

Culture and Ethnicity in the Korean Transnational Community in Brazil

Joo, Jong-Taick*

〈Abstract〉

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The formation and transformation of a specific transnational community can be heavily influenced by many factors in the community. Especially culture and ethnicity play an essential role in defining the social space of immigrants in the place of destination. However those factors useful to build solid transnational community may not be beneficial for the effective maintenance of the community in the long term. The transnational Korean community in Brazil clearly shows that the strong ethnic identity and cultural practice in the community does not always guarantee the favorable conditions for the stability of their own community.

[Key Words: Transnational Community/ Korean Immigrants/ Brazil/ Culture/ Ethnicity/ Migration/ Remigration]

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* Department of International Cultural Studies, Soonchunhyang University
E-mail: jtjoo@sch.ac.kr

I . Introduction

In this paper, I analyze the process of the development of Korean transnational community in Brazil in terms of the unique migration history of ethnic Koreans, their culture and ethnicity and the concomitant effects of its growth in the Brazilian society. Immigrants relying on their ethnic and cultural heritage tend to establish diverse social networks crossing national borders to facilitate their lives in the countries of destination. In this way, they can create their own social space that engenders new possibilities by generating a new form of symbolic capital (Malkin 2004, 76). Indeed, the construction of transnational behaviors and ideologies affected by various types of social networks and ethnic identity may contribute to decrease the culture shocks experienced by immigrants and to encourage their socioeconomic activities in various fields.

The Korean transnational community in Brazil has maintained its own distinctiveness based on the unique pattern of migration, the characteristics of immigrants and their life styles after their migration from Korea to Brazil since the 1960s, which promote the existence of very strong ethnic ties among them compared to other Korean transnational communities in the world. For example, Korean immigrants in Brazil can communicate with each other in Korean much better than Koreans residing in the U.S. and they have kept consistent and intensive cultural exchanges with relatives and friends left in Korea (Buechler 2004, 109). In cultural realm, Korean immigrants have still conserved many precious Korean traditional customs of the periods of their departure from Korea in their diasporic culture (Park

1999, 692). This case can be sharply contrasted with that of almost 100 year old Japanese-Brazilian society. In this context, examining the peculiar nature of the transnationalism of Korean community in Brazil and its long-term effects in the community and in the broader Brazilian society will allow us to improve our knowledge in the areas of culture, ethnicity, and migration from Asia to Latin America.

II . Transnationalism and Ethnicity

As many scholars are interested in the problems of contemporary international labor migration, their researches are frequently focused on the networks and sociocultural and economic relationship between migrant workers and people staying at home. Quite naturally, the networks constructed by migrants abroad under deterritorialized conditions are basically transnational. Transnationalism can be defined as the processes through which immigrants sustain multi-stranded social relations and multiple-layered networks that link together their societies of origin and destination transcending localities and national boundaries (Chierici 2004, 48; Cohen 2001, 955; Trager 2005, 21). Immigrants suffering from various unexpected difficulties to survive in new environments purposefully direct their efforts to conserve or utilize their own sociocultural relationship to improve their socioeconomic status and to overcome such problems. Accordingly, many researchers show interest in diverse types of meanings, functions and patterns of transnationalism (Brettell 2002, 278; Brettell and Hollifield 2000, 4; Chierici 2004, 56; Trager 2005, 207). For example, they

want to reveal the role of various kinds of exchanges, the flow of socioeconomic resources and information, the role of ethnic identities in the formation and transformation of immigrant societies.

Researches conducted so far do not show sufficient interests in the changing patterns and processes of transnational communities of immigrants. In order to understand dynamic and complicated relationship between ethnic bounds and the adaptation of immigrants to the host society, the historical transformation of ethnic migrant communities should be carefully investigated. The emergence of solid ethnic community may or may not help the immigrants be successful in unfamiliar societies. In some cases, strong and effective homogeneous ethnic transnational communities may ironically prevent the emergence of larger ethnic society due to the maladaptation of community members in the long run simply because they do not need or want to be actively involved in the social life of the society of destination. Their adaptive capacity may depend on the characteristics of migrants and the internal and external conditions surrounding the community. In this context, we have to reveal under what circumstances a specific ethnic community in the migrant-receiving society is formed, operated, and transformed. Next, more diachronic approach is required to comprehend the long-term impact and results of the achievements of immigrants in the host society and the historical development of their ethnic community. In order to acquire meaningful data concerning the critical features of the ethnic transnational community, we have to follow the movement of immigrants after their initial migration from the society of origin. Immigrants may not remain in the host society forever after their

migration. In many cases, migrants may look for other possibilities when they are not completely satisfied with the socioeconomic and cultural conditions of their current settlement. So, a rather sophisticated diachronic approach is needed to follow the whole process of the development and transformation of each ethnic transnational community. By doing so, we can discover the underlying causes and backgrounds of the formation and transformation of the ethnic community.

