The Function and Implication of the Ethnic Church

in the Vancouver Korean Community

by

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Abstract

The Korean community constitutes one of the largest ethnic communities in Vancouver. One conspicuous feature of this community is that over fifty percent of Koreans are affiliated with Protestant ethnic churches. Given that less than twenty percent of the total population in Korea manifest themselves as Protestant Christians, Korean immigrants’ extensive involvement in the ethnic church seems to be related to their experience in the settlement in and adaptation to Canadian society.

This study examines the impact of religious and social functions of the ethnic church on Korean immigrants and their acculturation. The Korean ethnic church has more organizational strengths than other ethnic associations in terms of providing services to meet the needs of Koreans for existential meaning, practical assistance, and psychological consolation. This draws a large number of church participants. This study finds Hurh and Kim’s model of adhesive adaptation applicable in the context of Vancouver, and concludes that Korean immigrants adopted adhesive adaptation, by which Korean immigrants retain their cultural and ethnic identity as Koreans while successfully adjusting to Canadian society.
Preface

This thesis is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, S. Kwon.
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Chapter One: Introduction

Empirical Background

Over the past few decades, Korean immigration\(^1\) has rivaled the numbers of other ethnic groups with a long history of immigration to Vancouver, such as the Chinese and South Asians. Korean immigrants have become one of Vancouver’s visible minorities. Issues related to the ethnic attachment of the Korean immigrant community in Vancouver, however, remain largely unexplored compared to this population’s counterparts in metropolitan areas of the United States. Since the beginning of the wave of Korean immigration to Vancouver in the 1960s, the Korean ethnic church has taken a central position in the Korean community and in the daily lives of Korean immigrants. Don Baker counted more than 200 Korean ethnic churches in the Greater Vancouver Area. According to Baker, half of the Koreans living in Vancouver, including both immigrants and international students, identified themselves as Christian. This percentage is twice as high as that of Christians living in Korea\(^2\). This fact seems to reflect Timothy L. Smith’s assertion that the immigration experience of uprooting from the old society, migrating, and re-rooting in the new society enhances their religious perception and commitment.\(^3\)

Research Questions

Notwithstanding the fact that more immigrants tend to affiliate with religious institutions in the new society than in the old society, this general tendency cannot, in itself, explain the unusually high degree of Korean immigrants’ religious participation. Questions arise as to why there is more active involvement of Korean immigrants in church in Vancouver than in religious

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1 Korea refers to The Republic of Korea in this thesis.
institutions in Korea, what is involved in Korean immigrants’ settlement in the Canadian society, what roles the ethnic church plays Koreans’ acculturation and ethnic solidarity, and lastly, whether this strong affiliation to the ethnic church facilitates their integration to the mainstream society or confines them in an ethnic enclave. This thesis attempts to answer these questions by examining the characteristics and social functions of the ethnic church, and its impacts on immigrants’ lived experience within the Korean community and in the larger society.

**Theoretical Framework**

In contrast to a paucity of studies on the Korean Canadian experience, there is a growing body of literature on the experience of Korean immigrants in the United States. This study draws upon that literature. By exploring the experiences of Korean immigrants on religious participations, the study examines a combination of published work pertaining to religion and immigrants, Korean immigrants and their religious affiliation, social functions of the ethnic church, and theories of acculturation. The development of the ethnic community through church participation and its impact on acculturation of Koreans are discussed as well. Special consideration is taken when examining the challenges Korean Canadians face in the settlement process. In doing so, the study utilizes survey results and research on Korean Canadian experiences of developing ethnic solidarity and identity.

**Focus of Analysis**

Literature on immigrants and immigrant communities is abundant. Many of those studies put an emphasis on the function of religious institutions and the relationship between religion and ethnicity. The themes are discussed in chapter two. Korean American scholars, Pyong

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Gap Min⁵ and Won Moo Hurh,⁶ focus on examining and analysing the Korean American community in the United States in terms of attachment of Korean immigrants to the Korean ethnic church and its implication on their assimilation into American society. The works of Min and Hurh contribute an important theoretical background to this study, which utilizes Min’s analysis of social functions of the Korean ethnic church and Hurh’s notion of adhesive adaptation to examine the high gravitation of the Korean ethnic church and Koreans’ adjustment patterns in the context of Vancouver. The arguments in this thesis respond to the questions addressed earlier, and thus, revolve around three areas of study: 1) the features of the Vancouver Korean community and the position the ethnic church holds within that community, 2) the social functions of the Korean ethnic church, and 3) the implications of the church has on Korean immigrants’ adjustment to the host society.

The thesis focuses on the Korean community in Vancouver in chapter three. One of the main themes is a historical account of the Vancouver Korean community, including the history of Korean immigration and the characteristics of the ethnic enclave. It also examines the Korean ethnic church and the impacts it has on the everyday lives of Koreans, through which the study provides an insight to understanding the Korean community from both religious and social perspectives.

Literature concerning Korean immigrants and religion paid significant attention to the non-religious functions of the ethnic church and posited social function as an important factor for

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such a high degree of participation among Korean immigrants.\textsuperscript{7} According to Min, the ethnic church serves four major social functions for the congregation: 1) fellowship, 2) maintenance of cultural tradition and identity, 3) social services, and 4) social status and position.\textsuperscript{8} Even though most of these studies were based on research conducted in the United States, this thesis argues in chapter four that many of the results are applicable to Korean immigrants in Vancouver. The non-religious functions of the Korean ethnic church play an important role in attracting more Korean immigrants, whose experience of uprooting and settling has increased the need for existential meaning, social belonging, and psychological comfort.\textsuperscript{9}

The experience of immigrants, such as changing socio-cultural patterns and the relationship with the host society, has been well documented. This thesis utilizes these studies to examine the Korean immigrants’ perception of cultural and ethnic identity in relation to their religious affiliations. Many scholars have worked on these themes. Among them, Hurh and Kim’s study\textsuperscript{10} on Korean American immigrants and their pervasive attachment to the ethnic church provides an important insight to understanding immigrants’ adaptation patterns in a socio-cultural context. This is discussed in chapter five. Employing the theoretical frameworks of both Hurh and Kim, and Berry\textsuperscript{11}- his classification of four patterns of acculturation-, the thesis finds Hurh and Kim’s model of adhesive adaptation the applicable integration pattern adopted by Korean immigrants in Vancouver, where Korean immigrants retain their cultural and ethnic identity as Koreans while successfully adjusting to Canadian society.

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{8} Min, Pyong Gap. 1992
\item\textsuperscript{10} Hurh, Won Moo and Kwang Chung Kim. \textit{Korean Immigrants in America: A Structural Analysis of Ethnic Confinement and Adhesive Adaptation}. London and Toronto: Associated University Press, 1984a
\item\textsuperscript{11} Berry, John W. “Acculturation and Adaptation in a New Society.” \textit{International Migration Review}, 30 (1992)
\end{itemize}
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Impacts of Religion on Migration and Korean Immigrants

The Korean community in Vancouver consists mostly of immigrants as well as international students with temporary visas. To understand this immigrant community and its constituents, it is necessary to examine the migration process and the effects that moving from a familiar setting to an alien one has on the everyday lives of immigrants. Understanding these effects will lead to an explanation of the questions addressed in the preceding chapter. Many scholars have articulated that the process of immigration entails significant suffering, deprivation, and a loss of status.\(^\text{12}\) Timothy L. Smith\(^\text{13}\) posited migration as “a theologizing experience”: separation from a familial childhood community and experiencing hardships such as unemployment and language barriers generate emotional turmoil, which cries out for religious explanation. In this regard, Smith argued that the perception of ethnicity is closely related to religious faith and commitment.

