

THE VANCOUVER KOREAN COMMUNITY:
REESTABLISHING STATUS WITHIN THE CANADIAN CONTEXT, 1965-1997.

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the social history of the Vancouver Korean community from 1965 to 1997. Within the Canadian context, first generation immigrant Koreans have experienced two key phenomena which have challenged their social status and made for a unique immigrant experience in Canada. First, there has been a negative estimation of Korean cultural merit by the host society. Second, first generation Koreans were highly educated professionals who could not find employment commensurate with their educational and professional backgrounds. Prestige is extremely important for all individuals and groups. In light of the two challenges of cultural devaluation and downward occupational adjustment, the question that this thesis investigates is how Vancouver Koreans have historically reestablished lost prestige within their own community. It is concluded that immigrant generation Koreans have contested for personal status in two ways: by promoting Korean cultural heritage and by pursuing positions of authority within the structure of the Korean community.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----|
| Abstract | ii |
| Table of Contents | iii |
| Acknowledgments | iv |
| INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| Chapter One Literature Review and Methodology | |
| Literature Review | 5 |
| Methodology | |
| Oral History | 12 |
| Focus of Analysis | 15 |
| The Researcher | 17 |
| Chapter Two The Historical Context | |
| Korean Canadian History | 19 |
| Early Vancouver Community History | 24 |
| Chapter Three Status at Work: Consolidating a Korean Ethnic Identity | 29 |
| Chapter Four Downward Occupational Adjustment and the Struggle for Social Status | 39 |
| CONCLUSION | 54 |
| Bibliography | 58 |
| Appendix A Sample of Community | 66 |
| Appendix B Oral History Interview Consent Form | 67 |

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INTRODUCTION

Since the liberalization of Canada's restrictive immigration laws after 1945, the ethnic humanscape of the nation has increased in complexity and variety. Although ethnic settlers other than the English and French have arrived since at least the late nineteenth century, it was only after the removal of colour-conscious immigration policies that Canada could be truly described as a culturally pluralistic society. Over the past few decades, those other ethnic immigrant groups with long histories in Canada, such as the Chinese and Italians, have experienced massive growth. Burgeoning because of increased immigration has resulted in increased visibility and a restructuring of these collectivities into more heterogeneous communities.¹ Amendments to prohibitive regulations have also resulted in the settlement and development of entirely new ethnic groups. For example, Canadian Vietnamese and Filipino immigrants did not exist in any significant numbers prior to the mid-1960s.²

Canadian historical literature, reflecting this growth in cultural diversity, has also expanded beyond analyses of French and English Canadians towards the study of ethnic collectivities, the "third force" in Canadian history.³ In an attempt to fill in the gaps on the map of the Canadian human landscape, scholars have recently begun seriously to

¹ For example, for an analysis of the changing nature of the Italian and Chinese Canadian communities, see Michele Del Balzo, and Bruno Ramirez, "The Italians of Montreal: From Sojourning to Settlement, 1900-1921," In *Little Italies in North America*, eds. Robert Harney and J. Vincenza Scarpaci (Toronto: Multicultural Historical Society of Ontario, 1981) 63-84, and Peter S. Li, *The Chinese in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988).

² See Nguyen Quy Bong, "The Vietnamese in Canada: Some Settlement Problems," In *Visible Minorities and Multiculturalism: Asians in Canada*, eds. K. Victor Ujimoto and Gordon Hirabayashi (Toronto: Butterworth and Co. Ltd., 1980) 247-254, and Anita Beltran Chen, "Filipinos in Canada: a Socio-Demographic Profile," in *Visible Minorities and Multiculturalism: Asians in Canada*, eds. K. Victor Ujimoto and Gordon Hirabayashi (Toronto: Butterworth and Co. Ltd., 1980) 301-312.

³ Roberto Perin, "Clio as an Ethnic: The Third Force in Canadian Historiography," *The Canadian Historical Review*, LXIV (no. 4, 1983): 442.

document the formation and life characteristics of old and new ethnic Canadians. However, this intellectual endeavor is just beginning to explore the varied experiences of ethnic immigrants in Canada. The histories of numerous Canadian ethnic groups still remain unexcavated and out of view; and until these unknown human regions are investigated in detail, the map of the Canadian humanscape will remain incomplete. Among the many ethnic collectivities which remain largely unexplored are the Korean Canadians. What is the history of Koreans in Canada? What particular life patterns characterize this community? And how have these patterns affected the way in which the Korean society has developed? This thesis attempts to answer these complicated questions; at a general level, it endeavors to begin the placement of Korean Canadians on the expansive cultural map of Canada.

At a more specific level, the present work explores how the members of the first generation of Vancouver Korean immigrants have struggled for symbols of social status since 1965. How is a new ethnic society made? How does the need for personal prestige affect the way in which such a community forms? In *Making Vancouver*, R.A.J. McDonald argues that in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth centuries, Euro-Canadian Vancouver society was shaped by those individuals who occupied the highest status positions. The central organizing principle employed in *Making Vancouver* is the notion of *status*. Late Victorian Vancouver society was not neatly divided along class, or ethnic lines. If you wanted the privilege to build the city, you had to possess the right combination of status ingredients, which became defined as highly educated, married,

male pioneers of British ancestry.⁴ In turn of the century Vancouver, a complex “scramble for the symbols of social status ensued” and the society sorted itself out into groups which were differentiated by education, ethnicity, wealth and influence.⁵

While McDonald’s exploration of status relationships reveals the complexity of early social formation in Vancouver, because its scope is limited to the ways in which the British majority vied for high status positions and shaped “their” city, it theoretically ignores the ethnic side of Vancouver society. In this way, *Making Vancouver* leaves unanswered the question of how ethnic groups define and achieve status within their own communities.