III. Research Site and Methodology

Fieldwork was conducted in São Paulo, Brazil, where most Korean immigrants have lived. Participant observation and intensive interviews were carried out in the Korean immigrant society between 2007 and 2008. As of 2009, 48,419 Koreans were registered in Brazil by the Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Among them, 47,871 Koreans were residing in São Paulo, where Korean socioeconomic activities stand out conspicuously. In 2007, there were 50,523 Koreans in Brazil. São Paulo, the largest city in Brazil with a population of eighteen million people, is the center of commerce, industry and finance, which would entice the Korean immigrants from the beginning.

First, in order to gather basic sociocultural and economic data related with the transnational community such as population, number of immigrants, years of migration, types of occupation, and kinds of important cultural organizations and activities, I examined census and various kinds of materials published by the Korean Association in Brazil. Second, discourses

and behaviors of Korean immigrants in their everyday lives were carefully observed and recorded by means of intensive interviews and participant observation. Informal and formal interviews were arranged among community leaders and many randomly selected members in the Korean community. Especially unstructured interviews with open-ended questions for the purpose of collecting unrestricted and manifold opinions were utilized to know and interpret Korean immigrants' ideas on transnational community. Finally, recorded and transcribed life trajectories of immigrants were collected to understand vivid experiences of immigration, socioeconomic conditions, and their cultural activities.

IV. The Historical Development of the Korean Community in Brazil

1. The History of Korean Migration to Brazil

Migration from Korea to Brazil under government sponsorship began in 1963. Officially, 103 Korean immigrants left the port of Busan in southern Korea and arrived at Santos, Brazil on 12 Feb 1963. In those days, many Koreans, once or twice a year, were continuously able to aboard ships to find work in the Brazilian agricultural sector until 1966 when the official immigration program was over. Although farmland was arranged for the Korean immigrants in Brazil before their departure, in most cases, they failed to materialize their original plans. For examples the lands purchased by the Korean government for them were not suitable for agricultural

production or too small to be used to maintain their households. Sometimes they were deceived by the Brazilian brokers as the lands contracted did not exist at all. Also, new immigrants without sufficient information and proper equipment were not well prepared to grow agricultural products in Brazil (Kim 1972, 27; Shin 1977). In reality most Korean migrants have never been engaged in farming in their lives. In addition, handful Korean farmers accustomed to small-scale labor-intensive agriculture in their home country were not successful in their competition with large-scale capital-intensive Brazilian agribusinesses (Kim 1991, 232). Moreover many Koreans without any experience of farming did not want to till the lands anyway (Hong 1992, 31) and headed to metropolitan areas to find urban jobs as soon as they got there.

Most Korean immigrants, who sought to leave Korea to avoid political instability and economic difficulty in the late 1950s and early 1960s after the Korean War, mainly belonged to well-educated middle class. Some of those who served in the military and who moved from North Korea during the war were forced to leave the country after the military coup in 1961 in Korea. The military government attaining political power allowed many former military officers without positions in the new regime and refugees from North Korea who failed to adapt themselves in South Korean way of life to move to other countries (Choi 2002, 57; Park 1999, 64). Taken together, Korean government was eager to send more migrants to solve the problems of overcrowded population, and devastated economic situations worsened by the war. Chun (1992, 47-48) summarizes the two major distinctive characteristics of the initial phase of the outmigration to Brazil as

follows: official government-sponsored program and family as a unit of migration. These factors have tremendous effects on the development of Korean ethnic community in Brazil and on their concomitant socioeconomic and cultural activities.

Beginning in the 1970s, many skilled Korean immigrants individually flew to Brazil legally and illegally and smoothly became members of the Korean ethnic society. This kind of individual migration continued until 1976 when the Brazilian immigration law was strictly enforced to prevent further illegal immigration. As most Korean migrants preferred to settle down in the urban areas rather than working in the countryside and some of them eventually remigrated to the U.S. after picking up money very quickly in Brazil, unsatisfied Brazilian government aiming at attracting foreign migrant laborers to solve the labor shortage in the rural sector tried to close the door for Korean immigrants. After 1976, a small number of Koreans with tourist visa stayed illegally in Brazil to look for profitable economic opportunities. One woman and two men recollected the experiences of migrating to Brazil as legal or illegal migrants in the 1980s:

In 1987, our family went to Paraguay to find better economic opportunity. I was really disappointed with the underdeveloped country. There, I heard that Brazil might be much better place to live in even though I did know what kind of country Brazil was. Still in the 1980s, detailed useful information about South America was hard to find in Korea and I was not able to find any comprehensive single book on Paraguay or Brazil. We decided to remigrate to Brazil and crossed the Paraguayan-

Brazilian border illegally through a small city north of Iguacu at night when the border patrol was not on duty. Then, right after the termination of official immigrant visa to Brazil, I believe that about ninety per cent of Korean migrants were illegal (Mi-Seon Park, age 55).