In the literature on immigrants, religion is identified as an important factor influencing the social integration of immigrants to a host society.\(^\text{14}\) In his study on Korean immigrants’ religious practice in the United States, Eui Hang Shin argued that the ethnic church has been instrumental in maintaining and promoting the ethnic identity and solidarity of Korean immigrants, yet with limitations in either representing the interest of the ethnic immigrant community in relation to the larger mainstream society or bridging the two due to a constrained


role in dealing with secular issues.\textsuperscript{15} The lack of involvement of the church concerning issues of the larger society has been a source for criticism.\textsuperscript{16} In comparison to the African American church, Shin postulated that the Korean ethnic church plays a central role as a religious institution in meeting the expectations of immigrants but it tends to hinder the interactions immigrants have with the larger society. In contrast, the African American church serves to link their community and the larger society through actively promoting issues related to black-white racial inequality and social injustice, as well as encouraging the political participation of African Americans.\textsuperscript{17}

\textit{Church as a Social Institution}

In studies on immigrants and the immigrant community, scholars have noted that immigrants in the new country are engaged in more extensive and intensive religious participation than they were in the old country. Oscar Handlin asserted that “the very process of adjusting immigrant ideas to the conditions of the United States made religion paramount as a way of life.”\textsuperscript{18} Even though Handlin’s argument was made in the American context, the point can be well taken in the context of the Korean immigrant community in Vancouver. In this regard, the research on Korean Protestant immigrants in the United States, done by Korean American scholars such as Pyong Gap Min and Okyun Kwon, provide a valuable and applicable source for understanding the characteristics of the Korean immigrant community. Seventy to seventy-five percent of Korean immigrants in the metropolitan areas in the United States are


\textsuperscript{17} Shin, 2002:31-2

\textsuperscript{18} Handlin, Oscar. \textit{The Uprooted}, 1973:105
affiliated with Protestant ethnic churches. This clearly reveals an overrepresentation of Protestant Christians in the Korean community.\textsuperscript{19}

To explain this phenomenon, studies on the Korean immigrants have focused on the functions of the Korean ethnic church. Bong-youn Choy argued that the church serves as 1) a social center and a mechanism for cultural identity, 2) an educational institution for preservation and education of Korean culture, history and language, and 3) a symbol of nationalism.\textsuperscript{20} According to Illsoo Kim, the church acts as “a pseudo-extended family” and as “a broker between its congregation and the bureaucratic institutions of the larger society.”\textsuperscript{21} The church also helps to mitigate the feelings of deprivation and marginalization which Koreans commonly experience during the migration and adjustment process. Articulated by Pyong Gap Min, the Korean ethnic church has four social functions: providing fellowship, maintaining Korean cultural tradition, offering social services, and providing social status and positions. Among these Gye Ho Kim concluded that fellowship and the maintenance of Korean cultural tradition are closely related to Korean ethnicity.\textsuperscript{22}

\textit{Immigrants, Religious Affiliation and Acculturation}

Strong attachment of Korean immigrants to the ethnic church and systemic exclusion of non-Korean members in the congregation have brought about much contention for the role of the ethnic church. On the one hand, to promote ethnic solidarity and maintain cultural heritage and


\textsuperscript{20} Choy, Bongyoun. \textit{Koreans in America}. Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1979


tradition, the church inevitably serves as a place where Korean immigrants can mitigate feelings of frustration, deprivation, and social isolation through making social interactions with co-ethnic church members who share the same cultural, linguistic, and religious experiences. On the other hand, it is likely the church perpetuates confinement of the Korean immigrants as a minority and keeps them marginalized. Nonetheless, Sang Hyun Lee stressed that ethnic particularity is essential to the function of the Korean ethnic church, arguing that the church could not function as a refuge for marginalized immigrants unless it endorses a strong sense of pride and dignity through mobilizing the ethnic identity of Korean immigrants.

One body of theories relevant to this thesis pertains to the adjustment patterns of immigrants into a new society. Assimilation is a concept critical to understanding a society in which immigrants take part, and in which ethnic, cultural, and religious diversities are overtly manifested, as in Vancouver. In a society formed through immigration, members are likely to face social problems and issues derived from differences in ethnicity, language, religion, and national background. Various theories of assimilation have emerged to deal with these problems and issues.

Furthermore, immigration inevitably brings multicultural characteristics to the host society, since the immigrants come from different societies in which the dominant ethnicity, language, religious and cultural practices vary greatly. Immigrants also bring to the host society a set of values, attitudes, beliefs and behavioural norms ingrained from everyday lives in the old society. In the process of adjusting to a new society, the constant interactions between new

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23 Hurh and Kim, 1984b: 208-9
comers and the host society subsequently bring about changes in cultural values, beliefs and behavioural norms. This process of transformation is defined as acculturation.  

In studies on acculturation, the notion of “model minority” has carried much weight in examining the adjustment of Asian immigrants to North America, viewing that Asian immigrants represent privileged and well-adjusted new comers to a host society. In the same vein, Seung Gyu Moon articulated the successful adjustment of Korean immigrants to Canadian society; “there is every indication that Korean immigrants are well adjusted to the Canadian way of life economically, socially, and psychologically, in spite of their extremely short history of settlement and hardship.” Uichol Kim, on the contrary, put an emphasis on the “hidden costs of immigration” which reveal internal conflicts and schisms in immigrant communities, asserting that Korean immigrants have hard time in dealing with language barriers, isolation, and discrimination, and that sufferings resulting from these hardships are manifested as psychological and physical disorders. 

David L. Sam and John W. Berry denoted the psychological changes immigrants undergo in the process of acculturation at the individual level. These changes entail both behavioral shifts such as dressing and eating styles and serious emotional turmoil that generates “acculturative stress”, manifesting as uncertainty, anxiety and depression.

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Milton M. Gordon made a distinction between cultural assimilation and social assimilation. Cultural assimilation (Gordon’s term for “acculturation”) refers to the changing of immigrants’ cultural patterns to adjust to the host society, whereas social assimilation refers to the socializing of immigrants with primary group members in the host society under the acceptance of the dominant group. Won Moo Hurh and Kwang Chung Kim argued that acculturation is a necessary but insufficient condition for social assimilation, describing Korean immigrants’ assimilation patterns in the United States as “adhesive adaptation” characterized by both “a high level of ethnic attachment” and “a low level of assimilation”. Hurh and Kim organized a set of behavioural and attitudinal indices to examine the degree of cultural and social assimilation, as well as ethnic attachment, thereby testing the “adhesive adaptation” model. In conclusion, Hurh and Kim confirmed Korean immigrants’ assimilation patterns as an adhesive mode of adaptation in which Korean immigrants incorporate certain aspects of American cultural and social relations into the Korean cultural and social networks without replacing or significantly modifying the latter.

Abundant literature pertaining to acculturation has been produced. Gordon postulated a unidimensional model to describe the cultural changes which immigrants experience during the process of adjusting to a new society. In the process of being fully adopted to the host culture, immigrants are likely to lose their cultural heritage. This model, however, fails to distinguish bicultural individuals who are highly familiar with both societies from those who are not.

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32 Hurh and Kim. 1984b: 191
Veronica Benet-Martinez proposed a framework of Bicultural Identity Integration (BII) which examines bicultural individuals’ differences in compromising both cultural identities. According to Benet-Martinez and Haritatos, immigrants with a high level of BII tend to view themselves as “part of a ‘hyphenated culture’ and find it easy to integrate both cultures in their everyday lives.”35 Furthermore, the ethnic culture may persist rather than wane after going through periods of change and transformation.36

Responding to this criticism, J.W. Berry37 suggested a bidimensional acculturation model which identifies cultural and personal trait of an individual as an important factor in shaping his/her identity. An individual can ascribe more than two identities at the same time, thus accept social and cultural aspects of a new society while maintaining his/her own social and cultural heritage. Berry further developed four patterns of acculturation based on immigrants’ relationships to both new and old societies. The four patterns are integration, assimilation, segregation, and marginalization. Integration refers to the immigrants’ retaining their own cultural tradition as well as a positive relationship with the host society. Assimilation occurs when immigrants relinquish cultural identity during the process of adjusting to a new society. Segregation involves immigrants’ preserving cultural aspects but not adopting the ones of a new society. Finally, marginalization is defined as immigrants’ losing the relationships with both the new and the old societies.38 As Gordon and Berry acknowledged, different ethnic groups appear to adopt different acculturation strategies, which consequently results in different outcomes for individual ethnic group. Chapter five of this thesis will examine Korean immigrants’ adjustment

37 Sam and Berry, 2010: 476
38 Ibid
patterns in detail in a framework that combines Berry’s acculturation theory and Hurh and Kim’s adhesive adaptation model.
Chapter Three: A Trajectory and Features of the Vancouver Korean Community

3.1 Overview of Korean Diaspora

Demographic Feature

Since the liberalization of Canada’s immigration policy in 1967, the ethnic landscape in Canada has become more diverse and complex. Immigrants from non-traditional source countries, including nations in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, account for a significant number of newcomers to Canada. Koreans are among those numerous ethnic groups in Canada. Korean immigration to Canada, which officially began after Korea and Canada established formal diplomatic relations in 1963, has increased rapidly since the mid-1980s when the Canadian government doubled its immigrant targets.