For Koreans, the attainment of status and success is an extremely important aim. Many sociologists and cultural anthropologists who study contemporary Korea have written about the importance of hierarchy and status within Korean society. According to Donald Stone Macdonald, Korean attitudes and behavior are conditioned by a “burning desire for wealth, power, and social recognition...[In Korea] success, wealth, and status are flaunted for all to admire.”⁶ In a more sensitive manner, Roger L. Janelli has asserted that in Korea: “status and rank [can] be observed in seemingly innocent details...the value of gifts brought back for friends and office mates after a trip overseas [are] expected to correlate with the ranks of their recipients.”⁷ For Koreans in Canada, status is also an

⁴ Robert A. J. McDonald, *Making Vancouver 1863-1913* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1996) xvii.

⁵ McDonald, *Making*, xvii.

⁶ Donald Stone Macdonald, *The Koreans: Contemporary Politics and Society*, 3rd ed. Ed. Donald N. Clark (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996) 81.

⁷ Roger L. Janelli with Dawnhee Yim, *Making Capitalism: The Social and Cultural Construction of a South Korean Conglomerate*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993) 170. Janelli asserts that in the Korean context, age, gender, kinship ties, occupation, education, and geographic location all determine an individual’s status ranking.

integral aspect of social identity. The present thesis endeavors to broaden the picture of Vancouver's social history by examining the structure of the status hierarchy of the Korean community of Vancouver. By applying and extending McDonald's status-centred approach to the more recent history of Korean immigrant life, it can be discerned that within the framework of the Vancouver Korean society, Koreans have also engaged in an ongoing struggle for the symbols of social status. This struggle has defined both individual experience and the shape of the community. In the face of cultural devaluation and the economic pattern of downward occupational adjustment, the contest for prestige in the Vancouver Korean community has involved Korean ethnicity, formal education, white-collar occupation and the mantle of leadership.

CHAPTER I

LITERATURE REVIEW & METHODOLOGY

I. 1 LITERATURE REVIEW

The biggest problem facing the researcher interested in studying the immigration, settlement, and development of Koreans in Canada is the paucity of secondary sources on the subject.⁸ The scholar interested in the Korean Canadian experience stands on uncultivated academic ground; a virtual *terra incognita* of Canadian immigrant history. The observation of historians Fritz Lehmann and Robert J. Lee a decade ago that "there is very little published literature on the Korean experience in Canada thus far" remains true.⁹ As scholar B. Jin-Sun Yoon articulated in 1995, "only scattered fragments of the Korean experience in Canada exists in...literary sources."¹⁰ Other than Lehmann and Lee's 1985 general descriptive account of Korean immigrants in British Columbia, David Bai's snippet in *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, brief essays by Chai-Shin Yu ¹¹, Seung Gyu Moon and Uichol Kim, and a few unpublished dissertations, there is scant literature dealing specifically with Korean Canadians. It should be noted that there are some primary sources which address the Korean Canadian diaspora. Korean community newspapers, for example, often discuss aspects of Korean Canadian life. However, these

⁸ A version of this literature review has been published as an article in *East Asian Cultural and Historical Perspectives*, eds. Steven Totosy de Zepetnek and Jennifer W. Jay (Edmonton: Research Institute for Comparative Literature and Cross-Cultural Studies, 1997)173-182.

⁹ Robert J. Lee and Fritz Lehmann, "Korean Immigrants in British Columbia," In *Asian Canadians: Contemporary Issues*, eds. Josephine Naidoo and K. Victor Ujimoto (Manitoba: University of Manitoba, 1986) 49.

¹⁰ B. Jin-Sun Yoon, "Second Generation Korean Canadian Women: The Historical Context of Ethnic Identity," Diss., University of British Columbia, 1995, 37.

¹¹ The Korean names in this thesis appear in English order; given name first. Most given names consist of two parts written with no hyphen between them. Given names which appear hyphenated reflect the individual's own preferred usage.

sources are inaccessible to academics who are curious about the Korean Canadian immigrant experience but cannot read the Korean language. Because of the dearth of secondary sources and the inadequate detail of existing works, those interested in this underdeveloped field must also turn to other related subjects, such as Koreans in the United States and the literature concerning other immigrant groups in Canada. By surveying these additional areas, an understanding of the potential issues and possible avenues of research concerning Koreans in Canada can be discerned.

Of the scant Canadian literature concerning Korean Canadians, David Bai's entry in *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, and Lehmann and Lee's article are the only works which survey the history of Korean immigration to Canada at a national level. Both of these exploratory expositions explain the general history of Koreans in Canada, describe major community associations and provide a brief glimpse into the social and cultural life of Korean Canadians. Although Lehmann and Lee's essay also provides a more detailed account of the Vancouver Korean community, with respect to Bai's, both pieces are limited in value because they do not interpret their observations in any depth. For example, while Lee and Lehmann denote that one of the main functions of the Korean church was and is to "fulfill [the] many social needs of the Korean immigrants", they fail to point out that the church, in addition to being a spiritual sanctuary and social meeting place, was also the scene of much conflict and many schisms.¹² Indeed, the increased number of Korean churches may not only reflect a growing Korean population, but may also indicate strife and competition within the community. Furthermore, these authors

¹² Lee and Lehmann, "Korean Immigrants," 65.

See David Bai, "Koreans," *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. 2nd ed., 1988, 1147.

make nothing of the establishment of various community organizations, such as the Vancouver Korean Language school, and alumni and professional associations. Are these patterns of organization only reflections of a "highly literate and educated Korean immigrant community," or does their ongoing existence reveal a community which is actively confronting the problems of adaptation?¹³ These inaugural works fail to make any connections between the Korean experience and the larger issues of immigrant life in Canada.

