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Koreans in Vancouver: A Short History

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Article abstract

The Korean-Canadian community in Vancouver is relatively new, compared to older Asian-Canadian communities such as the Chinese-Canadian and the Indo-Canadian communities. However, Koreans now constitute one of the more visible minority communities in the area. A rapid increase in immigration from Korea led to Koreans establishing churches and restaurants throughout the Vancouver area, and identifying those churches with Korean-language signs. The rise in the number of Koreans living in the southwestern corner of the BC mainland has also led to the emergence of a cluster of stores and offices in the middle of Metro Vancouver that is large enough to merit the label "Koreatown." In addition, downtown Vancouver is filled with students who have come from Korea to study English, further heightening awareness of a substantial Korean population in the Vancouver area. In just a few decades, Korean-Canadians have emerged as a significant component of the multi-cultural landscape of British Columbia.

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DON BAKER

Abstract

The Korean-Canadian community in Vancouver is relatively new, compared to older Asian-Canadian communities such as the Chinese-Canadian and the Indo-Canadian communities. However, Koreans now constitute one of the more visible minority communities in the area. A rapid increase in immigration from Korea led to Koreans establishing churches and restaurants throughout the Vancouver area, and identifying those churches with Korean-language signs. The rise in the number of Koreans living in the southwestern corner of the BC mainland has also led to the emergence of a cluster of stores and offices in the middle of Metro Vancouver that is large enough to merit the label "Koreatown." In addition, downtown Vancouver is filled with students who have come from Korea to study English, further heightening awareness of a substantial Korean population in the Vancouver area. In just a few decades, Korean-Canadians have emerged as a significant component of the multi-cultural landscape of British Columbia.

Résumé

La communauté coréenne-canadienne de Vancouver est relativement nouvelle, comparativement aux autres collectivités asiatiques plus anciennes, telles que celles des Canadiens chinois et des Indo-Canadiens. Cependant, les Coréens représentent maintenant une des communautés minoritaires les plus visibles de la région. Une augmentation rapide de l'immigration coréenne a mené ce groupe à établir des églises et des restaurants dans la région de Vancouver et à marquer ces églises de panneaux en coréen. L'accroissement de la population coréenne dans le sud-ouest continental de la Colombie-Britannique a aussi conduit à l'émergence d'un noyau assez vaste de commerces et de bureaux au centre de l'agglomération de Vancouver pour mériter l'étiquette de « Koreatown » (village coréen). De plus, le centre-ville de Vancouver est rempli d'étudiants venus de Corée pour étudier l'anglais, ce qui a pour effet de sensibiliser la population de la région à la présence coréenne. En l'espace de quelques décennies, les Coréens canadiens ont surgi comme un élément important du paysage multiculturel de la Colombie-Britannique.

Your ethnicity is determined by your relations. I do not mean only blood relations. While it is obvious that one's parents, grandparents, and siblings are a major determinant of one's ethnicity, they are not the only factor. Non-relatives a person interacts with also play a role in determining both how someone describes their own ethnicity as well as what ethnicity others ascribe to them. For example, someone born in Korea of Korean parents who spends their whole life in Korea is normally described as a Korean. However, if that same person emigrates from Korea to Canada, for example, they may take on a new ethnic identity, that of a Korean-Canadian. In other words, both society and genes determine ethnicity. This paper is an attempt to trace the process by which Koreans who moved from Korea to Vancouver adopted a new identity, that of Korean-Canadians, and in so doing created a Korean-Canadian community that, as it has grown increasingly more visible in British Columbia, has provided a separate and distinct identity for Koreans within the larger ethnic category of Asian Canadians that is such an important part of the multicultural landscape of that province.

It is not the purpose of this paper to analyze the many different ways individual Koreans in Canada have tried to reconcile their dual identities as both Koreans and Canadians. Other scholars have already analyzed the way some Koreans place more emphasis on the Korean side of their identity, while others place more emphasis on their identities as North Americans. Those scholars have also pointed out that ethnic identities even in the same person vary depending on the situation in which a particular "hyphenated" person finds him- or herself.[1] These scholars' insights have been confirmed by my students, who have told me that they tried to run away from their Korean identity when they were in high school, only to embrace it in university. Similarly, students have also told me that they feel more Canadian than Korean when they visit relatives in Korea, but feel more Korean than Canadian when they are surrounded by non-Koreans in Canada, echoing what Kyeyoung Park wrote about young Korean Americans, that their ethnic identity is "time-, space-, and speaker-specific."[2]

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1 Kyeyoung Park, "I Really Do Feel I'm 1.5!: The Construction of Self and Community by Young Korean Americans," in *Life in America: Identity and Everyday Experience*, ed. Lee D. Baker (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 123–36; Ji Hoon Park, "Contending Identities and Representations: How Do Young Korean Immigrants in Greater Vancouver Talk About Whites, Ethnic Chinese and Koreans Themselves?," paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, San Diego, CA, 27 May 2003, <http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p112299_index.html>, (viewed 8 August 2008); Jeongmin Eom, "Ethnographic Narratives of Korean-Canadian Youth: Ethnicity, Difference, Culture, and Identity Construction," (MA thesis, University of Alberta, 1996); Mi-Rha Cho, "Identity Formation in Korean Canadian Women: A Look at Subjectivity, Race, and Multiculturalism," (M.A. thesis, University of Toronto, 2003).

2 Kyeyoung Park, 133.

An exploration of the many different ways Koreans in Canada define themselves would be another paper, one that would require the disciplinary skills of an anthropologist, psychologist, or sociologist. I am none of these. I am an historian interested in group histories. In this paper, it is the history of Korean-Canadians in Vancouver as a community that is the focus of my scholarly investigation, not the variations within that community of how individual members define themselves at different times and in different places.

I first became interested in the Vancouver Korean community in the 1970s, when I observed it from a distance from my vantage point as a graduate student at the University of Washington in Seattle. I used to take a break from my studies once a year to drive up to the Peace Arch Park on the border between Canada and the United States and join a picnic bringing together the Korean communities of Vancouver and Seattle for a day of food, games, and fellowship. Such a picnic would be very difficult to arrange now. Both communities have grown so large that together they now total well over 100,000 people.[3] In just a little over three decades, the Korean presence in the northwestern corner of North America has grown from being about the right size for a party in a park to the size of a small city. How this change has come about, and the impact it has had on the Canadian side of the border, is a fascinating story, one well worth scholarly examination.

There were less than 1,700 Koreans in all of British Columbia (B.C.) in 1975.[4] Thirty years later, the 2006 census identified over 50,000 Koreans living in the province, 44,825 of whom lived in Metro Vancouver. This figure is an undercount. According to the local Consulate General of the Republic of Korea, there were actually close to 70,000 Koreans living in B.C. in 2006, which included not only Canadian citizens of Korean descent and landed immigrants from Korea, but also the many Korean students learning English in Vancouver, as well as those parents who have moved to B.C. as short-term visitors so that their children can attend school here.[5]

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3 The most recent United States census, in 2000, found 46,680 Koreans living in Washington State, mostly in the Seattle area. See Eui-young Yu, Peter Choi, and Sang Il Han, "Korean Population in the United States, 2000: Demographic Characteristics and Socio-Economic Status," *International Journal of Korean Studies*, VI, no. 2 (Spring-Summer, 2002): 5–6. That figure has undoubtedly risen substantially since then. Since Census Canada identified close to 45,000 Koreans living in the Vancouver area in 2006, it is highly likely that the total number of Koreans living in the Seattle and Vancouver areas has passed a combined total of 100,000.