The first large influx of Korean immigrants took place during the period from 1986 to 1989, immediately after the Business Immigration Programme in Canada took effect. The second wave of immigration started in 1997. There was a noticeable increase in the number of Korean immigrants to Canada between 1997 and 2006, resulting from the Korean financial crisis in 1997. During this period the rate of unemployment increased drastically in Korea, and many white-collar workers were laid off. National economic instability, combined with individual job insecurity, drove many Koreans to leave their home country, seeking an opportunity for economic betterment and an improved educational environment for their children. Alejandro Portes and Ruben G. Rumbaut gave an insightful view on the emigration of these well-educated Koreans with working experience in prestigious jobs:

The basic reason is the gap between life aspirations and expectations and the means to fulfill them in the sending countries. Different groups feel this gap with varying intensity, but it clearly becomes a strong motive for action among the most ambitious and resourceful. Because relative, not absolute deprivation lies at the core of most contemporary immigration, its composition tends to be positively selected in terms of both human capital and motivation.

White-collar workers or professionals with high education and urban middle-class backgrounds are likely to be better informed or conscious about economic opportunities outside their country of origin and have both the motivation and means to emigrate.

Canada has been the preferred destination for Koreans since the late 1990s. In particular, in 1999, the number of Korean immigrants to Canada exceeded those who chose the United States, which had been the leading destination for almost 35 years.41 Korea was one of the top ten source countries for immigration to Canada in the late 1990s, and the second largest source of business class immigrants between 2000 and 2005. According to Min-Jung Kwak, after 1987, the majority of Korean immigrants entered Canada under either the skilled workers or the business class, and a third of them settled in Vancouver. According to the 2006 Canadian census, over 36,000 Korean immigrants resided in Vancouver. Of these, more than 26,000 Koreans arrived after 1991.42

Features in Settlement

In general, these Korean immigrants were highly educated. Over one-third of the Korean immigrants possessed a university degree, as compared to 15 percent of the overall Canadian

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Another 10 percent had post-graduate education, as opposed to 5 percent of the Canadian population. Despite their higher educational attainment, the economic status of Korean immigrants in Canada did not appear promising. Only 59 percent of Korean immigrants were employed during this period, while the rate was 80 percent for the 25-to-44 age cohort of the general population. Due to the lack of English proficiency and inexperience in the Canadian job market, Korean immigrants had difficulties in finding occupations commensurate with those they had in Korea. They were likely to engage in low income employment as menial labourers or self-owned small businesses in spite of a high level of education, professional knowledge, and occupational skills.44

According to Statistics Canada, since the late 1990s Canadians of Korean origin constitute one of the largest non-European ethnic groups in British Columbia. Many Korean immigrants chose to live in Canada’s largest urban centres. More than one half (53.7 percent) settled in Ontario and nearly one third in British Columbia.45 More than one million visible minority residents have remained in the Vancouver Census Metropolitan Area (CMA), accounting for 45.2 percent of the total population in 2007. Within the Vancouver CMA, Richmond, Burnaby, Surrey, and the city of Vancouver had high proportions of visible minorities, with 70 percent, 59.5 percent, 52.6 percent, and 51.8 percent, respectively in 2007.46

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As of 2011, 45,305 Canadians identified Korean as their mother tongue, accounting for approximately 20 percent of the entire Vancouver population.\(^{47}\)

**Destination for English Learning**

In addition to attracting Koreans with permanent residency, Vancouver has also attracted numerous students from Korea over the last decade. In 2005, 13,407 international students entering Canada with study permits originated from Korea, comprising approximately 38 percent of the total. This number was surpassed only by China with a small margin.\(^{48}\) Furthermore, since the late 1990s Vancouver has surpassed Toronto as the preferred city for Korean students. Over the last decade Koreans have constituted approximately 35 percent on average of international students in Vancouver.\(^{49}\) This trend reflects Koreans’ educational aspirations, particularly with respect to English language learning. In addition to attending Canadian universities and colleges, Korean students typically spend one or two years studying at Canadian high schools, middle schools, or even elementary schools for the purpose of improving their English language skills.

**3.2 Socio-Economic Feature**

The rapid growth of the Korean population in Vancouver has facilitated the emergence of Korean business clusters, which consequently, made the Korean community increasingly visible. The opening of the Hannam Supermarket along North Road in Coquitlam in 1998 initiated a concentration of Korean businesses within that area. A few years later, the beginning of the Millennium SkyTrain Line, together with the opening of another Korean supermarket, Han-Ah-Reum, provided easy access to this Korean business cluster, and increased its popularity. This in turn strengthened the central role of the North Road shopping centre to the Korean community.

\(^{47}\) Statistics Canada. “Census Profile”. 2011  
\(^{48}\) Ibid.  
\(^{49}\) CIC. “Facts and Figures 2013: Immigration Overview”. 2013
Yu and Murray define this kind of business cluster as an ethnic enclave. This Korean ethnic economic enclave along the North Road in Coquitlam is the largest, and is known as ‘Koreatown’. In terms of scale and recognition, Koreatown is comparable to neither the Chinese enclave in Richmond nor Chinatown in Vancouver. However, Koreatown serves as a Korean ethnic economic centre, where the major economic establishments of the Hanin Mall and the North Road Centre are located. Within these shopping complexes, a variety of Korean businesses are in operation centred around two mega-scale supermarkets, including banks, accounting offices, medical clinics, restaurants, beauty salons, bakeries, and cafés.

One distinguishing feature of Korean immigrants is that, despite a lack of command of the English language by the majority, they have an apparent command of human capital and financial capital. According to BC Stats (British Columbia Statistics), over fifty percent of Korean newcomers to Canada do not have any knowledge of the English language at the time of their arrival. In his comparative study of East Asian immigrants and European entrepreneur immigrants in British Columbia, Froschauer found that East Asian immigrants from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and South Korea tend to use their native language to communicate for business purposes and employ co-ethnic workers. These business class immigrants are more likely to depend on the ethnic community for their commercial activities, and thus contribute significantly to the development of the ethnic enclave economy throughout British Columbia.

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51 British Columbia statistics. “Special Feature: Immigrants from South Korea.” 2011
3.3 Korean Ethnic Church

The existence of a great number of ethnic churches and concomitant Korean Christian affiliates are one of the distinguishing features of the Korean community in Vancouver. According to Baker, more than 200 Korean ethnic churches have been established in the Greater Vancouver Area, composed primarily of Protestant churches and a few Catholic churches. This translates to one ethnic church for every 350 Koreans. This ratio of churches to Koreans is comparable to that in the United States, where more Koreans (75 to 85 percent) are affiliated with the Korean ethnic church. Of these churches, only a dozen of them are large enough to accommodate the congregations in their building. Most ethnic churches have only 40 to 80 members, and often rent space for worship in local church buildings.

The Korean church serves as a site where Koreans can practice their religion without compromising their Korean identity. The church emphasizes its Korean identity and fosters its congregation to maintain their identity. Since Koreans in Vancouver are relatively recent immigrants in Canada, the church recognizes the needs for information and assistance for their settlement in and adjustment to Canadian society. Responding to the needs of its congregation, the church provides a variety of social services including English language classes for adult members and Korean language classes for their children born in Canada.