In contrast to the exploratory and descriptive works of the aforementioned authors, other Canadian literature concerning Koreans in Canada tends to emphasize immigrant issues, such as the problems of adjustment to life in Canadian society. Bok-Nom Yoon's 1983 Masters thesis, "The Adjustment Problems and Educational Needs of Korean Immigrant Women in the Winnipeg Garment Industry," is a more detailed case study which discusses the difficulties that many first generation working-class Koreans experience in the Canadian labor market. Some of the main issues facing Korean sweatshop laborers, common to other immigrant laborers, include: low pay, physically demanding labor, ethnic conflicts among and between workers and contractors, and social isolation in the work place.¹⁴

Uichol Kim's 1989 article on Korean Torontonians in *The Korea Observer* examines the "hidden costs" of immigration. Kim refutes the so called "model minority" thesis which views all Asians as a privileged and well adjusted "over minority" as

¹³ Lee and Lehmann, "Korean Immigrants," 65.

¹⁴ Bok-Nom Yoon, "The Adjustment Problems and Educational Needs of Immigrant Women in the Winnipeg Garment Industry," Diss., University of Manitoba, 1983, 1.

opposed to a disadvantaged "underminority." For example, Seung Gyu Moon has commented that: "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."¹⁵ Kim asserts that on the contrary, there is internal turmoil below the surface of the many communities.¹⁶ Koreans, like other immigrants, dealing with language difficulties, isolation, and discrimination suffer from internal psychological symptoms (feelings of anxiety, marginality, hopelessness), somatic conditions (elevated blood pressure, fatigue); and external symptoms which manifest themselves at an individual level (substance abuse, suicide) and social level (domestic violence, homicide).¹⁷ A low reliance on public health services and rare reporting of stress may speak of a community which hides or internalizes its health problems. As Kim points out: "Koreans do not want to admit they are sick, or to show any signs of weakness."¹⁸ Instead, they internalize their psychological problems into somatic illnesses. For many Koreans then, immigration and settlement has not been without its economic, social and physical costs.

It should be noted that this internalization process described by Kim is closely related to the phenomenon of downward occupational adjustment which many Koreans

¹⁵ Seung Gyu Moon, "Adjustment Patterns Among Koreans in Canada," In *Society in Transition*, eds. Yunshik Chang, et al. (Seoul: Seoul National University Press, 1982) 153.

¹⁶ Uichol Kim, "Acculturation of Korean Immigrants: What are the hidden Costs?" *Korea Observer*, XX (no. 4, wint 1989):450.

¹⁷ Kim, "Acculturation," 443.

For a discussion of the model minority myth, see Arthur Hu, "Asian Americans: Model Minority or Double Minority?" *Amerasia Journal*, XVII (no. 1, 1992), 69-83.

¹⁸ Kim, "Acculturation," 446.

experience after emigrating to North America.¹⁹ In Canada, Chai-Shin Yu observed in 1988 that once in Canada, "most Korean immigrants are not able to continue their professions" because of their poor English language skills, and inexperience in the Canadian job market.²⁰ Despite a high level of education, occupational skills, and professional training, many Korean immigrants thus change professions and engage in low income employment (sweatshop laborers, custodial work) or self-owned businesses as an adaptional strategy which provides an economic base within the new society.²¹ The ability of these immigrants to make sufficient capital within the wage labor system is contingent on long working hours. According to D.C. Ban, most Korean small business operators in Vancouver work 12 to 16 hour days. "The crazy hours...are how I stay in business."²² In the case of small retail establishments, economic survival is also dependent on the use of family labor. Edna Bonachich in her essay, "The Social Costs of Immigrant Entrepreneurship", has identified four main costs of Korean immigrant self employment: a joyless life of hard work marked by extensive hours; family tension manifesting itself in spousal physical and emotional abuse, and child neglect; social antagonisms with the outside community (hostility from racist clients, competitors and workers); and the double work load phenomenon of Korean women who must perform

¹⁹ See Pyong Gap Min's two articles: "Korean immigrant Entrepreneurship: A Comprehensive Explanation," In *Koreans in North America: New Perspectives*, eds. Tae-Hwan Kwak and Seong Hyong Lee (Seoul: Kyungnam University Press, 1988) 153-176. And "From White-collar Occupations to Small Business: Korean Immigrants' Occupational Adjustment," *Sociological Quarterly*, XXX (Summ, 1984) 333-352. Also Eugene C. Kim, "Korean Americans in the United States: Problems and Alternatives (1989)," *The Korea Observer*, XX (no. 4, wint 1989): 415-431 for insight into the realities of downward occupational adjustment in the United States.

²⁰ Chai-Shin Yu, "Koreans in Canada (in Toronto) and Korean Studies in Canada," In *Korea-Canada in Emerging Asia-Pacific Community (Volume 2)*, eds. Dalchoong Kim and Myungsoon Shin (Seoul: Institute of East and West Studies Yonsei University, 1988) 138.

²¹ Yoon, "Second," 163.

²² Susan Richie, "Shrimps, But They're Managing," *Vancouver Province* 8 January 1990: 12.

traditional domestic tasks in addition to shifts in the family business.²³ Given the stark similarities between the phenomena described by Uichol Kim and Bonachich, it seems obvious that the "hidden costs" of immigration must be understood in view of the experience of downward occupational adjustment. This economic pattern may also be directly related to feelings of marginality and low self esteem among Korean lay immigrants.

In light of the existing literature on the Korean experience in Canada, what seems to be needed at this point in the historiography of Korean Canada is a study which investigates the ways in which the Korean Canadian community has dealt with the various facets of adaptation. One method of engagement could be to describe in detail the formation of those formal community structures which have helped Korean immigrants adjust to the Canadian context. Such an enterprise would not only enumerate political, fraternal, or religious affiliations; it would also determine the extent to which immigrant organizations have worked to address some of the problems of occupational adjustment, social isolation, psychological anxiety and feelings of low personal prestige. In short, what is needed is a study which would explore how Korean community organizations, have met the primary and secondary group needs of Korean Canadians.