4 Young-sik Yoo, "Koreans," *Encyclopedia of Canada's Peoples*, <http://www.multiculturalcanada.ca/ecp/content/koreans.html>, (viewed 18 May 2008).

5 *Vancouver Chungang Ilbo*, (9 December 2006). This figure does not include any possible illegal Korean immigrants in the Vancouver area. First of all, there has not been enough research on illegal Korean immigrants in Canada to produce even an educated guess of their exact number. Besides, this paper focuses on the increasing visibility of Vancouver's Korean community and illegal immigrants, by their very nature, tend to be relatively invisible.

As an historian of Korea, I am interested primarily in what has happened in centuries past on the Korean peninsula. However, as a resident of Vancouver, I could not help noticing that the descendants of those whom I have studied have become increasingly visible in this area that has been my home since 1987. If I drive down North Road, the street that divides the Vancouver suburbs of Burnaby and Coquitlam, I notice the growing number of Korean stores and offices that constitute what has become known as "Koreatown." When I drive across town to my classes at the University of British Columbia (UBC), I pass numerous signs in Korean announcing Sunday worship services in the Korean language. Clearly, Koreans are now a significant presence in British Columbia, particularly in Metro Vancouver.

As someone who earns a living by studying the past in order to understand how the world we live in today has come to be, I wondered what brought all those Koreans to Vancouver in such a short period of time. In particular, I was curious whether changes in Korea or changes in Canada stimulated immigration across the Pacific. This paper represents an early attempt to answer that question, to determine the extent to which Koreans were pushed or pulled toward Vancouver.

I also was curious to find out what impact the growing Korean presence has had on the cultural landscape of the province. I asked myself why Metro Vancouver has a Koreatown when Filipinos, who greatly outnumber Koreans (the 2006 census identified 83,765 Filipinos in the Vancouver area), do not have such a concentrated commercial presence. There is more than one Chinatown and there is a Punjabi market, along Main Street, but both Chinese and Punjabis have been in British Columbia much longer than Koreans. Why have Koreans, only relatively recent arrivals in B.C. from Asia, gained such visibility? Koreans are even more visible than the Japanese (except in the number of restaurants), though there was a Japanese community here decades before the first Korean community appeared.

Korean supermarkets and offices, with their Korean-language signs, scattered throughout the lower mainland, not just in Koreatown, proclaim the presence of a large Korean community in the area. Even more noticeable are the many signs announcing the presence of Korean churches or of Korean congregations meeting in church buildings that are owned by Canadian congregations. (Korean Buddhists are much less visible.) One of my scholarly interests is the history of religion. Besides exploring reasons for immigration and for certain streets becoming dominated by Korean shops, part of this investigation of the history of the Korean community in Vancouver also looks into the impact all those Korean churches have on the religious landscape of British Columbia.

The First BC Koreans

Before looking into the emergence of Korean shopping districts and the presence of Korean Christians as a major component of the Christian community in the lower mainland, I will look at the birth and growth of a Korean community.

Canada and Korea did not have formal diplomatic relations until January 1963, so regular immigration from Korea to Canada did not start until after that. However, a few Koreans were already living here. Apparently, a middle-aged man of Korean descent arrived in B.C. in 1926 and stayed until 1934. There may also have been a Korean using a Japanese name (Korea was then under Japanese control) working as a farmer near Hope, B.C., before the Second World War broke out.[6] However, neither of these men left any mark on the cultural or demographic landscape.

The first known Korean resident of Vancouver was a man named Rimhak Ree (Yi Imhak). Ree arrived in 1953 as a graduate student in mathematics at UBC. After receiving his Ph.D., he stayed on as a professor, retiring from UBC in 1987. He died in 2005.[7] Ree was not long the only Korean in Vancouver. Bumsik Chang arrived in 1955 to study mathematics under Ree's direction and also stayed on as a faculty member in the same department. They were soon joined at Point Grey by a few others. By the early 1960s, there were five Korean professors at UBC, including Bumsik Chang's brother, Yunshik Chang, in sociology.[8]

A few Korean physicians also managed to immigrate to Canada before formal channels for immigration between the two countries were established. The first to arrive, in 1961, was Sun Shik Shim (Sim Sŏnsik), followed a couple of months latter by Jang-Ock Oh (Oh Chang-ok). Both came by way of the United States rather than directly from Korea. That same year Sangchul Lee (Yi Sangch'ŏl) was able to travel directly from Korea to Vancouver,[9] since he was not

6 Fritz Lehmann, "Korean Immigrants in British Columbia," in Chŏngam Kwŏn Hyŏng-myŏn Kyosu Hoegap Nonmunjip Kanhaeng Wiwŏnhoe (The Committee to Compile a Festschrift for Professor Kwŏn Hyŏng-myŏn in Honour of His 60th Birthday), ed., *Tongsŏ munhwa ŭi mannam : Chŏngam Kwŏn Hyŏng-myŏn Kyosu hoegap kinyŏm nonmunjip (The meeting of the cultures of East and West: Essays in honor of the 60th birthday of Professor Kwŏn Hyŏng-myŏn*), (Seoul: Posŏng Munhwasa, 1987), 599.

7 Obituary, *Vancouver Sun* (12 January 2005).

8 Conversation with Yunshik Chang, 8 May 2008.

9 Marc Song, "The Vancouver Korean Community: Reestablishing Status within the Canadian Context, 1965–1997," (M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, May 1997), 24–5. See also Marc Song, "Toward a History of Koreans in Canada," Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek and Jennifer Jay, eds., *East Asian cultural and historical perspectives: histories and society/culture and literature* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Research Institute for Comparative Literature and Cross-Cultural Studies, 1997), 173-182.

yet an immigrant. He came to study at the Union Theological College (now known as the Vancouver School of Theology) and returned to Korea after he finished his degree in 1963.[10]

Rev. Lee returned to Vancouver in 1965 as a landed immigrant — he had been invited by the United Church to serve as a pastor for a Japanese congregation in Steveston (the former Japanese fishing village in Richmond, not far from the Vancouver airport). His old acquaintances in the small local Korean community asked him if he could also lead a Korean worship group, which led to the formation, in 1965, of Canada's first Korean United Church congregation.[11]

Rev. Lee left Vancouver in 1969 to become the founding pastor of a Korean United Church in Toronto. He stayed in Toronto and, in 1988, was elected moderator of the United Church of Canada. However, the community he left in Vancouver continued to grow. From only approximately fifty people in the mid-1960s,[12] the Vancouver Korean community grew over thirty times by 1975, to 1,670.

During the first decade of regular immigration from Korea to Canada, most newcomers settled in Toronto. In fact, census figures show that Vancouver only had about sixteen percent of the 10,386 Koreans who lived in Canada in 1975.[13] Nevertheless, the community was growing rapidly, as more and more Koreans sought a safe haven from poverty and political unrest in Korea.[14]

The Korean Community Begins to Grow

Whereas only 189 Koreans immigrated to Canada in 1966, 4,331 did so in 1975.[15] However, that rapid growth in the number of Koreans moving to Canada soon slowed, thanks to changes in Canada's immigration policy. The beginning of regular immigration from Korea to Canada had been stimulated by the change in immigration laws away from ethnic quotas in 1967, but the new immigration law that was declared in 1976 and went into effect in 1978 put

10 Sang-Chul Lee and Erick Weingartner, *The Wanderer: The Autobiography of a United Church Moderator* (Winfield, B.C.: Wood Lake Books, 1989), 80–90.