The ethnic church also sponsors diverse Korean cultural events and observes Korean traditional holidays. As a result of its focus on Korean Christian culture and identity, the ethnic

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54 Todd, Douglas. “Metro’s 70,000 ethnic Koreans: Most Turn to Fervent, Conservative Christianity.” The Vancouver Sun, March 2, 2014.
55 Baker, 2010: 169
church appears to lack interest in attracting non-Koreans to the congregation. As Baker remarks, the ethnic church creates “a religious refuge”, where Koreans can turn to when they feel lonely and frustrated living in an alien culture.\textsuperscript{57}

Grace Community Church is an apt example that boasts a strong evangelist orientation, which is typical of ethnic churches. Established in 2003, the church has become the largest Korean church in Greater Vancouver with more than 3,000 listed members.\textsuperscript{58} The church has become so successful in attracting Koreans to its congregation that it holds four services on Sundays in order to accommodate the entire congregation. The church also holds weekday prayer services throughout the Vancouver area. Along with other evangelical ethnic churches, Grace Community Church sends members to the Vancouver International Airport to greet newcomers and invites them to Sunday service. Acknowledging that the church consists entirely of ethnic Koreans, head pastor Shinil Park stated that they place emphasis on members’ involvement in aid programs such as the Metro Vancouver’s food bank.\textsuperscript{59}

As mentioned, there is an extensive and active church affiliation among Koreans in Vancouver. In the history of Korean immigration to Canada, the ethnic church has played a central role, not only as a religious organization but also as a social organization. On the one hand, the church provides a variety of social services that newcomers can benefit from in order to adjust to Canadian society. The church also provides needed support for those who confront difficulties pertaining to the language barrier, cultural differences, discrimination, and the sense

\textsuperscript{57} Baker, 2010: 170
\textsuperscript{58} Todd, 2014.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
of isolation. On the other hand, the church fosters Korean identity by making church attendance a way of asserting Korean Christian identity.\textsuperscript{60}

Chapter Four: The Korean Ethnic Church and Its Social Functions

With successive notable influxes of Korean immigrants to Vancouver since the 1980s, the Korean ethnic church has taken on a central position in the Korean community and in the daily lives of Korean immigrants. With more than 200 Korean ethnic churches established in the Greater Vancouver Area, there is one ethnic church for every 350 Koreans. A popular saying among Korean immigrants aptly articulates this phenomenon: “When two Japanese meet, they set up a business firm; when two Chinese meet, they open a Chinese restaurant; and when two Koreans meet, they establish a church.”

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A number of theories on the ethnic church have been employed to explain the active involvement of immigrants in religion. One explanation is that immigrants, in general, tend to engage in religious activities more extensively and intensively in the new society than they did in the old, because “the very process of adjusting immigrant ideas to the conditions” of the new society “made religion paramount as a way of life.”

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In addition, the adverse experience of migration increased the need for existential meaning, social belonging, and psychological consolation, which immigrants are likely to seek in religious participation. In this regard, it is not unexpected that the Korean immigrants would find their religious, social, and psychological needs, which are more often than not functionally-interwoven, in the ethnic church. The primary motive for church attendance appears to be religious for many Korean immigrants. Diverse non-religious functions that the Korean ethnic church performs for its congregations carry obviously much weight for many church participants. The major non-religious (i.e. social) functions of the

62 Handlin, Oscar. The Uprooted, 1973:105
63 Hurh and Kim, 1990: 22
Korean ethnic church are: 1) fellowship; 2) preservation of cultural tradition and identity; 3) social services; 4) social status and position; and 5) mediator and a coping mechanism.  

**4.1 Fellowship**

Fellowship and a sense of belonging are the most instrumental church provisions for Korean immigrants. The importance of satisfying the need for primary social interaction has been well documented in the literature on the ethnic church. In his study on the social functions of the Korean ethnic church, Min articulated the family-like function of the church by comparing it with the ethnic churches of Afro-Americans; “its family functions are shown by the fact that the church is center of social life and intercourse; acts as newspaper and intelligence bureau, is the center of amusements - indeed is the world in which the Negro moves and acts.” Likewise, the Korean ethnic church provides a place where Korean immigrants can have social interactions with other co-ethnic members. Having lived as immigrants, Korean-Canadians come to terms with the reality that “complete assimilation is not possible because of their race and physiognomy.” The realization of this fact “generates an intense drive toward ethnic identity, sought often through the ethnic church.”

Loneliness and the feeling of being an outsider are commonly found among Korean immigrants. This alienation felt by Korean immigrants, labelled as a visible minority irrespective of educational, social, and occupational backgrounds, is the very impetus that draws many Korean immigrants into the ethnic church. Even Canadian-born Koreans express frustration at being treated like outsiders because of their race and/or ethnicity when asked questions like, 

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“Where are you from?” or, “Can you speak English?” Experiences of alienation and identity crisis have forced Korean immigrants to strive for a sense of belonging, and consequently, lead them to the ethnic church where they can meet with other Koreans, speak their own language, and are not bothered about where they come from. In this vein, the Korean ethnic church has played a central role.

The Korean ethnic church provides its members with a venue for initiating and maintaining social interactions, friendship, and networks with other Korean immigrants. All these churches have either formal or informal small group meetings such as Bible studies, cell-groups or social hours through which members are able to develop valuable and intimate relationships with one another. In addition, many Korean churches hold sport meets such as tennis, table tennis and fishing as annual events, and as part of church retreats along with Bible studies and prayers. Associated with a number of Korean churches in Vancouver, Korean immigrant youths hold softball matches on regular basis. This provides interaction with non-church members, non-Koreans, as well as other church members through on-line communications such as personal blogs and twitters. Most of these social media sites and blogs relating to church activities are operated in Korean, but they are also linked to other English web sites based in the local community.

Social media has become an inseparable part of people’s daily lives, and the church also recognizes its benefits in communicating with members and promoting church events. For instance, The Korean Central Presbyterian Church in Vancouver has its online website linked with Facebook, taking advantage of its popularity and accessibility to expose the church to more

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67 Hong, Young-Hwa. "Migration and Racialized Identity Formation: Skilled Korean Immigrant Women in the Canadian Labour Market.” *Asian Women*, 23.3 (Fall 2007): 33
68 Min, 1992; Chong, 1998
69 Min, 1992: 1383
social media users. Rachael Lee of *Christianity Today* commented that social media can be a useful source for new immigrants searching for a church, and for the church as a means to proselytize. Lee considered Desiring God as a good example of utilizing social media to share the gospel. This non-profit Christian blog and resource website organization frequently makes good use of diverse social media to convey sermons, Bible verses, and teachings from pastors.

The psychological comfort of being in a familiar environment and gathering with people who share the same culture and experience enhances the feeling of intimacy into “friendships of trust” as mentioned in this comment of a Korean church member:

> I found that neighbours or fellow church members are better than brothers and sisters. Really when we came to Canada; it’s different nowadays because there’s so many people who come now, but back then our [Korean community] neighbours were like our siblings.

The Korean ethnic church has become instrumental to the Korean community, serving as an extended family. Korean immigrants find themselves in a shelter where they are able to ease the feelings of deprivation, dislocation and alienation, and obtain comfort and company. At the very least the church offers weekly opportunities to interact with other church members. Korean immigrants appreciate the sense of belonging and existential meaning. For the Korean immigrants, the ethnic church functions as a substitute for the family and friends they lose close ties with due to immigration.

### 4.2 Preservation of Cultural Tradition and Identity

One non-religious function of the ethnic church is closely related to the preservation of cultural tradition and ethnic identity. As Min articulated, many immigrants have difficulties in

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maintaining their own culture and identity, and thus, turn to their ethnic church to deal with the loss of ethnic identity. For these immigrants, the ethnic church is “the first line of defense behind which these immigrants could organize themselves and with which they could preserve their group, *i.e.*, system, identity.”  