Our family of five, including parents, one sister, and one brother, migrated to Brazil when I was in the fourth grade of elementary school. I almost understood the Korean language at that time. We flew directly to Brazil because my father's brother who was already employed in the garment industry in São Paulo invited us. My father's brother went to Brazil illegally through Paraguay five years earlier than us. Of course he helped us very much for our initial settlement and my father worked for him in his clothing store before my father operated his own later (Jeong-Su Mun, age 34).

After finishing elementary school, I left Korea to migrate to Brazil. One of my relatives who moved to Brazil in the 1960s invited our family. My family was consisted of parents, younger brother and myself. My relatives were already quite successful in their clothing business. Some of them already remigrated to the U.S. and still others returned to Brazil after living in the U.S. for a while. Before going to Brazil I thought that I might need to study Portuguese. But my effort to find a private institute to learn Portuguese came to naught. Eventually I learned Spanish for two months in a private institute in Seoul instead. I did not know anything about Brazil. I was simply delighted in going to other country (Han-Su Kim, age 32)

As immigration to Brazil was officially renewed in the 1980s, many Korean immigrants in the nearby Latin American countries moved to Brazil. Illegal migration from Bolivia and Paraguay to Brazil continued during the 1980s even though the number of migrants was significantly reduced over time. Recently, only a few Koreans are willing to migrate to Brazil because Brazil is not a developed country they desire any more.

2. The Growth of the Korean Ethnic Community in São Paulo

For the early Korean immigrants, living in the metropolitan São Paulo area was not easy at all. Without sufficient capital and proper information about Brazilian economy, they had to be engaged in informal sector by selling fruits and vegetables in the market or by repairing shoes. People without enough income who brought a large amount of clothing from Korea for their own use began to sell these garments in order to earn their livelihood (Park 1999, 676). Selling garments was very lucrative for the Korean immigrants on account of poor quality Brazilian clothing. Immediately on disposing of clothes they had brought from Korea, they decided to be involved in making clothes for the market in 1969 taking advantage of relatively advanced Korean textile and clothing industry. The garment industry in Brazil was very rewarding for recent migrants like Koreans lacking capital and networks because it could be done using unpaid family labor on a small scale. In this situation, even immigrants just arriving from Korea could join the garment industry without difficulty.

As markets for garments were increasing, Koreans slowly penetrated into

diverse areas to expand their businesses. In this process, they had to compete with other ethnic groups who already dominated the Brazilian garment industry. Eventually they succeeded in finding stores and workshops in Bom Retiro and Brás in São Paulo since 1972, where Jews and Arabs had been firmly established before respectively (Kim 1986, 80). Many Koreans working in the garment sector were quickly able to accumulate wealth because the prices of clothes in Brazil were almost ten times higher than in Korea (Park 1999, 677). The development of garment sector provided valuable sources of income even for numerous illegal Korean immigrants in the late 1960s and 1970s. With increasing income from the thriving textile and garment sector, the Korean immigrants left the poor section of Liberdade and moved to better residential area called Aclimação.

The flourishing business of garments lasted until the late 1980s, which would be very beneficial for strengthening the Korean ethnic consciousness based on economic prosperity. It is reported that about ninety per cent of the Korean immigrants in the city of São Paulo were directly or indirectly engaged in this economic sphere in the 1980s and 1990s. Besides of making clothes, many members of the Korean ethnic community also participated in garment-related activities such as designing, cutting, delivering the cloth to the workshops, packing, and selling the pieces (Buechler 2004, 107). Currently out of every three garments sold in Brazil, one of them passes through the hands of the Korean immigrants.

In the 1990s, the growth of Korean garment industry was noticeably weakened as a result of high inflation of more than 1,000 per cent per year

and of economic policy including price-stop decree and currency reform (Kim 1991, 239). Korean garment industry was directly affected by the bad Brazilian domestic economic situation (Chun 1991, 254-255). After all too many Korean garment manufacturers had to compete with each other to survive in the reduced market because of Brazilian economic crisis, which would strike a severe blow to them. To overcome difficulties in economic recession, Koreans working on the garment sector had to change their way of business. For example, abandoning traditional small workshops and stores employing mostly unpaid family labor, they prepared to gain the bigger market share to become dominant garment producers and sellers in Brazil. Also beginning 1993, some Korean entrepreneurs tried to import textile from other countries in order to control the whole process of garment industry and to lower production costs, which was not possible under the strict import and export restriction in the past. But not all Koreans could follow this trend. Since then, Korean immigrants have realized that garment industry is not the goose laying the golden eggs any more. Inevitably, they have to diversify their income-generating activities.