11 Ibid., 90–9; *Vancouver Sun*, (31 June 2005), 36.

12 Kwak, Min-jung, "An Exploration of the Korean-Canadian Community in Vancouver," Research on Immigration and Integration in the Metropolis Working Paper Series (Vancouver Centre for Excellence, 4–14 July 2004), 14.

13 Song, "The Vancouver Korean Community," 20. See the chart in Kwak, 16.

14 Korea experienced the overthrow of one government in 1960 and another government in 1961. Moreover, in 1972, the little progress toward democracy that had been made since 1961 was reversed with the declaration of "Koreanized democracy" that made the then president of Korea president for life. In addition, though Korea began its march toward prosperity in the late 1960s , it still had a long way to go in the first half of the 1970s.

15 Lehmann, 611.

a damper on immigration. Perhaps inspired by concern for a dramatic change in Canada's ethnic make-up (in 1971, for the first time in history, more immigrants came to Canada from Asia than from Europe[16]), Canada made it more difficult for permanent residents who were not citizens to invite relatives to join them in Canada and also gave priority to those with occupational skills in short supply in the Canadian work force. The result was a drop from the peak of over 4,000 Korean immigrants in 1975 to less than 1,000 a year from 1978 through 1980. Immigration from Korea stayed below 2,000 a year until 1987, and did not return to the 4,000 level until 1997, in spite of the shift in 1986 to a policy of encouraging investment immigrants, those who brought enough capital to Canada with them to create jobs for people already in Canada. After 1997, as the Korean economy grew rich enough to produce a substantial number of people with the financial ability to be investment immigrants, the flow of people from Korea increased dramatically. In 2001, the number of immigrants from Korea was 9,608, well over double what it had been only five years earlier, almost four times what it had been in 1991, and ten times what it had been in 1980. However, in 2002, another change in Canadian immigration policy, which gave priority to those with proficiency in English or French, slowed immigrants from Korea once again, dropping down to less than 6,000 in 2005. It rose again to a little more than 6,000 in 2006.[17]

Despite these ups and downs in the numbers of Koreans immigrating to Canada, the total number of Koreans in this country grew steadily. In 1991, there were only 45,890 Korean permanent residents or citizens in all of Canada, fewer than there are in B.C. today. However, even that small number was 54 percent higher than the figure in the census five years earlier, in 1986, which found only 29,705 Koreans.[18] As noted above, the growth in the number of immigrants arriving annually from Korea slowed, growing only slightly over the first half of the 1990s. The 64,835 Koreans that Statistics Canada identified in 1996 was an increase of less than 20,000, only 43 percent, over 1991. That gave Canada a Korean community much smaller than the Chinese (860,150), South Asian (670,590), and Filipino (234,195) communities, and even a little smaller than the Japanese-Canadian community (68,135) that year.

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16 Will Ferguson, *Canadian History for Dummies* (Mississauga, Ont.: John Wiley and Sons, 2005), 369.

17 The figures for 1997 through 2006 were taken from Citizenship and Immigration Canada, *Facts and Figures: Immigration Overview*, <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/statistics/facts2006/index.asp>, (viewed 7 September 2008). Figures for the years before 1997 were taken from the annual reports available at <http://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/202/301/immigration_statistics-ef/index.html>, (viewed 7 September 2008).

18 See Yoo. That official figure may have understated the actual number of Koreans in Canada in 1985. There may have been as many as 50,000, with 8,000 of them living in the Vancouver area. See Lehmann, 600.

In 1996, Statistics Canada identified 19,050 Koreans in B.C., less than a third of the national total. However, that meant the Korean community in the province was 11 times larger than it had been two decades earlier, and that it had grown substantially over the less than 5,000 Koreans who lived in the Vancouver area in 1986, and the 8,330 who lived here in 1991.[19] Nevertheless, it was still not quite large enough to be a noticeable presence. Just as they were in the rest of Canada, Koreans in B.C. in 1995 were greatly outnumbered by Chinese (299,860), South Asians (158,430), Filipinos (47,080), Southeast Asians (25,355), and Japanese (29,815). The real growth, both nationally and in B.C., came in the decade that followed.

Between 1996 and 2001, the number of Koreans in Canada surpassed 100,000, growing 53 percent to 100,660, a substantially higher growth rate than seen in the overall Canadian population, which grew only four percent over that five-year period.[20] Five years later, according to the most recent census, in 2006, there are 146,550 Koreans living in Canada, which was a further growth of almost 46 percent, in spite of the slowdown in immigration caused by the shift in Canadian immigration policy toward favouring those with greater proficiency in English or French.

Moreover, over the last decade, British Columbia, particularly the Vancouver area, has been attracting a larger percentage of immigrants to Canada from Korea.[21] Between 1996 and 2001, the number of Koreans in the Vancouver area rose 69 percent, to 28,850 (out of 31,195 in B.C. overall). According to the 2006 census, the number of Koreans in the province overall rose to 50,490, with 44,825 recorded as living in the Greater Vancouver area. Whereas the B.C. Korean community until the early 1990s constituted only 20 percent or less of the entire Korean-Canadian community, six years into the twenty-first century, more than a third of all Korean Canadian citizens and permanent residents lived in B.C.

The Impact of Students from Korea

If you count sojourners from Korea in Canada, those who have come either to study or to stay with their children who are studying, B.C. now has an even larger percentage of Canada's Korean population. As noted above, the Vancouver Consulate-General estimated that there are around 20,000 more Koreans in B.C. than were counted in the most recent census. Most of that additional 20,000 comes from the transitory student population.

Clear evidence of the size of the Korean student population in BC is apparent if you walk along Robson Street (popularly known as Robsonstrasse) in

19 Song, "The Vancouver Korean Community," 22.

20 *The Korean Community in Canada* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2007).

21 Kwak, 3, 16–17.

downtown Vancouver. There are quite a few Korean restaurants and other shops along the street, including a branch of the popular Hmart (Han-Ah-Reum) supermarket, to cure the culinary homesickness of the many Koreans who have come to Vancouver to study in the many English as a Second Language (ELS) schools in that part of town. I would not go so far as some websites and call that part of Vancouver's West End the primary Koreatown.[22] Nevertheless, if I want to hear Korean spoken by native speakers, all I have to do is walk a block or two down Robson. The odds are high that I will overhear at least one Korean-language conversation.

Korea has been sending more students to study in Canada than any other country for most of the last decade. In fact, in 2005, almost 38 percent of those entering Canada with student visas came from South Korea (13,407, out of a total of 35,383). Only China came close.[23] Moreover, since the late 1990s, most of those Korean students have chosen Vancouver over Toronto.[24] Since Koreans make up close to 20 percent of those who come to Canada every year to study, it would be reasonable to estimate that around 10 percent of all international students studying in Canada are Koreans studying in Vancouver. This situation is a relatively recent phenomenon. Since 1999, the number of Korean students in Canada at any one time has doubled. Moreover, in addition to university-age students, Koreans of high school, middle-school, or even elementary school age have begun to spend a year or two in Canadian schools to improve their English. There are enough of these young English-learners, most of whom stay with their mother here while their father remains back in Korea to earn enough money to pay for their study overseas, that a special Korean term has arisen to describe their families. They are called "kirŏgi," a term for wild geese, since their fathers fly back and forth across the Pacific rather than staying put on one side of the ocean or the other.[25]

The Emergence of Korean Shopping Centres

The result of this rapid rise in the number of Koreans in the Vancouver area has been the appearance of more and more visible signs of the Korean community.