The maintenance of identity may not be a major issue for first-generation immigrants, but they still value cultural preservation and reinforcement through the religious participation. Concerning the preservation of culture and identity, the Korean immigrants consider language, Korean values, and traditions as the most crucial aspects.  

The Korean ethnic church plays an important role in maintaining Korean identity and cultural tradition mainly through the use of Korean language and observations of Korean customs and traditional holidays. For most worship services in the church, announcements as well as pastor’s sermons are given in Korean. On special occasions such as *chusoek* (Korean Thanksgiving) and *seolnal* (Lunar New Year), Koreans gather at their ethnic churches to enjoying ethnic food and celebrate religious and traditional holidays. In this way, children can learn traditional values and norms whereby they become aware of their cultural identity.  

Moreover, Korean ethnic church provides programs to help children learn and retain the Korean language. Language is one of the most instrumental factors in manifesting a sense of cultural identity: the frequent use of heritage language (*i.e.* Korean) among parents and children determines whether the language will survive over generations. Immigrant children’s heritage language acquisition and identity formation significantly depend on the parents’ attitude towards

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73 Min, 1992: 1383-4  
74 Ibid.
the language and the frequency of use. In a study by Yim and Lee on the perception of Korean immigrants in Vancouver, they found that parents are eager to provide opportunities to their children to learn or maintain Korean. Making their children participate in local community activities, mainly held at ethnic churches is how they facilitate this. Korean parents reasoned that the acquisition and maintenance of the language help their children to retain cultural identity and also communicate with their grandparents. As shown in a Korean parent’s comments:

Identity--- It includes everything. It is about culture, culture in the family, our life style. Language comes along with it. It [language] comes in a package.

the maintenance of culture and identity seems to be a major concern for most Korean immigrant parents. Under this circumstance, the Korean ethnic church has become an important venue for them and their children to practice Korean cultural tradition and identity.

In the Greater Vancouver area, there are 18 Korean language schools operating. Of these schools, more than half are church affiliates. The children not only learn Korean language, but also have the opportunity to practice Korean culture and customs through a variety of events and programs, such as Taekwondo class and Day of Korean traditional games, which the schools hold throughout the year. Vancouver Korean Language School, established in 1973, manifests its goal as teaching immigrant children their mother tongue, whereby promoting Korean identity

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76 Yim and Lee, 2012:109-129
77 Yim and Lee, 2012: 121
and instilling them with a pride of being Korean.\textsuperscript{79} As a means to achieve this goal, the school invites successful alumni professionals from various fields to give lectures. The lectures are to share their experience and knowledge with young immigrants, motivating them to become active participants in the Korean community as well as mainstream society. Among those lecturers, Yonah Martin (Conservative Senator from British Columbia) and Mi-Jung Lee (anchor for CTV News Vancouver) are amongst the more than 400 graduates from the school.

4.3 Social Services

Another non-religious function of the ethnic church is to provide a variety of social services for its congregation. These services include counseling on issues from immigrant settlement, children’s education, job referral and English language assistance in filling out forms.\textsuperscript{80} The function of providing social services makes membership in an ethnic church important to Korean immigrants, especially to new comers. Pertaining to the gravitation of the church, Hurh and Kim suggested that the Korean ethnic church is the most well-established social institution for Koreans; it serves as a “reception center” for new immigrants. Compared with other ethnic organizations, the church offers the most inclusive and accessible membership, and provides its members with more frequent and regular opportunities for both communal and associational social interactions.\textsuperscript{81}

The major hardships that immigrants initially face in a new society are found in language and employment, which are often functionally intertwined. In this sense, the Korean ethnic church has become the most common and open place for Korean immigrants to establish valuable social networks through which they can have access to business related resources such

\textsuperscript{79} For detailed information, visit at http://homepy.korean.net/~vancouverschool/www/
\textsuperscript{80} Min, 1992: 1385
\textsuperscript{81} Hurh and Kim, 1990: 30
as business information and employment opportunities. This ethnic network makes significant contribution to immigrants’ business establishments in terms of client generation, recruitment of employees, and advertisement. Given that there is no comparable ethnic organization with the capacity to meet all these needs, “the Korean ethnic church seems to be the only social institution that most immigrants turn to for useful information and services.”

4.4 Social Status and Positions

Koreans traditionally value the attainment of status and success. The provision of lay leadership positions within the Korean ethnic church, in this respect, is understood to reflect those aspirations for social status. In his study on contemporary Korea, D. S. Macdonald has asserted that a “burning desire for wealth, power, and social recognition” is a powerful impetus to shape Korean attitudes and behaviours, and “success, wealth, and status are flaunted for all to admire.” In contrast to their expectation on social status, most Korean immigrants come to terms with downward mobility in the mainstream society. This is mainly due to the inability to maintain occupations in their fields of education and working experience. As a result, many immigrants, who used to engage in professional white-collar jobs in Korea, turn to self-employment. Even though owning a business may provide economic mobility through accumulating financial capital, it is not generally accredited with high social status; and thus, Korean immigrants often struggle with the loss of status.

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84 Min, 1992: 1385
86 Min, 1992: 1389
Experiencing status devaluation inevitably leads Korean immigrants to look for a substitute in their own ethnic community. Given that they are more likely associated with the ethnic church, it is natural for them to strive for status within the church and thereby the Korean immigrant community. The church provides its members with various lay leadership positions called elders and deacons. These positions are not entitled to monetary remuneration or other direct rewards. However, the ownership of a title carries significant weight with the Korean immigrants. It is tantamount to the social status that they failed to achieve in the larger society.  

The provision of social status by the Korean ethnic church contributes to enhancing the social status of many church participants. By means of conferring various leadership positions for lay members, the church is able to meet the needs of Korean immigrants for recognition within the Korean community. In the study on Korean immigrants and their religious participation, Hurh and Kim found that among church members, holding a staff position signifies a better socioeconomic status; in addition, Korean male immigrants with staff positions in the church reveal a lower degree of depression and a higher degree of life satisfaction than those without staff positions. In the same vein, Min acknowledged that some “Korean pastors admitted that they created more staff positions than necessary to meet Korean immigrants’ social and psychological needs.” To sum up, the Korean immigrants utilize the ethnic church to mitigate the loneliness and hardships derived from the process of migration and adjustment, and to obtain compensation for the loss of social status and recognition in the host society.

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87 Min, 1992: 1389-90  
88 Hurh and Kim, 1990:28-31  
89 Min, 1992: 1390
4.5 Mediator and a Coping Mechanism

Korean immigrants are challenged to successfully adjust to the host society, while they continuously interact with the Korean culture through the ethnic church. Hence, religious participation of Korean immigrants is understood as a means to achieve their goal in this regard and the ethnic church as a vital mediating device for its congregation. In the midst of the migration process, Korean immigrants, more often than not, experience the so called “acculturative stress.” This results from settlement demands in a new society pertaining to language difficulty, cultural and customary adjustment, discrimination, and the loss of ethnic culture and identity. These stresses are manifested in psychological disorders.90 A study on Korean immigrants in the metropolitan Toronto area revealed that the general social support from mainstream society has no effect on alleviating psychological distress due to the lack of socio-cultural and situational similarity between support providers and receivers, whereas the support from co-ethnic members of the immigrant community plays a significant role in coping with acculturative stress.91

In their study on Korean immigrant women’s adjustment in Canadian society, Jaeyoung Choi et al. posited that ethnic church involvement is crucial to providing the women with the social support that is essential for a smooth transition into a new society and the further integration into the mainstream.92 All of the participants in the study practiced religion and heavily engaged themselves in church activities, which they believed help get them through

acculturative difficulties. In general, the role of religious affiliation appears to be critical to Korean immigrants coping:

My life wasn’t easy here [Canada]. When I came here, it was very hard on me physically and mentally … After I recovered my faith, I felt much happier when I looked at my situation.\textsuperscript{93}

The Korean ethnic church functions as a place where immigrants can establish a social network within the ethnic community which, in turn, helps them to facilitate adjustment to Canadian society.