Nowadays, people make efforts to diversify their businesses into automobiles, electronics, eyeglasses, neckties, computers and so on. Young second- and third-generation Korean immigrants prefer professional jobs like engineers, doctors, or lawyers. Many of them are office workers. Particularly major Korean companies like Samsung or LG manufacturing electronics in Brazilian factories are major targets for young Korean jobseekers. Brazilian companies do not pay much to satisfy Korean employees while they can get much higher wages from Samsung or LG. Still, many Koreans are

operating businesses making and selling clothes, but things are not what they used to be because some of them are looking for other kinds of income-generating activities. Community leaders confirm that presently only about two-thirds of the Korean immigrants are employed in garment related jobs. Along with the diversification of occupations, several Koreans have been leaving Bom Retiro, Brás, and Aclimação to find better places to live in São Paulo.

In spite of well-organized and efficient self-help system in the community, many Koreans have decided to leave Brazil for socioeconomic and cultural reasons since the 1990s. Most of them have remigrated to the U.S. to find more profitable businesses (Joo 2007, 166-168). In other words, many successful Koreans who failed to get local affection but accumulated sufficient wealth have abandoned Brazil to look for economic opportunities elsewhere. Some non-affluent Koreans who failed to adjust themselves to the Brazilian society also did not find bright future in Brazil. Families with students also wanted to move to the U.S. for the better education of their children. Young people in the community agree that more than half of their friends raised in Brazil together are living in the U.S. On the other hand, some Koreans decided to return to their homeland for economic or sociocultural purposes (Joo 2007, 168-171). Since the 1980s Korean economy has grown much faster than Brazil and trade between Korea and Brazil has been multiplied, which would provide new economic opportunities for Koreans in Brazil. Some older Korean wanted to live in Korea for the rest of their lives to associate with their precious families, friends, and relatives. Because of such incessant outmigration from the

Korean community, its growth has been significantly obstructed and many people suffering from worsened business opportunities in their own community. People doing business with only Korean immigrants as customers in the community are complaining that decreasing population make their lives difficult because the size of the community is not large enough to make profit any more.

V. Korean Immigrants in Brazil and Their Transnational Community

1. Transnationalism and Ethnicity among the Korean Immigrants in Brazil

The Korean immigrants in Brazil usually recall that their transnational community can be "real" Korean society because most of them still preserve and practice Korean culture, customs, and social relationship of the periods of their immigration under the well-defined concept of ethnic identity. So, many cultural elements, material or non-material, already disappeared twenty or thirty years ago in Korea still can be found in the Korean transnational community in Brazil and their households. They are quick to point out that they did not have any problems in conserving Korean culture in Brazil because most of Korean immigrants were much better off in socioeconomic terms in Korea at the time of migration. Actually, they were allowed to carry as much as they could from Korea. Naturally, they brought many

precious authentic Korean goods and properties, of which they make sparing use even to this time. They agree that they can organize an authentic Korean folk museum in Brazil if they collect all the Korean materials brought by the earlier immigrants. The first-generation Koreans emphasize that keeping authentic Korean goods can encourage more concern for the Korean culture and ethnic identity. Along with material goods, non-material cultures can be transmitted and conserved to enhance ethnic homogeneity among them. For example, many Korean immigrants still use the Korean dialects in Brazil, which were introduced by them. They say that they are able to develop much more intimate relationship in their everyday lives when using their familiar Korean dialects. In this sense, it is true that important material and non-material factors have been utilized to strengthen transnationalism in the ethnic Korean community in Brazil compared to other Korean transnational communities in other part of the world. Also many characteristic cultures, behaviors and organizations have been manipulated to enrich their own ethnic ties.

This phenomenon is quite different from the case of the Japanese residing in Brazil (Joo 2007, 179-180). The Japanese Brazilians belong to one of the most successful immigrant groups in Brazil because of their strong attachment to Brazilian culture and customs. Even a Japanese version of the carnival is held in their own community. In this sense, the majority of Japanese Brazilians are culturally assimilated Latin Americans (Tsuda 2003, 294). The Japanese, who have migrated to Brazil since 1908, have successfully assimilated into Brazilian society and have constructed multiple ethnic identities (Lesser 2002, 50). Unlike their Korean counterpart, the

Japanese Brazilians, with a population of about 1.5 million, did not build a distinct ethnic enclave and strong ethnic consciousness after World War II. Instead, they have been participating in diverse economic activities in Brazil and have tried hard to be fully integrated into Brazilian society. For instance, São Paulo's main fruit and vegetable market (CEAGESP) is dominated by many Japanese. Thanks to their constant efforts, the Japanese Brazilians have experienced substantial upward mobility and they have been able to achieve economic success and change their social class (Adachi 2004, 53). The Japanese Brazilians have participated in politics at the local, regional, and national level too (Masterson 2004, 253).