22 For example, <http://www.spiritus-temporis.com/koreatown,-vancouver>, (viewed 11 April 2009).

23 See <http://www.asiapacificgateway.net/statistics/permints.cfm>, (viewed 31 May 2008).

24 Kwak, 18.

25 On kirŏgi families in Canada, see Young-hwa Hong, "Skilled Korean Women on the Move: Becoming Transnational Migrants," in *Han Kŭt: Critical Art and Writing by Korean Canadian Women*, ed., Korea Canadian Women's Anthology Collective (Toronto: Inanna Publications and Education Inc. 2007), 210–16. Canada is not the only country attracting Korean "wild geese" families. Students as young as elementary-school age are being dispatched all over the English-speaking world to learn English at an early age. See Norimitsu Onishi, "For English Studies, Koreans Say Good-bye to Dad," *New York Times*, (8 June 2008).

One reason there are so many Korean language signs scattered around B.C. is that, though Koreans remain only a small minority of the population of the lower mainland (a little over 2 percent), Korean speakers now rank third among those who speak a language other than English at home, behind only the various varieties of Chinese, as well as Punjabi.[26] It is the continued use of Korean as their primary language that is most responsible for the visibility of the Korean community in B.C. More than those whose mother tongue is French, German, or Tagalog (all of whom outnumber Koreans in B.C.), Koreans tend not only to speak their mother tongue at home, but also use it at church or in a temple, when shopping, and, if possible, when at work.[27] This strong attachment to their native language leads to more signs in Korean identifying buildings scattered across B.C., from banks to churches, as catering to Koreans, giving the impression that there are more Koreans than there are Canadians of Filipino or German background.

Korean signs can be seen all over British Columbia, since Koreans can be found throughout the province. However, those signs, and the community at which they are aimed, are concentrated in the Vancouver area. Almost 89 percent of Koreans in British Columbia live in the Vancouver area (44,825 out of 50,490), though only around half of the overall population of B.C. can be found there. Moreover, almost 60 percent of all B.C. Koreans can be found in four cities: Vancouver itself, plus its suburbs of Burnaby, Coquitlam, and Surrey. Vancouver has the largest single concentration of Koreans, but, at 8,780 (not counting foreign students), it claims only 17 percent of the B.C. Korean community. Burnaby and Surrey are not far behind, at 15 percent each, followed closely by Coquitlam at 12 percent.

However, in spite of the greater number of Koreans in Vancouver, except for the Robsonstrasse area downtown, Koreans are actually more visible in Burnaby, Coquitlam, and Surrey. This situation may exist because in Vancouver itself not only are there more people who speak a form of Chinese at home, there are also more people who speak Vietnamese and Tagalog at home than speak Korean. In Burnaby and Coquitlam, on the other hand, since 2001, Korean has been second only to Chinese among the languages other than English spoken at home, and in Surrey, in 2006, it ranked behind only English and Punjabi. In the small town of Port Moody, which borders Burnaby and Coquitlam, Korean is second only to English, while in another small town, Port Coquitlam, which lies on Coquitlam's south flank, Korean is behind English and Cantonese.

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26 Statistics Canada asks citizens and permanent residents of Canada not only what their mother tongue is, but also what language they tend to use at home.

27 British Columbia Statistics, "2006 Census Fast Fact, Mother Tongue and Home Language," <http://www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca/pubs/pr_immig.asp>, (viewed 7 September 2008).

There are other communities in B.C. in which Koreans are disproportionately represented among visible and linguistic minorities. In the small town of Hope, beyond the eastern edge of the Fraser Valley, the 115 Koreans constituted the largest visible minority in the 2006 census. In White Rock, a tourist zone down on the United States border, Korean is the second most widely-spoken language, after only English. The same is true of the Langley district, which lies between Greater Vancouver and the Fraser Valley. And in North Vancouver, a small community resting between the mountains and the Burrard Inlet, Korean is second only to English and Farsi, though in the more exclusive neighboring North Shore community of West Vancouver, Koreans are outnumbered not only by English and Farsi speakers but also by speakers of Chinese and German.[28]

In spite of the relatively high ranking of Korean among languages spoken in these various smaller communities, the actual numbers of Koreans living there has not been enough to generate the sort of clusters of Korean stores that can claim the title of Koreatown. Instead, this designation has gone to a few blocks along North Road, stretching from New Westminster towards Port Moody between Burnaby and Coquitlam. This area, centrally located in the lower mainland, contains relatively large numbers of Koreans, especially relative to speakers of other languages at home.

However, before North Road appeared on the cultural map of British Columbia, there was Kingsway in Vancouver. Sometime in the late 1970s, the first Korean restaurant opened just off Kingsway. A few years later, in the 1980s, the first Korean grocery store opened. It was the beginning of what became, by the late 1980s, a cluster of various businesses run by and for Koreans along several blocks of Kingsway in East Vancouver. In addition to restaurants and grocery stores (including Western Market, the first large-scale Korean grocery store in B.C.), there were Korean video stores, computer shops and other retail outlets, and even a credit union (Sharons Credit Union).[29]

By the late 1990s, it became apparent that Kingsway did not offer enough space for the shopping needs of the growing Korean community.[30] When Hannam Supermarket bought an old Canadian Tire property along North Road, on the other side of Burnaby from Kingsway, Korean businesses began moving there from Kingsway. Hannam Supermarket opened in September 1998, and

28 Information on the various communities of B.C. is available in community profiles at <http://www.welcomebc.ca/en/growing_your_community/trends/2006/>, (viewed 7 September 2008).

29 In his 1987 article, Lehmann notes that there was no Korean shopping district at that time (page 606). I moved to Vancouver in 1987 and concur with his observation, though Kingsway began to change not long afterwards.

30 John K. Suk, chief operating officer of Sharons Credit Union, Kingsway branch, interview by Tony Fu Shing Tsang, May 2008.

Figure 1: The entrance to one of many Korean shopping centres along North Road between Burnaby and Coquitlam in Metro Vancouver.

became the nucleus of a much bigger cluster of Korean offices and businesses than had been on Kingsway street.[31] Soon North Road was filled not only with Korean retail outlets and restaurants, but also with offices for Korean lawyers, accountants, doctors, and dentists. The opening of the Millennium rapid transit line to the North Road area a few years after Hannam Supermarket opened increased the popularity of that area, since it was much easier to get to than Kingsway was. In addition, the central role of the North Road shopping area was strengthened when another Korean supermarket, Han-Ah-Reum, bought the London Drugs site across the street a few years later, and created another Korean shopping centre.