The academic literature on Koreans outside of Canada has paid particular attention to the creation and role of the Christian church in the lives of overseas

²³ Edna Bonachich, "The Social Costs of Immigrant Entrepreneurship," *Amerasia Journal*, XIV (no. 1, 1988): 125. Bonachich's observations are based on a study of Korean small business in Los Angeles. However, she asserts that the Korean experience is applicable to all immigrant entrepreneurs: "I believe that many of our observations about the Koreans can be generalized, with minor modifications, to much immigrant small business in general." 119.

Koreans.²⁴ In two historical and sociological studies which appeared in *The Korea Diaspora*, Hyung-Chan Kim surveyed four stages of transmission, development, and popularization of Christianity in the history of Korean America.²⁵ Based on reports concerning the projects sponsored by various churches, Kim argued that Korean churches acted to maintain group cohesion.²⁶ In *Korean Immigrants in America*, Won Moo Hurh and Kwang Chung Kim elaborate on this assertion. According to these authors, when a group migrates, its language, customs, and religious beliefs tend to remain intact. What are lost are the intimate communal (*gemeinschaft*) and extensive associational (*gesellschaft*) bonds and support networks with people back home.²⁷ The church restores these vital connections by providing a space in which fellowship at both levels is achieved at regular intervals.²⁸ In the face of immigrant isolation, alienation, and discrimination, Korean immigrant churches provide not only spiritual comfort, but social and psychological aid as well. This need to replace intimate and social affinities is a primary immigrant need.

Eui-Young Yu's article "Korean American Community in 1989" also discusses the important role of the Korean Christian church. In Yu's view, because the church embodies both the informal and formal aspects of society, it also serves the secondary

²⁴ Han Gil Soo's recent study, "An Overview of the Life of Koreans in Sydney and their Religious Activities," *Korea Journal*, XXX (no. 2, summ 1994): 67-77, while enumerating other associations, from the Korean Vietnam Veteran's Association to the Korean Chamber of Commerce of Canterbury, mainly documents the role of various Korean Australian Christian congregations.

²⁵ Hyung-Chan Kim, "The History and Role of the Church in the Korean American Community," In *The Korea Diaspora*, ed. Hyung-Chan Kim (California: Clio Press, 1977) 47-64.

²⁶ Kim, "History and Role," 67.

²⁷ Richard H. Thompson in his *Toronto's Chinatown* (New York: A.M.S. Press, 1989) also uses the terms *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* in his discussion of the development of North American chinatowns, 3.

²⁸ Won Moo Hurh, and Kwang Chung Kim, *Korean Immigrants in America* (Toronto: Associated Press, 1984) 133.

group needs of recent immigrants; that is, their need to achieve prestige, power and social status within their new surroundings. As the author elucidates:

The church is a place where one can regain his/her lost status. The position of an elder in the Korean church carries a special meaning- a symbol of authority and status...frequent schisms in Korean churches are related to those individuals trying desperately to restore their self esteem by obtaining a position of authority.²⁹

The observation of a connection between the institution and social status, perceptions of prestige, power, and factionalization could be further explored through the analysis of community structures other than the church.

In light of the preceding discussion, this thesis focuses on how Vancouver Koreans have struggled to meet their secondary immigrant needs within the framework of the formal community organization of the *Korean Society of British Columbia for Fraternity and Culture*. The present work argues that affronted by the phenomena of cultural discrimination and downward occupational adjustment, the Korean Society has provided an important cultural and political space in which community members can contest for lost personal prestige.

I. 2 METHODOLOGY

I. 2. i Oral History

Because of the lack of secondary literature dealing in specific detail with Koreans in Canada, this thesis relies heavily on primary source materials. In order to describe the history of the Vancouver Korean society, community records and personal oral testimony

²⁹ Eui-Young Yu, "Korean American Community in 1989: Issues and Prospects," *Korea Observer* XX (no. 3, Aut 1989): 291. See also Hyung Park and Eui Hong Shin, "An Analysis of Churches," In *Koreans in North America: New Perspectives*, eds. Tae-Hwan Kwak and Seong Hyong Lee (Seoul: Kyungnam University Press, 1988) 231-252.

of community members have been used. From September, 1996 to April, 1997, twenty personal interviews were conducted with Vancouver Koreans. These interviews were used as both a source of primary information and as an opportunity to allow Vancouver Koreans to theorize about their personal and collective experience. This thesis is written from a community perspective.

Oral history is a valuable method of understanding the inner view of cultural collectivites. Oral history does more than provide the factual background of a particular group, it also imbues events and activities with meaning by uncovering the history of one group's *mentalities*.³⁰ As Canadian historian Robert Harney has asserted, oral testimony allows historians to "pass through ethnic boundaries to ethnic identities."³¹ To a large extent, the structure of this study has depended on the community. It was intended to be sensitive to the needs of the community in terms of interview scheduling and the issues of discussion. Themes such as downward occupational adjustment and cultural reinforcement were topics that the members themselves felt were worth analysis. They have therefore been explored in this research. In short, since the Korean community is the focus of this thesis, the people's perspective of their own experience has not been ignored.

Oral history can "breath life into times past;" it is a critical and legitimate source of many historians.³² However, the employment of oral history often needs to be justified.

³⁰ According to Patrick H. Hutton, the history of *mentalities* "considers the attitudes of ordinary people toward everyday life...*mentalities* is a code name for what used to be called culture." Patrick H. Hutton, "The History of Mentalities: the New Map of Cultural History," *History and Theory*, XX (1981): 237-259.

³¹ Robert F. Harney, "Ethnicity and Neighborhoods," In *Gathering Place: Peoples and Neighborhoods of Toronto*, ed. Robert F. Harney (Toronto: Multicultural Historical Society of Ontario, 1985) 9.