4.6 Conflicts, Divisions and Challenges

To the Korean immigrants, the church is the centre of the immigrant community, serving as a site for meeting other Koreans, receiving assistance and socializing. Many Korean parents find the church an ideal place for their children to learn and practice Korean culture and identity. Nevertheless, there are conflicts and tensions between older Korean immigrants and relatively recent, more affluent arrivals. The new arrivals mostly entered Canada under the economic class provisions after the late 1990s. In his study on Korean Canadians in Vancouver, Song\textsuperscript{94} argued that the experience of downward occupational adjustment has increased the need for social status. Moreover, the recent influx of more affluent Korean immigrants under the investment class has affected negatively on the social status of many older immigrants. This is illustrated in the statement of an older Korean immigrant:

The old immigrants have their own history. They established themselves from [having] no money, no house. They worked hard in groceries and labour work. They spent 20 to 15 years to finally have a house...Nowadays, investment immigrants they do not have to

\textsuperscript{93} Choi, et al, 2014: 291
build money. They easily buy a house, a car. [They don’t] need to work. That’s why mentally, it has not been easy to harmonize. 95

The conflict often stems from differing appropriation of traditional values and norms between older and younger groups of immigrants. The older immigrants complain about the recent immigrants’ lack of respect for elders and precarious duty performance at the church, while the recent immigrants consider the older immigrants as outmoded and lacking reasonable work ethics. 96

Concerning the extensive religious participation of Korean immigrants, some of the church participants stated that the church membership might not help them integrate into mainstream society. Since church membership requires the members’ time, financial support, and commitment, church participants “don’t have time for other engagement. Between their business or work and the church, they have no free time, money or… resources.” 97

Furthermore, the fact that church participants tend to heavily depend on the church for social belonging and psychological comfort indicates that there is not much room for members to interact with people outside the ethnic community. In other words, an extensive church involvement by the immigrants enhances a sense of belonging within the Korean community while greatly limiting their engagement with the larger society. Nonetheless, it should be noted that by providing a site where Korean immigrants congregate to find cultural identity, a sense of belonging, and social status, the Korean ethnic church is a visible and vital social institution, functioning as an essential instrument of realization of ethnic interests.

95 Song, 1997: 54
96 Chung, 2008: 54-69
Chapter Five: Ethnic Identity and Acculturation

Baker\(^9\) has argued that when a person immigrates to a new country, that person is likely to ascribe to a new ethnic identity. This new ethnicity is determined not only by blood relations but also mutual interactions with others in the host society. In the same vein, Korean immigrants in Canada come to hold the new identity as Korean-Canadians. At the same time, they reconcile their dual identities as both Koreans and Canadians. Immigrants’ reconciling dual identities is a notion critical to conceptualizing their adaptation patterns. This notion has been employed in the literature on the adjustment experiences of Korean immigrants. In a study by Hurh and Kim, in the United States, the authors suggested that “adhesive adaptation” is employed by Korean Americans to reconcile their own native culture and that of the host culture. This is “a process of cultural adjustment in which certain aspects of American culture are added onto the traditional Korean culture without substantially altering it.”\(^9\)

In discourse on conceptualizing their findings, the authors have utilized two notions of assimilation, acculturation and social assimilation, as suggested by Gordon. Acculturation (i.e. cultural assimilation) refers to immigrants’ changing their cultural patterns to adjust to the host society, whereas social assimilation (i.e. structural assimilation) refers to immigrants’ socializing with primary group members in the host society under the acceptance of the dominant group. Employing these concepts, they concluded that Korean immigrants successfully acculturated into the American culture while maintaining their own cultural tradition and identity. However, Korean Americans were not socially assimilated enough to be fully integrated into mainstream society. The authors called this pattern of adaptation “additive” or “adhesive.”

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Similar findings are observed in studies on the adjustment experiences of Korean Canadians, who retain their ethnic ties mainly through extensive involvement in the ethnic church. This does not affect their social interaction in Canadian society. When encountering cultural differences, Korean immigrants may not be sure about the degree to which they should become socially integrated. But they want to retain their native cultural aspects and practices.\textsuperscript{100} According to Sam and Berry\textsuperscript{101}, the adjustments by immigrants can be understood through acculturation patterns differentiated by their relationships with both the new and the old societies. There are four identified patterns of acculturation: integration, assimilation, segregation, and marginalization. Integration is the retention of cultural traditions as well as a positive relationship with the host society. Assimilation occurs when cultural identity is relinquished during the adjustment to a new society. Segregation involves preserving cultural traditions and practices but not adopting those aspects of the host society. Marginalization is defined as losing the relationship with both the new and the old societies.\textsuperscript{102} As Gordon and Berry acknowledged, adopted acculturation strategies differ among ethnic groups resulting in different outcomes for each individual ethnic group.

5.1 Challenges in the Settlement and Adaptation

Korean immigrants encounter many challenges in the settlement process. Among these challenges difficulties with language, employment, and acculturative stress seem to be the major

\textsuperscript{101} Sam, David L and John W. Berry. ””Acculturation: When Individuals and Groups of Different Cultural Backgrounds meet.” Perspectives on Psychological Science, 5.4(2010): 473
\textsuperscript{102} Sam and Berry, 2010: 476
concerns. More often than not, difficulties in language and employment are functionally intertwined, which exacerbate the hardship of adaptation. The migration process, in itself, involves dissociation from a familiar living environment. The uprooting experience causes Korean immigrants to go through “acculturative stress,” which refers to the psychological distress resulting from the demands of settling in a new society.

**Language Barriers and Employment**

The language barrier is considered as the foremost obstacle that most Korean immigrants find difficult to overcome in the short term. It has significant implications on every aspect of their daily lives. It limits their social interactions to the ethnic community. In addition, language barriers are often closely related to occupational status. Language incompetence hinders job opportunities, inevitably leading to underemployment in many cases. In her study on the experience of Korean immigrant women in the Canadian labour market, Hong argued that women faced systemic racism by means of foreign accent discrimination, unrecognized foreign credentials, and Canadian work experience requirements.

According to Hong, speaking English with an accent manifests the speaker’s place of origin, which is likely to cause accent discrimination. Language incompetence also brings about limits to communication and even engenders job insecurity. Due to the lack of English proficiency, many immigrant workers have difficulty accessing information, making demands

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105 Hong, 2007: 50
and expressing themselves. These restrain the scope of communication with others on issues related to work. Therefore, successful performance in the workplace largely depends on language facility, especially communicative skills. Korean immigrants who generally lack this language capacity tend to be marginalized in the mainstream labour market.

Kim illustrated, in his study on Korean Canadians’ coping with acculturative stress, the challenges that immigrant employees have to deal with in regards to having a limited scope of communication:

My co-workers often put their work on my shoulders and then blame me for not doing the work properly. I just don’t know who they think I am. But I try to stand this and gently express my opinion when an appropriate time, because I have to see them always in the office.

Another Korean immigrant expressed his concern about job security:

I was somehow fortunate to get a job but I was the only one who did not speak English. I guess I was on the top of the layoff list. I really suffered job insecurity. The only thing I could do was just to work hard, much harder than others with a belief that someday they would recognize me.

As revealed in these statements, limited communicative resource acts as a significant hindrance not only to Korean immigrants’ entry to the Canadian labour market, but also to their job performance in the work place.

**Downward Occupational Adjustment**

Despite having a high level of education, professional skills, and knowledge, many Korean immigrants fail to secure employment in their field of study or work experience.

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106 Hong, 2007: 41-2
108 Kim, 2006: 45
According to a survey on immigrant professionals in Vancouver, the majority of respondents had a university education and more than 40 percent received a Master’s or Doctor’s degree. Yet only 22 percent managed to sustain the same level of employment after immigration. The rest experienced downward occupational mobility. In many cases, the factors forcing many Korean immigrants into low-paying manual jobs or self-employment are a lack of English proficiency and inexperience in the Canadian labour market.