At the same time that many of the Korean businesses catering to the permanent Korean community were moving to North Road, a new cluster of Korean restaurants was opening up for the many students in the English-language institutes in downtown Vancouver. In the early 1990s, a Korean grocery store, as well as several cafés, noodle-shops, and dry-cleaners, began opening along or near Robson Street. Though there have been some changes in the ownership and even the names of some of the businesses, it remains a vibrant centre

31 Chun Sangju, manager at Hannam Supermarket, and James J. Lee, chartered accountant at Minsoo Go & Company Ltd., interviews by Tong Fu Shing Tsang, May 2008. (See Figure 1).

for Korean shopping. However, since it arose to serve the needs of a transient student population, the Robson Street area has not developed the suites of professional offices seen along North Road, nor does it have as great a variety of retail outlets. Moreover, it has attracted a more diverse customer base than North Road, with the many young non-Korean professionals who live in Vancouver's West End frequenting these Korean-owned establishments.[32]

The three clusters of Korean shops, plus smaller clusters in Surrey and Langley, are not the only visible evidence for a growing Korean presence in the lower mainland of British Columbia. There are also other Korean-run businesses, including many corner markets and flower shops, as well as Korean-run Japanese restaurants, scattered across Vancouver and its suburbs. However, the most visible impact on the cultural landscape of B.C. has come from the proliferation of churches.

Korean Churches

According to the 2005 census in South Korea, around eighteen percent of Koreans are Protestant Christians, eleven percent are Roman Catholic, and 23 percent say they are Buddhists. (Most of the reminder have no explicit religious orientation).[33] However, Canada census takers found in 2001 that, across Canada, over half of the Koreans living here said they were non-Roman Catholic Christians and another 25 percent said they were Catholic. (Less than four percent said they were Buddhist.) Protestants claimed a similar percentage of the B.C. Korean community in 2001, but Catholics did not do as well. Twenty percent of B.C. Koreans in 2001 said they were Roman Catholics. Another five percent said they were Buddhists, somewhat higher than the national average.[34] There probably has not been much of a change since 2001, except that Buddhists may have risen beyond five percent in B.C., given the claim of a local Korean Buddhist temple that there are over 1,000 families on its membership roles.

A few years ago, in 2005 and 2006, as part of a broader project on Asian Religions in Vancouver, I studied the religious affiliations of Koreans in British Columbia. At that time, I counted over 170 separate Korean congregations, the vast majority (over 150 of them) in the lower mainland. I also located one Korean Catholic Church (that church claimed to have over 9,000 names on its parish rolls and ran, in addition to its main church in Surrey, three branch

32 Darren Noh, manager of Madanggol Restaurant, and Mr. Guan, owner of Pleasant Dry Cleaner, interviews by Tong Fu Shing Tsang, May 2008.

33 National Statistics Office of the Republic of Korea, <http://www.kosis.kr/domestic/theme/do01_index.jsp>, (viewed 8 September 2008).

34 Census of Canada, 2001, Catalogue no. 97F0022XCB2001005, "Religion and Visible Minority Groups," (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 13 May 2003).

Figure 2: Kwanglim Korean Methodist Church alongside the trans-Canada Highway, on the outskirts of Metro Vancouver

chapels, including one on Robson Street for the English-language students). In addition, I identified three Buddhist temples, including the one in Surrey, built to look like a temple in Korea, which claimed a membership of over 1,000.[35] These figures are quite a change from two decades ago, when there were only 15 or 16 Korean Protestant churches in the lower mainland, only one Catholic church, and no Buddhist temples.[36]

The Korean Buddhist temple, Seo Kwang-sa, is at the end of a country road in Langley and is not likely to be noticed by many people who have not set out to look for it. The Catholic Church is also in a quiet location in Surrey and has probably gone unnoticed by non-Koreans who do not live in that neighborhood. The various Korean Protestant churches, however, are hard to miss. Most of them are located near some of the busiest streets in Greater Vancouver. For example, if you drive along the Trans-Canada Highway out of Vancouver, as you pass through Surrey, you will see a large building with a sign proclaiming that it is the Kwanglim Methodist Church (see Figure 2).

35 Don Baker, "Shelter from the Storm: Korean (and some other) Religious Organizations in British Columbia," in *Asian Religions in British Columbia*, eds. Don Baker, Larry DeVries, and Dan Overmyer (University of British Columbia Press, forthcoming).

36 Lehmann, 604.

When I investigated the religious affiliations of B.C. Koreans two years ago, I counted 31 Korean churches in Surrey, 28 in Vancouver, 25 in Burnaby, 16 in New Westminster, and 14 in Coquitlam, to name only the places with the largest number of churches. Most of these churches are not separate buildings used only by Koreans. With the exceptions of large churches such as Kwanglim Methodist, Grace Church, and Philadelphia Presbyterian in Surrey; the Korean United Church in Burnaby; and the Korean Presbyterian Church in Vancouver, most Korean Christian denominations rent space from already existing churches and place large signs outside to announce their Korean-language services (usually on Sunday afternoons). Up the street from my home in New Westminster, there is one church, a Canadian Lutheran Church, which shares its space with two Korean congregations, one Presbyterian and the other Seventh Day Adventist.

It is not only the presence of signs in Korean announcing church services in buildings that have housed Euro-Canadian congregations for generations that has changed the religious landscape of British Columbia. The type of Christianity Koreans practice has pushed Protestant Christianity in B.C. in a more charismatic, fundamentalist, and evangelical direction. The first church established for and by Koreans in the province was a mainstream United Church. However, as the Korean population grew, Koreans grew bolder in importing their own denominational affiliations. At first they opened Presbyterian and Methodist churches. Although these denominations are not particularly significant in Canada today, they are by far the two largest Protestant denominations in Korea. Koreans brought these denominational preferences with them when they immigrated, and in doing so have increased the visibility of the Presbyterian and Methodist approaches to Christianity. Although Koreans were less than 1 percent of the B.C. population in 2001, they were 6.5 percent of the Presbyterians in this province, and nine percent of the Methodists.[37] United, Presbyterian, and Methodist churches were soon followed by churches affiliated with other denominations active in Korea, including the Holiness Church and the more charismatic Full Gospel Holiness Church and the Foursquare Gospel Church, churches not even listed in the 2001 census as Christian denominations in Canada. I have counted at least 13 Protestant denominations represented among the various churches serving the B.C. Korean community. Not only have Koreans diversified the religious landscape of B.C., with churches representing denominations that have been less prominent here, they have increased the visibility of evangelical Christianity. Koreans hold enthusiastic revivals more frequently than most other Canadian Christians do, and they have also opened at least four local "retreat centres," which maintain a revival atmosphere almost every day of the week. The

37 See note 32.

enthusiastic Korean approach to Christianity has begun to influence non-Korean Christians. Koreans make up a disproportionate percentage of the students at Trinity Western University in Langley, as well as at Regent College UBC. They have also given new life to Presbyterian, Methodist, and Baptist communities in B.C. In addition, Korean Christian groups appear to be the most active student Christian groups on the UBC campus (though the Chinese Christian community may dispute that claim).