³² Mary Paik Min, *Quiet Odyssey: A Pioneer Korean Woman in America* (Su Cheung Chan, ed. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990) 138.

Human memory is fallible. Certain events are not mentioned because participants cannot remember them. Oral testimonies are also “colored by what motivates the speakers to tell their stories to the world and by their perception of who their audience might be.”³³ Because participants were made aware that their testimony would be subject to public scrutiny both inside and outside of the local community, it was anticipated that some interviewees would reveal only a part of their personal histories and a fraction of the general history of the community. In an effort to present a positive self and group image, some participants chose to present a more sanitized narrative largely devoid of conflict.³⁴ Other individuals were more candid about antagonisms. Every individual edits his or her narrative in a different way. Awareness of public exposure actually encouraged many participants to enter certain personal and community issues into public discourse.

Corroborating oral testimonies has been done in two main ways. First, a large enough sample size was consulted in order to decide which statements to accept and which to reject. Recurring themes that the majority of narrators expressed and shared in common were focused upon. Second, interviewees were given the option to withhold their names from the study. This measure provided participants with the opportunity to openly discuss more controversial community issues which may have otherwise been lost to the historical record.

All of the interviews were conducted in English, interspersed with some Korean words and phrases.³⁵ English was chosen as the language of conversation chiefly because

³³ Min, *Quiet*, 138.

³⁴ Jean Miriam Gerber, “Immigration and Integration in Post-War Canada: a Case Study of Holocaust Survivors in Vancouver 1947-1970,” Diss., University of British Columbia, xiii.

³⁵ Romanization of Korean words is done under the McCune-Reischauer scholarly system in this thesis.

of my inability to fluently converse in Korean. However, it was also anticipated that some of the oral recordings of interview sessions (with the permission of the participants) would be deposited into a public archive. In this event, it was felt that an English language data base would be the most accessible to all segments of Canadian society.³⁶ Because English was the second language for the majority of the participants, the narratives had to be edited in order to achieve coherency and clarity. Testimonies were rearranged in chronological order, certain grammatical and tense changes were made, and redundancies were deleted.³⁷

I. 2. ii Focus of Analysis

Using formal structures as a tool of historical analysis has traditionally been employed by historians of ethnic collectivities. As Canadian historian Roberto Perin has asserted, a full rendering of immigrant life depends on the examination of community structures. Historians and social scientists must look at conventional institutions, such as churches, language schools, and elite associations, if they are fully to comprehend the immigrant experience.³⁸ Bruno Ramirez and Michele Del Balzo, in their examination of Italians in Montreal, and Edgar Wickberg, in his analysis of Chinese Canadian enclaves, have all used ethnic institutions as entry points into the atmosphere of these

³⁶ Although the Multicultural History Society of Ontario has collected over fifty taped interviews with Toronto area Korean immigrants, of these, only four are conducted in English. For the scholar interested in the Korean Canadian immigrant experience, but who cannot understand the Korean language, this creates a problem. See Nick G. Forte, *A Guide to the Collections of the Multicultural History Society of Ontario*, ed. Gabriele Scardellato (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1992) 294-304.

³⁷ Margaret Blackman, *During My Time: Florence Edenshaw Davidson a Haida Woman*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982) 19.

³⁸ Perin, "Clio," 457.

communities.³⁹ In general, these authors have illustrated that ethnic associations “provide a yardstick to gauge community evolution.”⁴⁰

At another level, studying the history of the Vancouver Korean community through the Korean Society is theoretically important because using organizations as units of analysis also allows historians to avoid studying the minority group experience from the perspective of the majority group. This thesis does not focus on the extent to which the Korean community has or has not assimilated into the wider society.⁴¹ This work does not extensively analyze Canadian views of Koreans; it does not elucidate the “origins and manifestations” of Canadian racism that has confronted Koreans.⁴² Furthermore, this thesis is not primarily concerned with the process by which Koreans have been culturally managed, or “racialized” by the host society.⁴³ As it has already been stated, this project attempts to examine the history of the Korean community from the insider’s view. Similar to oral testimonies, using the Korean Society helps to keep the project community-based. As Julia Kwong has observed: “[By] capturing the dynamics

³⁹ See Ramirez and Del Balzo, “The Italians of Montreal,” And Edgar Wickberg, “Chinese Association of Canada, 1923-1947,” In *Visible Minorities and Multiculturalism: Asians in Canada*, eds. K. Victor Ujimoto and Gordon Hirabayashi (Toronto: Butterworth and Co., Ltd., 1980) 23-32.

⁴⁰ Julia Kwong, “Ethnic Organizations and Community Transformation: The Chinese in Winnipeg,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 7 (no.3, July 1984): 376.

⁴¹ Many traditional studies of ethnic groups have examined the ethnic experience in light of the social and cultural distance that these communities have kept or been forced to keep from the majority group. See, for example, Milton Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).

⁴² Wing Chung Ng, “Ethnicity and Community: Southern Chinese Immigration and Descendants in Vancouver, 1945-1980,” Diss., University of British Columbia, 1993. 7.

For an approach that attempts to gauge the Canadian perceptions of other Asian Canadians, see Patricia Roy, *A White Man’s Province* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1989) and Peter Ward, *White Canada Forever* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1978).

⁴³ See Kay J. Anderson, *Vancouver’s Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875-1980* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1991).

of...minority groups through their ethnic organizations, one is acquiring an understanding of the minorities from a different perspective, that of the minorities themselves.”⁴⁴

The use of the Korean Society of British Columbia for Fraternity and Culture as a entry point into the atmosphere of the Korean Vancouver community is also methodologically viable. A list of past executives and key volunteers of the Society is readily available in the *1996 Telephone Directory of Korean-Canadian in British Columbia*.⁴⁵ Past executive members of the Society were selected because as community leaders, they were generally more articulate and enthusiastic about addressing community history and concerns than common members.⁴⁶ However, general members were also interviewed in order to balance discussions about organizational issues. Because members of the Society do not represent every member of the Korean community, non-members were also invited to comment on community life (see Appendix A).