Another factor hindering suitable employment for Korean immigrants is that their educational and professional credentials are not recognized in the Canadian labour market. For instance, immigrants who want to continue their professional career in the medical field have to go through rigid licencing and training requirements. This efficiently blocks the entry of immigrant professionals and at the same time enables the Canadian medical professionals to maintain their exclusive occupational status. The denial of professional credentials greatly limits immigrants’ job opportunities:

> When I came to Canada, what I found here is…whatever your education or experience, Canadians do not recognize these things. It doesn’t matter where you train, I had a couple of certificates from the US, it didn’t help me at all…they ask for local experience, which we had none. But, how do you get local experience unless they give us a chance? We had a hard time.

Due to the institutional discrimination and unwelcoming attitudes towards newcomers found in the mainstream labour market, the Korean community in Canada is subject to “deskilling” as

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Couton has put it, where Korean immigrants commanding a high level of education and professional training are forced to accept lower-skilled jobs because they cannot find employment in the areas for which they were educated or trained.\textsuperscript{113}

\textit{Self-employment and Acculturative Stress}

Korean immigrants’ realization of their disadvantages in the mainstream labour market appears to be an important determinant to their entry into self-employment.\textsuperscript{114} Korean immigrants, according to Kwak and Hiebert, reveal a higher rate of self-employment than any other ethnic group in Vancouver (44 percent for men and 29.7 percent for women); the majority run businesses in the lower tier of the service sector such as grocery stores, coin laundries and coffee and sandwich shops.\textsuperscript{115} Combined with a sense of isolation and marginalization felt by Korean immigrants through immigration experience, physical and psychological constraints derived from operating small businesses which requires long work hours and physically demanding work are another major cause for acculturative stress.\textsuperscript{116}

\textit{The Ethnic Church as a Site for Resources}

Confronted with a variety of difficulties in dealing with living in a new society, Korean immigrants desperately need a place where they can obtain information, receive practical assistance, and relieve their emotional turmoil; their local ethnic church appears to fulfill such needs. Korean immigrants in Chung’s study emphasized benefits from church attendance through which they received or gave emotional support, were able to learn practicalities about

\textsuperscript{113} Couton, Philippe. “Ethnocultural Community Organizations and Immigrant Integration in Canada.” \textit{Institute for Research on Public Policy}, 47 (June 2014): 10, According to Couton, 81 percent of Korean immigrants were admitted as skilled workers under Economic Class and 65 percent reported attaining post-secondary education (Statistics Canada 2013).
\textsuperscript{114} Min, 1984: 344
living in Canada and about Canadian culture, and were encouraged to confront challenges in the 
adaptation to a new country. The church becomes a meaningful place for Korean immigrants 
and their settlement in and adaptation to the Canadian society in three ways: 1) the church 
supports and encourages Korean immigrants to live as Christians; 2) it supports and assists 
Korean immigrants’ successful adjustment to the host society; 3) it supports the establishment of 
social relationships among Korean immigrants.

The reason for the church occupying a central position in the Korean immigrant 
community can be found in the weekly mobilized Korean social organizations. Among the 
Korean-background charitable organizations, 84 percent of them are religious organizations. 
Other than the ethnic churches, there are not yet any intercultural organizations, solely dedicated 
to Koreans, such as S.U.C.C.E.S.S (Sino United Chinese Community Enrichment Social Service) 
for Chinese and PICS (Progressive Intercultural Community Services Society) for South Asians. 
Yu and Murray have argued that the lack of well-developed Korean Canadian Civil Service 
Organizations attributed to the absence of both Korean Canadian leaders in the Canadian 
political system and symbolic political issues such as Chinese head tax and the Komagata Maru 
incident for mobilizing people to establish CSOs dedicated to their own ethnic communities. 
These organizations provide immigration settlement services available to Koreans; nonetheless, for most Korean immigrants, the church functions as the most accessible

University of Waterloo, 2008: 43-51
118 Park, Kyungran. “Korean Immigrant Family Communication Strategies and a New Identity Construction.” Ph.D 
Dissertation. Université du Québec à Montréal, 2006: 117-9
119 Couton, Philippe. “Ethnocultural Community Organizations and Immigrant Integration in Canada.” Institute for 
Research on Public Policy, 47 (June 2014): 11
120 Yu, Sherry Y. and Catherine A. Murray. “Ethnic media under a Multicultural Policy: The Case of the Korean 
Media in British Columbia.” Canadian Ethics Studies, 39.3 (June 2008): 104
and resourceful means for services they need for settlement in and adjustment to Canadian society.

5.2 Ethnic Attachment and Its Implications on Acculturation

Ethnic solidarity is an ironic but inevitable outcome resulting from leaving a native culture and entering a host culture. Ethnic solidarity is closely related to a minority groups’ sense of loss, especially, the loss of identity. In his articulation on lost and dissocialized identity in a host society, Bar-Yosef asserted that immigrants cannot become active participants in the dominant society because they are outsiders. Hence, they are dissocialized in the host society, and consequently, tend to struggle to reclaim a sense of identity.\(^{121}\)

_Dealing with Marginalization and Sense of Loss_

In this regard, religion plays an important role in the striving for ethnic identity and solidarity by immigrants. It appears that religion constitutes an even more important part in the daily lives of immigrants after they enter a new society. Yet, there has been much contention on whether a strong attachment to the ethnic religious organizations facilitates or hinders the social integration into the host society.

Korean immigrants confront a number of hardships when they first settle in a new country. The difficulties vary depending on social and economic status; however, the most common difficulties are the language barrier, emotional discomfort, and cultural and customary adjustment, such as shopping, buying a house or a car, helping children with school work, and looking for a family doctor.

In his study on Korean immigrants and their religious pursuit in Christianity, Kim illustrated his own painful experience as a new comer to Canada:\(^\text{122}\):

In Korea, I was an educated person with a respected job and could do almost everything I wanted. However, in my new immigrant situation, I could not go shopping, speak freely, get a car, or even take my child to a doctor. Literally, I did not know what to do and where to start, and I actually could not do anything without the help of others. All of my past education and life experience became nothing in adjusting to a different country. Feeling totally lost, I became passive and acquired a victimized perspective towards my life.

Kim’s predicament in adapting to Canada was brought about mainly due to language incompetence. This also reveals a sense of being lost and low self-esteem which many Koreans go through after immigration. In search of ways to deal with these challenges, many Korean immigrants turn to the ethnic church for emotional and/or practical support.

Social status and self-esteem are often closely related to educational and occupational status. Song argues that the Korean community can be understood by means of status rankings which differentiate its members according to education and occupation.\(^\text{123}\) As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Koreans who experience downward occupational adjustment tend to suffer from loss of status and dignity because occupational status is the means through which individuals distinguish themselves from others. In this manner, Korean immigrants use occupation as an instrument of social status, and engagement in white-collar professions has been a distinguishing feature for Korean Canadian leaders in the ethnic organizations such as the Korean Society of British Columbia for Fraternity and Culture.\(^\text{124}\) Under these circumstances, Koreans come to


\(^{123}\) Song, 1997:44

\(^{124}\) Song, 1997:52
search for strategies to deal with these challenges, and consequently many Korean immigrants turn to the ethnic church for emotional and/or practical support, status, and identity.

**Getting Acculturated through Church Participation**

Social supports from mainstream social organizations other than the ethnic church are often not accessible or available for Koreans due to the language barrier and cultural differences even though they are very important for them. Psychological consolation is particularly important for those who suffer from acculturative stress, and they are likely to deal with it through church participation. In this sense, offering emotional comfort to the believers is one of the most instrumental functions of the church. In addition, social networks established through the church attendance are seen as the most crucial resource to Korean immigrants. A church participant stated:

> From time to time, I am invited to a seminal and to other professional gatherings. It is a time to get along with the mainstream professionals with good food. Often, it is important for my profession. But I am not really interested in that. I have greater joy from my own ethnic church groups where I can freely speak, because it spiritually strengthens me.  

As this comment indicates, even Koreans with a good command of English are affiliated with the ethnic church and reveal a strong attachment to it.