The Korean immigrants living in Brazil for the most part used to participate in their own ethnic voluntary organizations and sociocultural and religious activities to support their ethnic cohesiveness while sharing the Korean language. Their contacts with other ethnic groups are pretty much limited and usually carried out only for economic necessity in their daily lives. First of all, there exist various kinds of formal and informal institutions to teach the Korean language and Korean way of life. Many kindergartens, churches, Korean Association in Brazil, and Korean elementary and high school in Brazil offer classes to teach Korean. The first Korean language school for the children of the Korean immigrants opened in 1983. Many Koreans in Brazil felt that they might need to establish language institutes to teach the Korean language for their children born in Brazil or who came to Brazil when too young to learn the language in Korea. Since then, numerous institutions have found to meet the demand of learning and practicing Korean. Later, the Korean school named Colégio

Polilogos sponsored by the Korean government officially set up for the systematic education of young people in the ethnic Korean community in 1998. About 350 students are attending this school in 2005, where they can learn the Korean language and Korean history in addition to regular subjects designated by the Brazilian government. The school provides regular courses for elementary, middle, and high school students. Though more affluent families wish to send their children to more expensive international schools to learn English in the better educational environment, a growing number of Koreans are interested in this school because of cheap tuition and fees. With all these efforts, the Korean immigrants can communicate in Korean at home and in their workplaces fluently.

In addition to teaching and learning Korean, numerous publications in Korean also expedite the development of the consciousness of Koreanness in the community. Many first-generation Korean immigrants read daily Korean newspapers republished in Brazil everyday to know what is going on in Korea. Particularly, older Koreans subscribe the Korean newspaper even though many of them do not read any Brazilian newspapers. Five major Korean newspaper publishing companies are operating branch offices in Brazil. In spite of small circulation, their influence for the Korean culture and ethnic identity should not be underestimated in the community.

Next, many Korean Protestant churches led by Korean pastors are focal point for accelerating many ethnic organizations and activities. For example many Korean immigrants go to churches to obtain and share important information surrounding the community and to solidify their ethnic consciousness. Currently, there are forty Protestant churches and one

Catholic Church led by Koreans in the community. There are more Korean churches than Korean restaurants in the ethnic Korean community. They assert that more than eighty per cent of the Korean immigrants are Christians. Some people whose faith was devoted to Buddhism or who did not belong to any kind of religious organizations have converted to Christianity after their migration to Brazil. Attending church service is a valuable asset for the Korean immigrants to secure belongingness and social networks. Basically services are officiated in Korean, but some churches hold special Portuguese services to attract second and third generation Koreans who are not fluent in Korean.

A great number of voluntary associations and interest groups in the Korean community have promoted cultural exchanges among themselves for several decades. The membership of each association is strictly limited by hometowns in Korea, blood relationship, and high schools and colleges attended in Korea. Voluntary associations gathered by same hobbies or occupations also attract many Koreans to highlight Korean ethnicity and culture. Each organization performs specific ceremonies or events to differentiate from others and to demonstrate royalty and solidarity. For example, veterans association of Korean marines holds meetings two or three times a year with about forty members and their respective families in Korean military uniform. They administer Korean military ceremonies under the Korean national flag singing Korean military songs.

Traditional customs are another type of cultural elements the Korean immigrants use to identify themselves as Koreans in Brazil. The custom of exchanging labor which was widely practiced in the countryside to help

agricultural production in Korea can be witnessed in the community. Sometimes, customs disappeared about twenty years ago in Korea still exist among Koreans in Brazil. For example, friends of bridegroom beat the sole of bridegroom right after the wedding ceremony. In the past, beating bridegroom was intended to send a message in Korea that he had to be physically strong enough to support his family since he reached manhood.

Moreover, individuals, households, and Korean organizations proudly celebrate major traditional Korean holidays not to forget their roots. Protestant and Catholic churches provide Korean foods to their followers and let them play traditional Korean games to memorize the holidays. Traditional rituals including marriage ceremony, funeral rites, and ancestral rites are carried out by individual Koreans at home. To practice ancestor worship, they utilize appropriate ritual vessels purchased in Korea. They try to take a necessary procedure for each ritual if at all possible. For instance, when they need jujubes in the table for ancestral rite, they ask their relatives in Korea to send them. Other than ritual foods, typical Korean foods are also served in the daily dining table at home. Also in the Korean restaurants in the community, one can taste the traditional Korean foods, which are hard to find in the contemporary Korean diet.