I. 2. iii The Researcher

It should also be noted that the present thesis was undertaken by a researcher who identifies himself as a second generation Korean Canadian. Studying one's own cultural group presents certain research problems. Not being detached from the object of study, a “folklorist” historian may romanticize his or her community.⁴⁷ On the other hand, only a community member, as part of the culture, would have an insider's sensitivity to

⁴⁴ Kwong, “Ethnic Organizations,” 375.

⁴⁵ *1996 Telephone Directory of Korean-Canadian in British Columbia*, (Vancouver: Korean Society of British Columbia for Fraternity and Culture, 1996).

⁴⁶ According to Julia Kwong, executive members are “usually more outgoing and more articulate than the members during interviews.” For the most part, this statement held true for executive members of the Korean Society. See Kwong, “Ethnic Organizations,” 376.

⁴⁷ For Ruth Finnegan, an individual who approaches his/her own culture as an object of study is located on the inside of the cultural community. Therefore, he/she is often labelled as a local, or folklorist scholar. See Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Traditions and the Verbal Arts* (London: Routledge, 1992) 26.

community issues, experiences, and perceptions.⁴⁸ I feel that I am in a unique position. Because I was raised in the Edmonton Korean community, I have a certain sensitivity to the Korean Canadian experience. However, because I am not a member of the local Vancouver community, I can remain somewhat critical of the local history and detached from more current community politics.

This thesis is only a partial accounting of the history and experience of the Vancouver Korean community. A study of this size cannot explore every aspect of Korean Canadian life. The themes of this work are limited to the views and recollections of the participants. The study is also limited by my inability to function in the Korean language. My inadequate command of the Korean language affects the level of depth of the discussions. It also leaves unexplored other channels of community communication, such as local Korean language newspapers. Furthermore, because women have traditionally played a subsidiary role in the Korean Society (which illustrates that Korean women have been accorded low status within the community), “female perspectives are largely underexplored” in this work.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, I feel that this project, through the current methodology, does address important issues about the Korean Canadian first generation diaspora. It is valuable because it bespeaks of the challenges, struggles, and achievements that the first generation of Korean settlers in Vancouver have experienced. At a wider level, this history informs the larger social history of Canadian immigrant groups. It sheds light on the process by which our various communities are made.

⁴⁸ Finnegan, *Oral Traditions*, 54.

⁴⁹ Ng, “Ethnicity and Community,” 21.

CHAPTER 2

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

II. 1 KOREAN CANADIAN HISTORY

The history of Koreans in Canada dates back to the early Twentieth century. During the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth centuries, Canadian missionaries, such as James Scarth Gale, and Duncan MacRae, were active proselytizing in the north and south Hamgyong mission field located in what is now the People's Democratic Republic of North Korea.⁵⁰ The very first Koreans who came to Canada were mission students who were sent to study theology. According to Jung-Gun Kim, the mission-sponsored Koreans who arrived in Canada before the Korean War included: H.Y. Cho (1915), Y.H. Kang (1919), K.S. Kim (1922), C.R. Mun (1928), John Starr Kim (1934), and Dr. T.Y. Whang (1948).⁵¹ Typically, these individuals did not settle permanently in Canada. At the end of their theological training, they either severed their ties with the Canadian missionary institution by moving to the United States, or they returned to Korea to act as "native" church leaders as their sponsors had intended them to do.

Koreans did not begin permanently to immigrate to Canada until the early 1950s, after the end of the Korean War. Many of the first Korean settlers were war brides of Canadian servicemen and war orphans adopted by Canadian families.⁵² In addition to these two groups, there were also a small number of intellectuals, mission and government sponsored students, Korean Americans, and at least two North Korean

⁵⁰ Jung-Jin Kim, "To God's Country: Canadian Missionaries in Korea and the Beginnings of Korean Migration to Canada," Diss., University of Toronto, 1983, iv.

⁵¹ Jung-Jin Kim, "To God's Country," 77. See Kim's thesis for details on the individual histories of these individuals.

⁵² B. Jin-Sun Yoon, "Second," 81.

political refugees, Young Wan Lee and Pong Che Yue, who settled in Canada before the mid-1960s.⁵³ Taken together, the members of this first group numbered only about 90 and because these individuals existed in isolation from each other within Canadian society, they also did not form an identifiable community of Korean propinquity.⁵⁴ The establishment of a true Korean Canadian community did not begin until after the complete removal of color-conscious immigration policies during the 1960s.⁵⁵ Since this time, there has been a steady flow of Koreans into Canada.

Vancouver community members divide the last 30 years of Korean immigration history into three distinct waves. The first wave consisted of intellectuals and highly skilled white collar professionals who arrived in Canada between the years 1965 and 1975. Typically, this wave consisted of doctors, nurses, academics (including graduate students), engineers, accountants, managers, and pharmacists.⁵⁶ The members of this group are distinguished as the "pioneer" generation of Korean Canadians and numbered approximately 10 386 by 1975.⁵⁷ Between 1975 and 1985, 15 249 Koreans entered into Canada.⁵⁸ The members of this second wave were largely admitted either as family relatives of the first group, or as independent skilled white and blue collar workers. As one community member asserted: "[In] about 1975, the immigration system allowed

⁵³ "Two Korean Stowaways to Have Merry Christmas as Celebration on Decision to Stay in Canada," *Vancouver Sun* 22 December 1950:1.

⁵⁴ Yoon, "Second," 82.