The Identity of Koreans in Vancouver

So far I have discussed Koreans in Vancouver as though they were all members of a homogenous community. However, as the Korean community has grown in numbers, it has also grown in diversity. Adult immigrants, often already with professional degrees in hand, have been joined by sojourners, such as students at UBC (UBC has exchange programs with several Korean universities), in the English-language institutes in downtown Vancouver, as well as elsewhere in the lower mainland, and in various elementary and secondary schools. Those younger students are often (though not always) accompanied by their mothers, forming the "kirŏgi" families mentioned earlier. Even if they stay in B.C. for a few years, they usually hold firmly to their Korean identity, since they are aware, and are constantly reminded by their mothers and fathers, that they are only temporarily in Canada. Moreover, because of the relatively large size of the Korean student population in the lower mainland, they are able to hang out with Korean friends of a similar age. Thanks to the internet and satellite TV, they are able to keep up with popular culture in Korea. In a further reinforcement of their Korean identity, many of them attend Korean churches, in which both the services and the socializing that follows are largely conducted in the Korean language. Since so much of their life outside of the classroom is spent in a Korean cultural zone, very few of them adopt a Canadian self-identity. The vast majority of them would resist being labelled "Korean-Canadians," even though they might spend a lot of time in Canada.

These temporary Korean residents of the lower mainland, with their strong assertion of a Korean identity though they are living in Canada, are very different from those Koreans who have made Canada their permanent home. Permanent residents of Korean descent, those with landed status as well as those with Canadian citizenship, also differ in the way they define themselves. Adult immigrants from Korea have, as one would expect, a relatively strong sense of a Korean identity. Children brought from Korea, depending on how old those children were when they immigrated, have a mixed identity, feeling both Korean and Canadian. Second-generation Korean-Canadians, a growing community, often (though not always) say they feel more Canadian than Korean.

Adult immigrants who have succeeded in high-status professional occupations, such as medicine or higher education, are usually the most comfortable

with a dual identity. They are proud to be Korean but also feel they belong in Canada. However, they make up a minority of adult immigrants. Many more of those first-generation Korean-Canadians find that in Canada they have had to accept a job with lower social status than they enjoyed back in Korea. Often men with managerial or even executive positions in respected corporations in Korea end up running sandwich shops or corner stores in British Columbia. They find that the credentials they had worked so hard to earn in Korea are not accepted or respected as much in Canada as they were in Korea and, as a result, they feel that they have not been completely accepted by Canadian society. Some of them also feel that, because of their accent and their skin colour, they will never be accepted as real Canadians.[38] As a result, they often feel more like Koreans living in Canada rather than true Korean-Canadians. In order to overcome the low self-esteem that feeling like an outsider can bring, they spend much of their free time with other Koreans at church or in various local Korean organizations, such as the Korean Society of British Columbia. Both Korean churches and Korean social and cultural organizations provide opportunities for acquiring the social status they feel Canadian society at large denies them while affirming their self-identity as Koreans who happen to live in Canada.[39]

Their children often have a different self-identity. Koreans talk about a "1.5 generation," Koreans who immigrated to Canada involuntarily (they were brought here by their parents) after they had begun their education in Korea but before they finished high school.[40] Particularly if they immigrated before their teenage years, they usually speak English without a perceptible accent. However, since they began but did not complete their socialization in Korea, they sometimes feel caught between two cultures. They recognize that, in many ways, they are different culturally from "real Canadians" (a term they tend to restrict to Caucasian Canadians).[41] However, especially if they have a chance to spend some time on vacation in Korea, they also recognize that in many respects they are culturally different from "real Koreans" as well. Feeling neither fully Korean nor fully Canadian, they tend to associate with other 1.5 generation Koreans. They congregate in Korean Christian youth groups on B.C. university campuses and at Korean churches that provide English-language services.

38 Song, "The Vancouver Korean Community," 9–10, 40–6.

39 Kwang Chung Kim and Shin Kim, "The Ethnic Roles of Korean Immigrant Churches in the United States," in *Korean Americans and Their Religions: Pilgrims and Missionaries from a Different Shore*, eds. Ho-Youn Kwon, Kwang Chung Kim, and R. Stephen Warner (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 71–94. Much of what they say about the Korean-American pursuit of social status and solidarity in church is true of the Korean-Canadian community as well.

40 Ji Hoon Park, 2–3.

41 Ibid., 6.

Ironically, though Christianity is the majority religion in Canada, their Christian faith does not make them feel more integrated into Canadian society.[42] Koreans are aware that Korean Christianity is distinctive, not only in the language used in services, but also in the intensity and manner in which they manifest their faith. In fact, many Korean Christians feel that Korean Christianity is superior to the Christianity practiced by other ethnic groups. Both in Korea and in North America, Korean Christians often assert that they are a chosen people, that God has assigned them the task of showing the rest of the world how Christianity should be practiced. As one Korean-American scholar recently noted:

> From Korean American Christians' point of view, God chose America in the seventeenth century and enormously blessed it as His second Chosen People after the Jews. However, they lost their favor because of their increasing atheistic attitudes. Then Korean Christians are here to help America to regain God's favor.[43]

Several scholars of Koreans in the United States point out that, because of their belief that Korean Christianity is special, attending a Korean church is a way to assert a distinctive Korean religious and therefore cultural identity, not a way to assimilate into American society.[44] It is reasonable to assume that the same is true of Korean-Canadians.

Because the 1.5 generation feels neither fully Korean nor fully Canadian,[45] there is often tension between them and the true second generation Korean-Canadians. Korean-Canadians who were born in Canada and have spent most their formative years outside of Korea usually feel a greater distance from Korean culture and "real Koreans" than do those who spent a major part of their childhood in Korea. Moreover, they usually do not speak Korean well, unlike those in the 1.5 generation, who completed elementary school or higher in Korea. As a result, many of the 1.5 generation look down on second-generation Koreans as not being real Koreans ("banana," yellow on the outside but white on the inside, is one derogatory term for them), while second-generation

42 Cho, 119.

43 Soo-Young Lee, "God's Chosen People: Protestant Narratives of Korean Americans and American National Identity," (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas, Austin, 2007), 240.

44 For example, see Rebecca Kim, "Second-Generation Korean American Evangelicals on the College Campus: Constructing Ethnic Boundaries," in *Religion and Spirituality in Korean America*, eds. David K. Yoo and Ruth H. Chung (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 172–92; Kelly Chong, "What it Means to be Christian: The Role of Religion in the Construction of Ethnic Identity and Boundary among Second-Generation Korean Americans," in *Life in America: Identity and Everyday Experience*, ed. Lee D. Baker (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 98–9.

45 Cho, 3.

Korean-Canadians are sometimes embarrassed by the way the 1.5 generation act "like a Korean" in a Canadian cultural context. (One particular point of tension is the respect older 1.5 generation Koreans demand from younger members of Korean campus organizations. Although there is a strong sense in Korea that even a small difference in age creates a social hierarchy in which the junior should defer to a senior, second-generation Korean-Canadians who have absorbed the more egalitarian spirit of Canadian culture resent demands for deference from those only slightly older than they are.)[46]

However, it is dangerous to generalize about second-generation Korean-Canadians as though they are all the same. Some grow more interested in their Korean heritage in high school or when they enter university as they become more self-conscious about the fact that they have a different physical appearance or that their parents have raised them with different values. Others try to fit into mainstream Canadian culture by downplaying their ethnic heritage. Students in the first group sign up for UBC's Korean language and history classes, join Korean student clubs, and call themselves "Korean-Canadians." Those in the second group tend to stay away from groups and classes that are predominantly Korean, and tend to refer to themselves as Canadians. However, members of both groups, as well as members of the 1.5 generation, find themselves asserting their Korean identity more aggressively than usual when they are mistaken for Chinese-Canadians. Since Chinese-Canadians greatly outnumber Korean-Canadians, this mistake happens fairly often, and appears to bother even those who otherwise are not particularly concerned about the Korean side of the cultural heritage.[47]

Gaining Visibility in the Vancouver Area

In spite of the variety of opinions within the Korean-Canadian community over how best to define Korean ethnicity, and over how much to adapt to Canadian culture, there is broad agreement within the community that, nonetheless, they are all Koreans. In the 2006 census, when Vancouver-area Koreans were asked their ethnic identity, the vast majority, 95.7 percent, said Korean only. Only 1,980 (4.3 percent) out of the 46,035 Koreans the census recorded said they were both Korean and something else. That gives the Korean community greater cohesion than other Asian minorities in the lower mainland. Eleven percent of Chinese in the lower mainland claimed a multiple identity, over twice

46 M. Agnes Kang and Adrienne Lo, "Two Ways of Articulating Heterogeneity in Korean American Narratives of Ethnic Identity," *Journal of Asian American Studies*, 7, no. 2 (June, 2004): 93–116. Though Kang and Lo are writing about Korean-Americans, their research is applicable to Korean-Canadians.

