korean ethos and emotional connectedness – *jeong-suh* and *jeong-gam*, terms without adequate equivalents in the English language. Soon lamented that even though she tried to bring up her children according to Korean *jeong-suh*, ultimately outside influences such as American culture and education and peer relationships were too impactful on their upbringing. Choo Ja who now lives in Duluth, Georgia, described instances that gave justification to her moving to the South away from her siblings and sons. “The reason I live [in Duluth] is because of *jeong-suh*,” she said. “One day I was out with my daughter and heard a child yell out ‘umma’ in the street. It made me crane my neck in the direction of the little girl’s voice.” The mellifluous sound of a kid calling out after

their mother in Korean – hearing her mother tongue spoken by people she didn't know – made her feel as though she was back in Korea.

Another time a stranger accosted Choo Ja and began speaking to her in Korean. “She asked me, ‘Are you Korean? I haven't seen you around here before, when did you come here?’” She recalled. “It's this kind of *jeong-gam* that I like the most about being here.” To Choo Ja who struggled with perpetual foreignness, a random encounter with another Korean brought up a sense of affection – *jeong-gam* – that was only possible with people who shared the same sense of *jeong-suh*. It did not matter that the exchange was banal and brief. She had been hungry for a kind of kinship that can inspire a sense of ease with which people can approach strangers in the streets and feel connected without being weighed down by the heavy coat of foreignness. The irony was despite the deep yearning for Korean-ness in the mundane, Choo-Ja had no desire to return and live in Korea. “It always felt like I had one foot in and one foot out. I was conflicted and had doubts about the decision to come. I couldn't leave America yet I also couldn't find a way to accept it either.”

Most of the siblings and spouses, with the exception of Choo Ja and Sung Woo, expressed overall satisfaction with their decision to immigrate and join the family in the United States. At least half of them said they would have come or tried to come to the United States even without family. The reasons given were better economic opportunities that were afforded to them, a higher premium on privacy and individualism in the U.S., a better place to raise children, as well as lesser degree of material competition and keeping up with the appearances in comparison to Korea.

The family members who felt split on their decision cited racism and loss of self as two main reasons. “There were always racist incidents when we started our business but after a while it started to get to me,” said Yong Jae. He resisted obtaining citizenship for this reason and even considered returning to Korea. Soon in particular was sensitive to the latter. “The difference between my husband and I is that he was able to enter workforce and maintain what he wanted to do rather seamlessly [in America],” she said. “On the other hand, in my case, my education became useless and the direction of my life was derailed.” She also worried the same factors that impeded her aspirations might affect her children. “So if my kids wanted to do something but wasn’t able to because they were not in their native country I would feel very sorry.”

If the language barrier was the source of the biggest hurdle, the greatest sense of achievement was derived from the outcome of the children. No matter how they felt about their decision to immigrate, all the family members were satisfied by and grateful for how their children turned out despite, according to Song Jae, more temptations for wayward behavior in the United States. For siblings like Soon whose children grew up without speaking Korean, having just rudimentary knowledge of the English language presented a double obstacle – one between her and the American society at large and another between her and the children. “The thing I regret the most is that I can’t have deep, heart-to-heart conversations with my children because of the language barrier,” she confessed. There were also concerns of the children experiencing discrimination because of their race, but largely the children provided sources for pride and justification for immigration.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Through this narrative analysis involving my own family members I tried to bring to light how the 1970s and 1980s Korean immigrants came to embody the family reunification provisions under the 1965 Immigration Law. To that end, I assessed the legal, emotional and material processes each member underwent during the pre-departure period and the struggles and eventual sense of achievement, as well as disappointment, during the post-arrival period. The narratives that emerged from their perspective and lived-in experiences were a critical component that led to the findings. Staying in the new country after immigrating was not always a given and the reasons behind remaining were just as complex as the ones for leaving homeland.

As Yoon aptly phrased, “Immigrant life involves constant doubt and justification of one’s reasons for being in a foreign land” (1997:61). Family provided justification beyond financial and educational reasons which cut both ways. In the best case scenario family made the new life in a foreign land feel natural and right but when there was a struggle to accept it, familial ties became an obligation as was the case with Choo Ja, Sung Woo and Sonhui. Once the siblings and their spouses were reunited in the United States, family structure provided emotional and financial support instrumental in maintaining equilibrium and economic success but it also worked as a crutch that prohibited bigger risks and immersion in the host country. Additionally, family was not always a cohesive unit in service of the collective. The splintering of the family based on arrival periods led to different sets of challenges, and sustaining family harmony and establishing independence required weaning off from the larger family as well.

In examining the occupational patterns of the siblings and spouses which consisted predominantly of dry cleaners, I also explored some of the myths surrounding the emphasis on the presence of large family, traditional values and collective mentality as a positive attribute to the high propensity of entrepreneurship among Korean immigrants. I argued that two cohorts emerged as a result of different arrival spurts. The challenges the early arrival, pioneer immigrants faced included navigating the system, finding work for the survival of the entire family, and resolving housing problems. But they also experienced less saturation in the immigrant-friendly business sectors once they found their financial footing and more robust economy in the U.S. They were also able to create a strong camaraderie with family members with whom they shared the same immigrant “battle scars.”