⁵⁵ See Steven Lee, "The Canadian-Asian Experience: An Introductory Synthesis," *The Journal of American-East Asian Relations*, VI (no. 3, fall 1995): 219. "Between 1962 and 1967...the Canadian government gradually adopted universal immigration regulations and eliminated race, religion, sex, nationality and social origins as factors in the selection process."

⁵⁶ Personal Interview, tape 1, 27 January 1997.

⁵⁷ Lee and Lehmann, "Korean Immigrants," 51.

⁵⁸ Lee and Lehmann, "Korean Immigrants," 51.

brothers and sisters to apply. [These were] invitees...now that's no more...and sometimes I think independent families immigrated...engineers; high tech [immigrants]."⁵⁹

The final wave of Korean immigration started roughly in 1985, and still continues today. It is characterized by the arrival of investment Koreans. According to retired Reverend Byong Sub Van, "Nowadays, *t'ujain* (investors) bring lots of money...they are very rich. When we immigrated in 1970, at that time, there weren't such people."⁶⁰ The most recent Korean immigrants are generally large business operators and investors who sometimes spend equal amounts of time between Korea and Canada and are thus also referred to as "astronaut immigrants" by members of the first two waves.⁶¹ 1993 Korean Society of British Columbia for Fraternity and Culture president, Sang-Bin (Steve) Seo, described the difference between the people of the first two waves and the last in the following way:

Our Korean Society, Korean community we divide into two sections, maybe three sections. Number one is the pioneer group. Number two is the family or independent immigrants. These two groups when they came to Canada, they did not have money. Because the Korean government was poor, they controlled foreign currency. So when we came to Canada, 300 dollars was the maximum [we could take]. In about 1985 or 86, new immigration started. Rich people came. They brought more than half a million. These days, they bring one million, or two million. That's why we divide into old immigrants and new immigrants. the old immigrants are poor, the new immigrants are rich...I live in this house, I have a high mortgage. Before I retire, maybe I will pay off my mortgage. But new immigrants, they buy houses in a lump sum. 300, 400, 500 thousand dollars cash. They buy a car for 40, 50 thousand dollars cash. We can't do that. That's the difference.⁶²

⁵⁹ Sang-Bin (Steve) Seo, Personal Interview, 24 February 1997.

⁶⁰ Reverend Byong Sub Van, Personal Interview, 28 March 1997.

T'uja is the Korean verb which means to invest. *In* refers to people. Together, *t'ujain* can be translated as people who invest, or investors.

⁶¹ Personal Interview, 22 January 1997.

⁶² Sang-Bin (Steve) Seo, Personal Interview, 24 February 1997. Seo immigrated to Canada on January 5, 1975 after being invited by his sister who had already immigrated to Winnipeg. He was born on April 12, 1949 and studied physics at Sŏn'gyun'gwan (Confucian) University. He arrived in Canada with 150 dollars

Because of the different lifestyles between the first two waves and the third, there is quite a social gap between this last phase and the other two. For example, business immigrants do not generally participate in the community organizations which have been established by earlier settlers. Reverend Van observed that in Vancouver:

Some churches, like the [Korean] United Church, those kind of old churches, the investment immigrants are not interested in these. But recently, lots of new churches have started. Quite a number of new churches have been established for new immigrants...the *Hanin Hoe* [Korean Society for Fraternity and Culture] is still [run] by the old immigrants, they are the so-called presidents.⁶³

Between 1986 and 1991, 19 410 Korean entrepreneurs arrived in Canada.⁶⁴

In recent years, significant Korean populations have developed in the Canadian urban centers of Toronto, Vancouver, Edmonton, Calgary, and Montreal. In 1986, Statistics Canada estimated that there were 29 705 Koreans living in Canada of which 15 290 resided in Toronto, 4895 in Vancouver, and 1145 in the metropolis of Montreal.⁶⁵ In 1991, the number of Korean Canadians increased to approximately 44 095. In 1991, 21 670 of Korean Canadians lived in metro Toronto, 8330 in Vancouver, 2510 in Montreal, 2195 in Edmonton, and 1325 in Calgary.⁶⁶

and after one week in Winnipeg , he decided to move to Vancouver encouraged by rumors that it was the best place to live in Canada.

Mr. Seung Kyu Lee described the community as divided into two main groups. The native, or older Korean immigrants who came with little money, and the investment Koreans who have come since the late 1980s. Mr. Lee asserted that many investors run large hotels in the Vancouver area. Seung Kyu Lee, Personal Interview, 26 March 1997.

One participant, who arrived in Vancouver in 1968 also said that the South Korean government only allowed him to emigrate with 300 dollars. Personal Interview, tape 1, 27 January 1997.

⁶³ Reverend Byong Sub Van, Personal Interview, 28 March 1997.

⁶⁴ Canada, Statistics Canada, *Dimensions* (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1989) 2-121. Canada, Statistics Canada, *Ethnic Origin* (Ottawa: Industry, Science and Technology Canada, 1993) 20.

⁶⁵ Canada, Statistics Canada, *Dimensions* (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1989) 2-121.

⁶⁶ Canada, Statistics Canada, *Ethnic Origin* (Ottawa: Industry, Science and Technology Canada, 1993) 20, 36, 53.