**Impact of Church Attendance on Identity Perception**

Church attendance is not driven simply by the need for spiritual consolation but also by the need for maintenance of their identity and culture:

> Why do I come to a Korean church? Well, it’s not strictly for religious reasons, but cultural. Part of the reason is to keep some contact with the Korean community because it’s our only source of cultural identity.  

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Chong has explained the rationale behind this strong attachment of Korean immigrants to ethnic identity and culture. Ethnic unity is seen “as part of the defense against prejudice and hostility”, and many Koreans who have experienced discrimination from the mainstream undergo identity crisis, and struggle to develop an awareness of who they really are.\textsuperscript{127} In Cho’s study on identity formation of Korean immigrants, taking on the Korean identity also comes from being labeled as a non-Korean, and is reinforced by others’ recognition:

When I was identified as being Asian, I felt a need to defend myself and remove myself from being Chinese. I tried to explain that being Korean is different.\textsuperscript{128}

This awareness of self-identity leads Koreans to engage in the ethnic church since the ethnic identity is formed and developed through social interactions with the larger society as well as within the ethnic community:

And still there’s this thing about being a minority or a majority. So we are outsiders, right? So new immigrants come to the Korean church not to be an outsider, right? …No matter how they try to trick people, Korean people are Korean … So that’s why they come and attend (Korean church).\textsuperscript{129}

Church participation, in turn, reinforces their identity by enabling them to appropriate and internalize traditional Korean values and norms based on Confucian ideology such as filial piety and respect for elders.\textsuperscript{130}

\textbf{Reinforcement and Reproduction of Traditional Values and Norms}

The appropriation of practiced culture brings about perpetuating undesirable aspects of traditional culture in structures and operations of the ethnic church. An emphasis on patriarchal hierarchy based on gender and age is commonly found in social interactions and church activities.

\textsuperscript{127} Chong, 1998: 269
\textsuperscript{128} Cho, Mi-Rha. “Identity Formation in Korean Canadian Women: A Look at Subjectivity, Race, and Multiculturalism.” M.A. Thesis. The University of Toronto, 2003: 66
\textsuperscript{130} Chong, 1998: 269
The gender division is another aspect of negatively perceived cultural practices, particularly by women:

We do pick deaconesses, but the work the male elders and deaconesses do are totally different. Deaconesses usually take overall care of kitchen stuff ... You have to be obedient to church leaders. That is following the bible ... The women are consorts that help men and uh, even now it’s like that in the church.\textsuperscript{131}

This comment reveals that the church imposes on church members the traditional gender roles, values and norms which are reinforced by the men and the elders through lay leadership positions.

\textit{Adhesive Adaptation as Acculturation Strategy}

For Korean immigrants, the ethnic church is the most resourceful instrument to help them maintain their culture and identity and adjust to Canadian society. However, the church role of supporting for their adjustment can be understood as either bridging their community with the larger society or bonding Koreans together within the ethnic community. On the one hand, their strong attachment to the church greatly contributes to mobilizing Korean identity and ethnic solidarity; on the other hand, they openly express frustration that church participation does not help them to interact with the larger society.

Similarly, the Korean community can be understood through adhesive adaptation in that Koreans have acculturated into the Canadian society while preserving their ethnic identity and culture through the religious affiliations. Nonetheless, Hurh and Kim gave caution that the adhesive adaptation can serve to ease the immigrants’ experience of being lost, daily frustration and isolation in the short-term, yet it keeps branding Koreans as minority and being marginalized in the long-term.\textsuperscript{132}

\textsuperscript{131} Chung, 2008: 78-80
Chapter Six: Conclusion

Features of the Korean community in Vancouver

The Korean community constitutes one of the largest ethnic groups in Vancouver, and the influx of Korean immigrants and international students continues to grow. The rapid growth of this community brings with it several distinctive features. First, most of these immigrants are white-collar professionals with a high level of education, and an urban middle-class background in Korea. The grim reality, however, is that in Canada they undergo severe downward occupational mobility. This is due to a lack of English proficiency and unrecognized educational or professional credentials in Canada. Failure to capture employment commensurate with what they had prior to immigration confines many of them to self-employment, and subsequently compels the establishment of an ethnic economic enclave.

Another characteristic of the Korean community relates to the entrepreneurs and the contribution they make in developing an ethnic economic enclave. The increasing influx of Koreans heightens the need for services dedicated to Koreans who are not fluent in English. This demand facilitates the emergence of ethnic business clusters, which simultaneously has the effect of making the Korean community more visible. To wit, there are over a hundred Korean owned and operated stores along North Road in Coquitlam, which is affectionately known as “Koreatown”. Koreatown emerged as a business cluster primarily to serve the local Korean ethnic Community. Entrepreneurs in this business cluster tend to conduct business and work related activities with members of the same ethnicity,\textsuperscript{133} using their own language rather than English.

\textsuperscript{133} Yu, Sherry S. and Catherine A. Murray. “Ethnic Media under a Multicultural Policy: The Case of the Korean Media in British Columbia.”, \textit{Canadian Ethnic Studies}, 39.3 (June 2008): 103
The existence of a great number of Korean ethnic churches and the extensive church involvement of the congregation are very noticeable characteristics of the Korean community in Vancouver. The adverse and challenging experiences of migration foster a need for existential meaning, social belonging and psychological consolation among the immigrants. The Korean church is equipped to respond to these communal demands by performing a variety of social functions.

**Ethnic Church and its Meaning for Koreans**

This thesis attempts to present a descriptive account of the lived experience of the Korean ethnic community in Vancouver. It also explores the relationship between ethnicity and religious affiliation. Five non-religious functions of the ethnic church are examined, whereby the church fosters Korean identity retention and ethnic solidarity. As a social organization, the church becomes the centre which the everyday lives of Koreans revolve around. Korean immigrants face challenges they would not otherwise experience if they have remained in Korea. The emotional and practical difficulties with language, employment, and acculturative stress in the settling and adapting seem to be the main determinants that draw Koreans into church participation. The church is a place where they achieve ethnic solidarity, cultural preservation, and the legitimization of their interests. This easily explicates the overrepresentation of the church in the Korean immigrant community.

The ethnic church functions to offer the most accessible and resourceful means for services Koreans need for settlement in and adjustment to Canadian society. Koreans receive and offer emotional support from and to other church members, obtain practical assistance on living in Canada and about Canadian culture, as well as assist each other to confront challenges faced
in adapting to their new country.\textsuperscript{134} Simply put, the ethnic church becomes a meaningful place for Koreans in terms of spirituality, practicality, and social relations. In this manner, the church facilitates the acculturation of Koreans.

Despite the fact that it does not fit with Berry’s notions, the acculturation of Korean Canadians can be understood as adhesive adaptation. Acculturation strategies can be utilized differently by individuals or groups depending on the given situation, but this can lead to a diverse array of outcomes. Therefore, in order to grasp Korean acculturation, individual characteristics as well as social and economic status should be taken into account. In addition, without an understanding of the relationship between the church and its participants, it is not possible to fully understand Koreans’ experiences in Canadian society. In this regard, this study contributes to the understanding of the ethnic church and its impacts on Koreans and the Korean community as a whole.

\textit{Limitation and Future Study}

For future studies, it should be noted that technological advancements have an impact on the interactions that immigrants have with their home country. This in turn will influence their perception of identity as immigrants. That is, they may not be as concerned about the isolation and marginalization which results from severing ties with close friends and family. The advancement of online communication and the Internet makes it possible for Koreans to live in Korean time amid a familiar Korean environment: they talk with their family and friends in Korea at any time, read Korean newspapers, and watch Korean television programs. In this regard, the Korean media outlets in Vancouver greatly contribute to facilitating the connection

between the home country and the host country. Yu and Murray argued that this connectivity brings about changes in identity perception and makes trans-nationality more applicable.\textsuperscript{135}

This thesis renders only a partial account of the Korean community in Vancouver. The lack of in-depth investigations and a deficiency in the existing literature pertaining to the Vancouver Korean community limit the scale and scope of the study. Therefore, this thesis has limitations in examining the full extent of every aspect of the social, religious, and cultural reality in which the lives of Korean immigrants are embedded.

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