In short, the formation and development of cohesive and homogeneous ethnic transnational Korean community can be beneficial for the existence of notable ethnic identity and solidarity among the Korean immigrants. The community with unique culture and ideology can manage various types of interdependent self-help system to support many Koreans who are not

familiar with Brazilian way of life. Even newcomers can join the community and get significant help in surviving in the unknown territory. A young second-generation Korean mention that he was moved by the real feeling of affection among Koreans when he met so many Koreans visiting his home to see his sick mother

2. Korean Immigrants in the Contemporary Brazilian Society

Partially, the contribution of the Korean immigrants to the development of Brazilian garment industry may make them to be looked favorably in the Brazilian society in recent years. Officials in the Korean Association in Brazil mention that about 40,000 Brazilians are directly or indirectly connected with Korean businesses. Nevertheless the Korean community has been isolated from the mainstream Brazilian society in a certain degree since they arrived at Brazil. By maintaining strong inwardly cohesive ethnic community, Koreans have hesitated to participate aggressively in the Brazilian society other than the garment sector. Naturally, their sociocultural exchange with other ethnic groups has been severely limited in scope and nature. Among the Korean immigrants born and raised in Korea, only ten per cent of them actually were naturalized in Brazil until the late 1990s. So very few of them can enjoy the right to vote for political affairs. Accordingly, their political power is not that strong considering their economic affluence. During the past decade a handful of young Koreans have registered as candidates for municipal councilmen, but none of them have been elected because of the lack of eligible voters in the Korean

community. After their failure in the election, Korean Association in Brazil has vigorously asked their members to acquire Brazilian citizenship. In 2009, there are 24,234 naturalized Koreans in Brazil. Still the first-generation Koreans do not pay much attention to the general political matters of Brazil, for which their voices have not been frequently heard in policies closely related to their lives and businesses.

Most Korean immigrants agree that they could not get much help from the Brazilian government in their initial stage of adaptation. In this unfamiliar country whose culture, language and way of life were totally different from those of Korea, they felt powerlessness in their everyday lives. Therefore they had to develop their own exclusive self-help systems to solidify their foothold in the society, which resulted in the strengthening of the internal ethnic ties among themselves.

Early Korean immigrants assert that their peculiar experiences and purposes of immigration compared with other ethnic minorities in Brazil did not allow them to develop intimate relationships with Brazilians. In other words, the idea of remigrating to other countries as soon as collecting sufficient money rather than settling down in Brazil permanently led them to set a limit to their process of assimilation in Brazilian culture (Joo 2006; 2007, 167). As a consequence they maintain a certain distance with the Brazilian society and are bent on keeping their own partly self-sustaining ethnic society. Quite naturally, some of them do not evaluate the Brazilian society in a positive way. In this circumstance, the Korean immigrants do not want to disclose their problems to the Brazilian society in order not to spread the negative public images about their lives and social activities.

They are even reluctant to contact Brazilians even when they are in trouble. For example, they hesitate to report to the police when their shops or houses are robbed.

Once the Korean immigrants were heavily employed in the garment sector, they could not find time to practice cultural exchanges with other ethnic groups in Brazil because they were simply too busy to work. During the process of producing and selling textiles and garments, they had contact with other people with different ethnic backgrounds in a limited sense. For example, they met Brazilian cloth sellers and garment buyers in their work that accompanied minimal cultural exchanges.

From the time the Korean immigrants set feet in the Brazilian territory, language problem prevented them from establishing friendly relations with other Brazilians. The early immigrants were not able to communicate in Portuguese at all. Many of them doubted the usefulness of Portuguese in their future life if they planned to remigrate. For some reason or another, some Korean immigrants did not have a chance to learn Portuguese or did not intend to study it after all. So many Koreans only communicated with other Koreans in their own ethnic community for living. Based on such ideas, many parents preferred to send their children to expensive prestigious international schools to teach English for the bright future instead of Brazilian public schools. This phenomenon was reinforced by the low level of the Brazilian educational system. One woman who returned to Korea recently devalues the quality of Brazilian education. "My daughter went to school in Brazil. But she was not satisfied at all. She was always thinking about going back to Korea. Personally, I believe that the Brazilian

educational system has too many problems. If you are educated here, you cannot compete with other Korean students when you return”(Mi-Suk Seon, age 59).

Ethnic exclusivism can be clearly manifested in finding marriage partners. The first-generation Korean immigrants show negative opinions about marrying people with different skin colors. They feel uncomfortable to communicate with people possessing different languages and cultures. They think that endogamy among Koreans should be preferred in order to keep their own culture and ethnic identity. Naturally it is quite rare for Koreans to marry outside their ethnic group. One of the first-generation Korean immigrants says that he did not attend the wedding reception for relatives held after wedding ceremony when one of his close relatives married a German-Brazilian. Even so, male Korean immigrants may occasionally marry Brazilian women, but female Koreans seldom marry men belonging to other ethnic groups. It is no wonder that some Koreans do not want to inform other Koreans of their children's marriage with Brazilians.

One thing particularly interesting is that second-generation Koreans or Korean immigrants who came to Brazil when young also predominantly want to have Korean spouses even though they were fluent only in Portuguese and familiar in Brazilian rather than Korean culture. Young Koreans rationalize their behaviors by saying that though intercultural exchanges should be important to live in Brazil, they would like to marry people who can understand their language and culture. Regardless of their ability to speak Korean, Korean culture was important for the second- and third- generation Koreans too. Even young people who do not speak

Korean try to find a Korean spouse who can understand Portuguese. In this situation, finding good marriage partners for their children has been a serious annoyance to the majority of Korean immigrants. They even look for Korean marriage partners for their sons and daughters in the churches. Many Protestant pastors mention that the most important and frequent theme of prayers in their churches is the marriage of their children. Early Korean immigrants have always worried about a sharp rise in interracial marriage among second- and third-generation young Koreans in the future. It does not happen so far.