47 See Eom. Although this thesis is about Koreans in Edmonton, the findings resonate with what I know about second-generation Koreans in the Vancouver area.

the rate of the Korean community, as did 12.4 percent of South Asians, 29 percent of Filipinos, 20 percent of Vietnamese, and 36 percent of Japanese.[48]

One reason so few Koreans in Vancouver give themselves a multiple or hyphenated identity may be because so many of them are immigrants rather than Koreans born in Canada. The 2006 census calculated that at least 89 percent of the Koreans living in the Greater Vancouver area were not born in Canada. That is substantially higher than any of the other Asian minorities. Only 76 percent of Chinese, and the same percentage of Filipinos, were not born here. The figure was even lower for Southeast Asians (70 percent) and South Asians (63 percent). The Japanese community contrasted with the Korean community the most, with a majority, 55 percent, not born in this country. Moreover, the Korean community was also the youngest immigrant group, in terms of the how recently they had arrived. Twenty-seven percent of the Koreans identified as Korean in the census figures arrived in Canada between 2001 and 2006. The comparable figure for Filipinos was only 20 percent, 14 percent for Chinese, 12 percent for South Asians, and 8 percent for Southeast Asians. In addition, the Korean community had, in 2006, a higher percentage of non-permanent residents than any other Asian-Canadian community (20 percent). In fact, census Canada recorded more Korean non-permanent residents than it did for any other Asian ethnic community, the 8,875 non-permanent resident Koreans outnumbering even the 7,660 Chinese.[49]

The fact that so many of the Koreans in Vancouver are relatively new arrivals, or are even temporary residents who have not legally adopted a Korean-Canadian identity, has helped the Korean community maintain its Korean identity in the midst of an overwhelmingly non-Korean culture. However, the community is not just a Korean community. It is a Korean-Canadian community. It is a Korean-Canadian community partially because non-Koreans in Canada recognize that Koreans constitute a separate and distinct culture within the multicultural mosaic that is the lower mainland of British Columbia. That means that Koreans there are seen as part of the broader Canadian community and therefore are Korean-Canadians. It is also a Korean-Canadian community, rather than a purely Korean community, because members of that community themselves recognize that they live in Canada and therefore things they would do as part of everyday life in Korea constitute an assertion in Canada that they represent a separate and distinct ethnic culture.

48 Census Canada, 2006, Catalogue no. 97-562-XCB2006006, "Ethnic Origin, Single and Multiple Ethnic Origin Responses, and Sex", (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 6 December 2008).

49 Census Canada, 2008, Catalogue no. 97-562-XCB2006016, "Visible Minority Groups, Immigrant Status and Period of Immigration, Age Groups, and Sex," (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2 April 2008).

One reason Koreans have gained visibility in the lower mainland is that Korean-language signs are ubiquitous, identifying Korean churches, Korean restaurants, and Korean businesses. When a Korean-Canadian erects such a sign in Metro Vancouver, he or she is not simply signalling the location of a generic church, eatery, or store (as would be the case in Korea), but is proclaiming the presence of a Korean church, eatery, or business, providing visible evidence of the existence of a Korean sub-culture within the larger Canadian culture of this part of Canada. These signs, often appearing amid a sea of English-language signs, serve as reminders both to those who erect them, as well as to other Koreans who notice them, that they are Koreans in Canada. Non-Koreans also notice those signs and, even if they do not read Korean, they can tell that the signs are not in English or French. In fact, many non-Koreans in the Vancouver area have learned to tell the difference between the circles and straight lines of the Korean alphabet and the more complex characters of Chinese and the cursive script of Punjabi. For non-Koreans, therefore, the Korean signs that appear on streets and buildings throughout Metro Vancouver stimulate an awareness of the existence of a Korean-Canadian community in their midst. Korean signs are much more visible than Filipino signs (which, because they are written in English, are less distinct) or Vietnamese signs (which are written using the English alphabet and thus do not have the visual impact Korean-language signs have.)

In addition to the signs above the front doors, Korean restaurants not only serve food, but they serve to reinforce, both for Koreans and in non-Koreans, the recognition that Koreans have a distinct culture that is not only different from mainstream Canadian culture, but is also different from Chinese, Japanese, and Vietnamese culture because of the distinctive character of Korean food. Korean restaurants that specialize in Korean dishes (and there are quite a few such restaurants in Metro Vancouver) serve food that could not be mistaken for the foods associated with other Asian cultures. When a Korean-Canadian has a meal of bean paste soup (*toenjang jjigae*), or takes a bite of spicy *kimch'i*, he or she is reminded that Korean culinary culture is unique, and often feels that only a true Korean such as himself or herself can enjoy such dishes.[50] (This misperception persists even though it is not unusual to see non-Koreans enjoying those exact same foods.) Moreover, eating Korean food in a restaurant in Vancouver is not the same as eating Korean food in a restaurant in Seoul. In Seoul, eating Korean food is simply having a meal. In Vancouver, it is often a conscious choice to eat food that is familiar and comfortable, or that reminds you of the food your mother used to make, or that you ate regularly

50 The connection between Korean food consumption and ethnic self-identity among expatriates, albeit in a Japanese context, is discussed in H.K. Wang., "A Study of the Ethnic Identity of Korean Residents in Osaka City through the Food Culture: A Focus on the Festive Food Culture," *Journal of Home Economics of Japan* 53, no.7 (2002): 671–80.

before you emigrated. In other words, a simple bowl of bean paste soup or a bit of *kimch'i* is a culinary assertion of a Korean identity in a Canadian context, in other words, of a Korean-Canadian identity.

When non-Koreans try Korean food, they too are reminded that Koreans, with their distinctive cuisine complementing their distinctive alphabet, are not Chinese or Japanese or Filipinos or Vietnamese but Korean. In fact, Canadians often go to Korean restaurants precisely to try something different. In doing so, they are affirming, both in their own eyes and in the eyes of the Koreans whose restaurants they patronize, that Korean culture constitutes a separate and distinct culture and that Korean-Canadians constitute a separate and distinct ethnic group with the broader society of Metro Vancouver.