On the contrary, while the later arrivals benefited from the foundation the early arrivals established and the blueprint they created for starting business, having to rely on the early arrivals for housing and jobs as well as figuring out the “American ways,” the latecomers felt a chip on their shoulder and pressure to “catch up.” When the Lee family first went into dry cleaning, there was already a precedence set by other Korean immigrants in New Haven. However, when Yong Jae and Chang bought a second business with machines on premises they were navigating an uncharted territory for Korean immigrants in the Southern Connecticut area and became entrepreneurial pioneers both in the family and in the Korean immigrant community. The later arrivals were able to start their own dry cleaning businesses in a more streamlined way because of the initial hard work by Yong Jae and Chang and the path they created. The caveat was the pressure, or cajoling, by the family to consider dry cleaning over something of their own interest and against their adventurous spirit because it was now a tried and true business model.

Furthermore, family ties were more than resources for and bridges to economic success as in the classical theory of Korean family dynamic (Foner 2000:96; Waldinger 1995:265-81; I. Kim 1981:145; Light and Bonacich 1988:143). They also became a physical extension of their being when the immigrant was handicapped by the limitations imposed by the new adopted country. Katarina who developed a special bond with her mother while working together in the family's first dry cleaners, carried additional responsibility for her. "Because [my mother] didn't speak English and couldn't drive I would take her everywhere and speak on her behalf," she said. "So she would often tell me, 'you're my voice and my legs.'" Rather than considering it a burden she took on the role of her mother's voice and legs diligently. And as Kee Hyun would articulate family also functioned as a psychological balm against the melancholy of being an immigrant: "Having a big family around was a source of immense support. If there was no family it would've been harder and more lonely and we might've gotten depressed. But we got together regularly to eat, hang out, and talk, so that helped ease our stresses."

There are many studies on why would-be immigrants emigrate to another country as I have illustrated throughout this paper, but what's seldom folded into that discussion is why U.S. family members sponsor their siblings and parents. Rosa and Henry were pioneer immigrants for the Lee family. After immigrating to America in 1970 the decision to sponsor her own family came unexpectedly to Rosa during a visit from her father. Rosa had her in-laws nearby. Even so, having her father around for a brief time made more acute how alone she had been. So it was out of loneliness that she asked him to stay. After her father, the petitioning snowballed into "chain migration." Rosa looked back on the last 50 years and remarked on the improbability of having extended families on both her and her husband's sides in the United States:

Somehow eventually, one by one, my whole family immigrated to America. I had the entire family on my husband's side and also my own family here as well. There are eight siblings and parents on my husband's side and nine siblings and parents on mine and we all ended up living in America which is quite unique and incredible.

In total there were 25 adults and children who came because of Rosa, surpassing the average 17 possible relatives a Korean immigrant can petition according to the immigration multiplier theory (Arnold et al. 1989). They became green card holders using fifth and second family preferences. Not all came thinking of putting down their roots in the U.S., never mind becoming American citizens. They thought they would be gone for just a few years until they finished their studies, or if they didn't like it after giving it a try, they would go back to Korea. But their children grew up and didn't speak Korean and it felt too late. And there was no one left in Korea because all their siblings and parents had immigrated to the United States. Then, for some, there was nothing left to go back to – they had sold their houses and businesses and it would've been too hard to start over even if they wanted to go back. For some there was pressure to stay from the family in Korea because “everyone in Korea wanted to go to America.”

Over the course of 17 years – from Rosa and Henry's arrival in 1970 to the last family members in 1987 – the Lee siblings and their spouses have transplanted themselves and established new roots and economic and family foundations in the United States. Despite reservations and caveats America has become the place they call home now. And regardless of their feelings about whether they have “entered” American society or not, they have absorbed American ways and system. Even though they may not necessarily feel American, there is no

denying that they have been woven into the American fabric. In return, the United States have benefited from their hard work and perseverance as well as culture they brought with them.

Gradually they have become strangers in Korea. When they go back to their native country on visits, they realize their American-ness and how much they've been reshaped by decades of living in the United States even though while in the U.S. their Korean-ness is pervasive and influences their daily habits and sense of belonging. Their dual additive-identity that of an Americanized Korean differs from being a Korea American, a qualifier of an American of a Korean descent. The first generation Korean immigrants seldom shed their identity as Korean and the evolved version of themselves, Americanized Koreans, occupy an unambiguous yet complex liminal space hidden away from mainstream America.

It could not be fathomed that in 1965 as the policymakers fought to privilege family reunification provisions over skill-based visas that Asians would arrive in numbers so great they would become the fastest-growing population group in the U.S. and Asian Americans would make up seven percent of the country's total population by 2020 (Gebeloff et al. 2021; Tavernise and Gebeloff 2021; Budiman and Ruiz 2021). Family reunification brought close to two million Koreans to the United States over the span of five decades (Budiman 2021), and through their extraordinarily high business-ownership Korean immigrants contributed \$107.8 billion to the overall U.S. economy in 2012 (Frauenfelder 2016). In spite of Lyndon Johnson's measured precaution at the signing of the bill, the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 did "reshape the structure of daily life in the United States, and it did add to American wealth and power. It really was a revolutionary bill" (J. Park 2018:31).

In examining the micro effects the 1965 Immigration Law had on one extended family who immigrated to the United States through family preferences, we can arrive at a more humanized understanding of the previously overlooked individual aspects of family reunification. The Lee siblings and their spouses arrived in the U.S. under varying economic, generational and emotional circumstances. Their personal and collective decisions to leave their homeland for a new country in search of better opportunities was life-changing yet it was an ordinary act carried out by millions after them and even more before them. What was remarkable was that an entire extended family's trajectory and history were diverted in one generation and rerouted and rerooted as a whole because of their desire to be near family. In doing so, they became part of a wave, a wave made up of millions of individual decisions – both mundane and monumental – vibrating with excitement, anxiety, hopes and worries with momentum and force big enough to cause an irreversible disturbance in the makeup of a country as big and indomitable as America.

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