Insufficient cultural exchange with other ethnic groups was frequently responsible for ethnic conflicts surrounding the Korean community. Starting in the 1990s, Korean garment manufacturers have been subcontracting Bolivian workers to stay competitive in the market (Buechler 2004, 99-100). Illegal Bolivian immigrants who left their country to get out of extreme destitution were eager to accept low wages and poor working conditions. It was incessantly reported in the several local media in São Paulo that Korean garment manufacturers were taking advantage of the illegal status of Bolivian workers by letting them work long hours under inhumane conditions because the workers had no rights and were at constant risk of deportation. For example the media blamed that the underpaid laborers had to work without sufficient heat, light or food. Some of them described it as slave labor and sweatshops because Bolivians suffered from harsh disciplinary measures, sexual abuse and enslavement by debt. Worst of all, there was a rumor that Korean Mafia was protecting the businesses. Some Koreans were even arrested by police for these matters. The Korean

garment manufacturers did not deny that the Bolivian workers were not well-treated in their workplaces. But they argued that many accusations against them were exaggerated grossly. They asserted that many Brazilian garment manufacturers who did not want the Korean counterparts to lead the clothing industry deliberately distorted the truth. Anyway the Korean community has learned a lesson from this incident that, since then, they have to participate in the Brazilian society more actively and need to intensify mutual understanding between Koreans and other ethnic groups.

Gradually, facing difficulties caused by severe competition in the Korean clothing market, some young Koreans want to be employed by the Brazilian companies. But many of them leave the companies for various reasons. They say that, other than low wage levels, they are not accustomed to live and work with other Brazilians yet. That is why many of them decide to remigrate to other countries or try to find work in the garment industry in which they can earn a little bit more than in the Brazilian companies. Thus young second- and third-generation Koreans who are better adapted themselves to Brazilian culture try to maintain strong ties with the ethnic Korean community in the end when they grow up. For these reasons, Koreans have not won the affection of the local population because there still exists apparent gap in terms of language and culture.

3. The Transformation of the Korean Community

The ethnic Korean community confronts many new challenges from inside and outside in the 21st century. The community does not look like what it

used to be in the 20th century. Decreasing population and increasing heterogeneity in the community slowly has eroded solidarity among its members. These changes are mainly due to the isolation of the ethnic Korean community from the mainstream of the Brazilian society intensified by the overemphasis on cultural and ethnic homogeneity in the community in the past. The principal factors affecting changes in the community are remigration or return migration, the growth of second- and third generations, and the inflow of new types of migrants from Korea, which can weaken the stability of the community from the bottom. First of all, as more Koreans have left Brazil to find better places to live, the community cannot function very efficiently for the benefit of the whole community because of smaller population. People complain that the community is not large enough to be self-sufficient now. Since the late 1980s, many Koreans have abandoned Brazil to avoid economic difficulties and headed to the U.S. to look for better economic opportunities. Many successful Koreans who accumulated sufficient wealth in such a short time believed that they could earn more money in the U.S. utilizing their experiences and networks developed in Brazil (Joo 2007, 168).

On the other hand, some Koreans have returned to Korea for cultural and psychological reasons after living in Brazil for several decades. Older Korean immigrants who left Korea during the 1960s and 1970s are unable to become completely immersed in Brazilian culture because of the language barrier and tend to feel uncomfortable as they become old. In particular, they miss the traditional Korean custom of respect for senior citizens. Therefore, some older men and women may want to return to

Korea where they can rely on their families, relatives, or friends when they suffer from serious diseases or personal problems (Joo 2007, 169). In short, the decrease of the first-generation Koreans who readily support Korean value and ideology in the community has had a detrimental effect on maintaining strong and desirable ethnic ties among the Korean immigrants. As a result, they point out that relationship among them is going to be drifted farther and farther apart from each other. In addition, the Korean Protestant churches losing believers little by little may undergo a change in the near future as well.