Just as the Korean script and Korean cuisine is easily recognizable as distinct from Chinese, Japanese, and Vietnamese scripts and cuisines, so too, to those who notice it, is Korean religiosity. Although Koreans make up only a small portion of the overall Christian population of the province (at most 50,000 Koreans in B.C. are Christians, out of an overall provincial Christian population of over 2,000,000), Korean-language signs identifying places where Korean congregations gather for Christian worship can be seen in every municipality in Metro Vancouver. As noted earlier, in 2006, I counted over 150 Korean congregations in Metro Vancouver. My contacts in the local community claim that today the number is closer to 200. The sharing of worship space with Euro-Canadian congregations increases awareness of Korean Christianity, while holding separate worship services for Korean congregations increases awareness that Korean culture, including Korean Christian culture, is separate and distinct from the many other cultures that can be found in Metro Vancouver. Both the Koreans who attend separate worship services, as well as non-Koreans who are aware of them, see in Korean religiosity more evidence for the existence of a distinctive Korean-Canadian culture.

One of the distinctive features of Korean-Canadian culture is how strongly Protestant Christian it is. According to the 2001 census, almost 52 percent of the Koreans living in the Metro Vancouver area were Protestant Christians (another 20 percent were Roman Catholic), a much higher percentage than in any other Asian ethnic community. The only other B.C. Asian communities with a substantial percentage of Christians are the Filipino and Vietnamese. But the Filipino community is 77 percent Roman Catholic and only 17 percent Protestant. Vietnamese, when they are Christian (Buddhists outnumber Christians in the Vietnamese community), tend to be Catholic as well. Although there are a lot of Chinese churches and Chinese Protestants in B.C., only about 15 percent of the Chinese community is Protestant (and less than 9 percent are Catholic).[51]

51 Census Canada, 2001, Catalogue no. 97F0022XCB2001005, "Religion and Visible Minority Groups."

As noted earlier, a much higher percentage of the Vancouver Korean community is Christian than is the community in Korea itself (where less than 20 percent are Protestants). So when Koreans attend services in a Korean Protestant church in B.C., they are affirming, both in their own eyes and in the eyes of non-Koreans who observe them, that the religious culture of Korean-Canadians is distinctive and is different not only from mainstream Canadian religious culture, but also from the religious cultures of other Asian ethnic communities in Metro Vancouver. Going to church in Korea is a way of asserting a Christian identity, but in Vancouver, it becomes a way of asserting a distinctive Korean-Canadian identity and of gaining recognition of that distinctive identity from non-Korean Canadians.

Language is also an important marker of ethnic identity, both for those who speak a minority language and for those who are aware that it is being spoken and written. For those in the second generation, for whom English, not Korean, is their first language, the existence of Korean language schools scattered across the lower mainland and of the Korean language program at UBC provides reinforcement of the Korean side of their self-identity. (The first Saturday Korean language school for youngsters in the lower mainland opened in 1973. Many more have opened since then.) Even when school-age Koreans attend Saturday language schools involuntarily, ordered to attend by their parents, they cannot help but feel more Korean when they learn to speak and read the Korean language. These classes also introduce them to many other young Korean-Canadians, helping them acquire the network of Korean-Canadian friends that further reinforces their self-image as Korean, which in turn leads to more Korean being spoken in buses, on Skytrain, and on the streets of the lower mainland, which increases the visibility of the local Korean community as a separate and distinct ethnic community.[52]

As more Korean is spoken in public in Vancouver, more non-Korean Vancouverites are growing aware that Korean is a separate and distinct language. When I returned in the 1970s from my first prolonged stay in Korea, I was sometimes asked, "What language do they speak in Korea, Chinese or Japanese?" No one would ask that question in Vancouver today. Not only is Korean widely heard, it is also increasingly being studied by non-Koreans who want to do business in Korea or who want to be able to participate more fully in Korean popular culture. (UBC has added a non-heritage learners Korean language class to its Korean language program in order to meet the demand from non-Koreans for Korean language instruction.)

In addition to the increasing visibility and audibility of spoken Korean, Korean popular culture has also become a major stimulus both to Korean-

52 Cho, Sunah Park "Korean immigrants' social practice of heritage language acquisition and maintenance through technology," Doctoral Dissertation, UBC, 2008.

Canadians' assertion of a distinctive cultural identity and to non-Koreans' recognition of that identity. Thanks to modern technology, Koreans in the Vancouver area are able to participate on a regular basis in Korean cultural life. There are several Korean-language daily newspapers, daily Korean-language radio and television broadcasts, many cultural associations (for example, a Korean youth symphony), and even high school and university alumni associations. What needs to be noted about all these religious, educational, and cultural activities carried out in the Korean language, or even just among a group of friends of Korean descent, is that they are normal activities in Korea that would not be interpreted as asserting a Korean identity. They are simply what is done. However, in Canada, they take on the added significance of stating "I am Korean" or "I am a Korean-Canadian." In Vancouver, they catch the attention of non-Koreans as further evidence that Korean-Canadians are both Korean and Canadian and are not simply a part of some generic Asian-Canadian culture.

Very few non-Koreans in Metro Vancouver are comfortable speaking Korean, but quite a few have learned a few Korean words and phrases from martial arts classes, from watching Korean B-boys (hip-hop groups) on YouTube, and from watching Korean dramas on local TV channels. Korean popular culture has grown dramatically in popularity around the world over the last decade. Vancouver, particularly in the younger generation of Chinese-Canadians, has not escaped the impact of what is called the "Korean Wave."[53] The growing acceptance of Korean culture that the Korean Wave represents has both inspired more pride in their heritage among Korean-Canadians (and thus a greater eagerness to assert a Korean identity within Canada) and has inspired more respect for, and interest in, Korean culture among non-Korean Canadians.

Conclusion

The rapid growth of the Korean community in Canada and British Columbia over the last few decades is a result of Koreans being pulled, not pushed to Canada. Poverty and political oppression may have been a factor in early Korean migration to Canada, but most of that migration occurred after Korea left poverty and dictatorship behind and became a prosperous, democratic country. Koreans did not come to Canada to escape intolerable economic or political conditions in Korea. Rather, they came to improve on the decent living standards they already enjoyed. Changes in the immigration flow are more closely related to changes in Canada's immigration laws and to Canada's opening its doors wider to "English-as-a-second-language" students, than to changes in conditions back in Korea. In other words, most Koreans who moved to

53 Korea Herald, ed., *Korean Wave* (Seoul: Jimoondang, 2008).

Canada did not do so out of a desire to reject Korea, but to add a Canadian identity to their already proud Korean identity.

Korean-Canadians in Metro Vancouver have been able to nurture that dual identity and to win recognition and respect from the wider Vancouver community for the Korean side of their cultural identity, because of the growing visibility of their language, religious culture, cuisine, and popular culture over the past couple of decades. A recent sign of that visibility and respect was the decision of Prime Minister Stephen Harper to appoint a local Korean-Canadian, Yonah Martin, to the Senate in late 2008.

Three decades ago the Korean community was almost invisible. It is clearly no longer the case today. Although immigration from Korea has slowed slightly from its peak earlier this decade, thousands of Koreans continue to move to Canada every year, and a significant percentage of those immigrants settle in Vancouver. As I am an historian and not a prophet, I cannot claim any qualifications for predicting what will happen in the years and decades ahead. However, I feel fairly confident that a highly visible Korean community will be a significant part of the British Columbia cultural landscape well into the foreseeable future and that the size and visibility of that community will continue to grow, contributing further to the cultural diversity that makes B.C., in the words of its tourism agency, "the best place on earth."

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