Secondly, the growth of second- and third-generation young Koreans who are born and raised in Brazil and familiar with Portuguese and Brazilian culture has made the task of the integration of Korean immigrants in the community very difficult. The first-generation Koreans have worried that the second- and third generation young Koreans in their community do not share firm ethnic identity and do not have a good knowledge of the Korean language and culture. Older Koreans mention that their children's ability to speak Korean relies on parents' concern and effort. But most parents who are simply too busy to make a living in the very competitive Korean community cannot manage to find time to teach their children the Korean language and culture. In fact, less Koreans are subscribing the Korean newspapers in the community than before because many young people are not able to read and write in Korean. Fortunately, some young Koreans try to learn things related to Korea since the 1990s for economic and cultural reasons. As more Korean companies such as Samsung and LG electronics enter the Brazilian market, more bilingual and bicultural young

Koreans have a chance to be hired by them. Most young people prefer to join Korean firms, which pay good wages compared to Brazilian ones. Also a small number of young men are engaged in their own trading business between Korea and Brazil. To realize their hope, they think that they have to learn Korean immediately. Many of them, who did not care much about Korean in the past, decide to go to Korea to learn the Korean language. Some of them even have acquired necessary academic diplomas in Korea to get ahead of other people. Thank to this change, some young Koreans can read the Korean newspaper published in Brazil. In spite of all these efforts, young Koreans endlessly complain that they can easily forget the Korean language soon after a long and intensive study because they cannot practice it often in their lives.

Finally, newcomers from Korea have made the Korean community more heterogeneous than ever before. Even though their influence is pretty much restricted since only an extremely limited number of Koreans are coming to Brazil nowadays, their existence cannot be disregarded entirely. Some of them emigrate from Korea to Brazil prompted by curiosity, and many others simply leave the country after irrevocable failures in their businesses in Korea. So they are not well-educated or rich like the early immigrants. Obviously, the newcomers recently arriving from Korea have remained aloof from the early immigrants. They are not welcomed in many ethnic voluntary organizations in the community, which are totally dominated by the early settlers. In this sense, they are fairly isolated from the community. Besides, they cannot get enough assistance from the other Koreans in their process of adaptation to the Brazilian society compared to the early

immigrants. Furthermore, their poor Portuguese cannot help them to participate fully in the Brazilian socioeconomic and cultural activities. As more Koreans are remigrating to the U.S. or returning to Korea, the homogeneous nature of the Korean community may be slowly damaged by the increasing number of newcomers in the long run.

VI. Conclusion

The unique feature of the formation of the ethnic Korean community in Brazil has been indebted to their history of migration from Korea and the pattern of settlement in Brazil. In short, continuous planned collective migration from Korea to Brazil and settlement in the same place in Brazil has made the Korean immigrants relatively easy to survive in an unfamiliar society. Therefore they had to develop their own exclusive self-help systems to solidify their foothold in the society, which resulted in the strengthening of the internal ethnic ties among themselves. Next, same economic activities of the Korean immigrants supported by the transnational networks have contributed to the intensification of Korean culture and ethnic identity in the immigrant society. The peculiar pattern of clustered living and economic activities among Koreans intensified the homogeneity of their ethnic community and the Korean language and their customs could be preserved without too much difficulty.

In short, for the most part the early Korean immigrants consisted of the adult family members whose labor force could be employed right away. Also considerable number of former merchants in Korea among them

played a critical role in developing the garment industry. Also Korean immigrants who went to Brazil collectively shared similar economic status and careers in the Korean society, which functioned to expedite the homogeneity of the Korean community in the foreign land from the beginning. These unique characteristics of the Korean diaspora in Brazil have existed up to the present.

The establishment of the strong Korean transnational community has been partially possible by relatively weak racial discrimination in Brazil affected by so-called 'racial democracy' or 'racial paradise.' Under these circumstances, the Korean immigrants have been successful in constructing a very inwardly cohesive ethnic community in Brazil. However, the development of their own strong ethnic community has resulted in their maladaptation to the Brazilian society and isolation from other ethnic groups in Brazil. From the time the Korean immigrants entered the Brazilian territory, the lack of understanding Portuguese and Brazilian way of life prevented them from establishing favorable relations with other Brazilians. By maintaining stable and solid ethnic community, the Korean immigrants have hesitated to participate aggressively in the Brazilian society. Also, the idea of remigrating to the U.S. from Brazil as soon as possible decisively has hindered their process of adaptation and assimilation in Brazil. As a consequence, they always have maintained a certain distance with the Brazilian society and are bent on keeping their own unique ethnic society. Quite naturally, some of them do not evaluate the Brazilian society in a positive way.

The formation and transformation of a specific transnational community

can be heavily influenced by the historical process of migration, the sociocultural characteristics of migrants, cultural distinctiveness and ethnic identity of migrants, and socioeconomic conditions of host society. Especially culture and ethnicity play an essential role in defining their social space in the place of destination. However those factors useful to build solid transnational community may not be beneficial for the effective maintenance of the community in the long term. In many cases, strong transnational communities may prevent their members from participating in the societies of destination actively and efficiently. For example, many immigrants who cannot get local affection due to overindulgence in their own culture and ethnicity may eventually abandon their transnational community and remigrate to other countries or return to their homeland. In other words, the strong ethnic identity and cultural practice in the transnational community does not always guarantee the favorable conditions for the stability of their own community. In the long run, the organization of the community may be weakened and the number of immigrants may not increase substantially.

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