It should be noted, however, that official government statistics do not give a totally accurate account of the numbers of Koreans in Canada. Local Korean community sources report much higher populations. For instance, J.W. Berry and U. Kim reported in 1986 that there were about 40 000 Koreans in Canada, and over 30 000 Koreans in Toronto alone.⁶⁷ Informed by the Korean Society of British Columbia, in 1990, Susan Richie asserted that the Vancouver Korean population was about 10 000.⁶⁸ As Lehmann and Lee speculated in 1985, the possible reasons behind this discrepancy is probably due to the fact that official immigration statistics do not account for the existence of refugees, students, visitors, and third country immigrants who also "subsequently acquire residence status."⁶⁹ Suk Do Jee, the current president of the Federation of Korean Canadian Associations and resident of Canada since 1976, estimates that there may be up to 150 000 Koreans nation wide and around 20 000 permanent residents in the greater Vancouver area.⁷⁰ However, Korean community sources are also not exact. As one Vancouver community member admitted:

We don't know how many Koreans there are in greater Vancouver. Nobody knows. We [only] estimate because lots of Koreans don't report or register. They don't appear at the Korean Society, so we don't know how many Koreans there are in Canada, even in B.C. or even in greater Vancouver.⁷¹

Irrespective of exact numbers, Korean Canadian communities have all developed various organizations which academics can study in order to gauge the history and characteristics

⁶⁷ J.W. Berry and U. Kim, "Predictors of Acculturative Stress: Korean Immigrants in Toronto, Canada," In *Ethnic Minorities and Immigrants in a Cross-Cultural Perspective*, ed. L. H. Ekstrand (Berwyn: Swets North America, 1986) 162.

⁶⁸ Susan Richie, "Korean Haven," *The Province* 7 January 1990: 20.

⁶⁹ Lee and Lehmann, "Korean Immigrants," 51.

⁷⁰ Suk Do Jee, Personal Interview, 8 December 1996.

⁷¹ Sang-Bin (Steve) Seo, Personal Interview, 24 February 1997.

of Korean Canada. This thesis focuses on how the Korean Society of British Columbia for Fraternity and Culture has facilitated the adaptation process for Koreans who came to Vancouver during the first two waves of Korean Canadian immigration history.

II. 2 EARLY VANCOUVER COMMUNITY HISTORY

Retired medical doctor Sun Shik Shim, and his family were the first Koreans to settle in the Vancouver area. As he has recollected in his personal memoir, *Journey From East to West*: "When my family immigrated to Vancouver, Canada from Washington, DC on July 21, 1961, there was no Korean in Vancouver as far as we knew. It was a [sic] beginning of Korean immigration."⁷² Dr. Sun Shik Shim was born in 1929 in a small village in Yonback county, Hwanghai province, located in the west coastal area of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.⁷³ After graduating from the Seoul Severance Union Medical College on May 21, 1955, Shim immigrated to the United States in order to pursue post graduate medical training.⁷⁴ On July 21, 1961, after practicing orthopedic surgery in Washington D.C., Shim, his wife Kee Soon, four year old daughter Helen, and baby son Frank, entered British Columbia.⁷⁵ For Shim, immigrating to Canada represented yet another opportunity to increase the breadth of his medical knowledge and experience. In 1962, he enrolled in graduate program in physiology at the University of British Columbia (hereafter U.B.C.).⁷⁶

By 1965, there were only a few other adult Koreans residing in the Vancouver area. Reverend Sang-Chul Lee arrived in Vancouver in September 1961 to attend the

⁷² Sun Shik Shim, *Journey From East to West* (Unpublished manuscript, 1996) 137.

⁷³ Shim, *Journey*, 8.

⁷⁴ Shim, *Journey*, 56.

⁷⁵ Shim, *Journey*, 119.

⁷⁶ Shim, *Journey*, 124.

Union Theological College (now Vancouver School of Theology) masters degree program.⁷⁷ Dr. Jang-Ock Oh and his partner immigrated one or two months after Reverend Lee. Oh worked for the U.B.C. department of pathology and later emigrated to the United States.⁷⁸ In *Journey From East To West*, Shim recalls that professor Bom Shik Chang and his partner came to Vancouver in 1962.⁷⁹ However, the Chang had actually first arrived seven years earlier. In 1955, Chang, sponsored by the government of South Korea, initially came to pursue a Ph.D. in mathematics at U.B.C. After a short return to Korea, the Chang's settled permanently in Vancouver in 1962.⁸⁰

Chan Sook Kim, Hyun Won Kim, a Mr. and Mrs. Baek and Sung Ung (Jack) Cho were some other early Vancouver Korean immigrants. Chan Sook Kim was born in Seoul in 1936. She was educated as a nurse at Yonsei University in Seoul, South Korea. Chan Sook Kim and her partner, Hyun Won Kim came directly from Korea in 1965. Mr. Kim, an alumnus from Seoul National University, intended to study music at U.B.C.⁸¹ When asked about her first day in Vancouver, Chan Sook Kim reflected:

We just arrived in the airport...Mr. Baek and Mrs. Baek, we were on the same plane. We came to Vancouver on the same day. We had just arrived at the Vancouver airport and somebody, a Korean, was waiting for us! He was Sang-Chul Lee! We didn't know what to do. We were so glad he was there...He just volunteered at the airport, checking to see if any Koreans were coming...He took us to his house, gave us lunch and arranged a motel for us.⁸²

Sung Ung (Jack) Cho was born in 1936. Before immigrating to Canada, he had worked in Tokyo and Okinawa for seven years. His work experience in Japan was as a business

⁷⁷ Shim, *Journey*, 58.

⁷⁸ Shim, *Journey*, 58 & 137.

⁷⁹ Shim, *Journey*, 137.

⁸⁰ Lee and Lehmann, "Korean Immigrants," 57.

⁸¹ Chan Sook Kim, Personal Interview, 12 January 1997.

⁸² Chan Sook Kim, Personal Interview, 12 January 1997.

trader and manager. Cho moved to Canada because he felt that Canada held the promise of the most economic opportunity:

I had four choices. One, go back to my country. Another choice, go to the United States. Or, South America. Or, Canada. Then finally, I decided it [would be] Canada. Because I figured that at that time, this place was still underdeveloped; we would have more chance here. The States was already established. [It would be] tough to break into the market. South America was too far away from Korea. So I decided on here. I landed here and I stayed, just in Vancouver.⁸³

According to Jack Cho, when he arrived in 1965, there were only a few Koreans and the majority were either doctors or intellectuals: "Most of them were from the United States at that time. I can say medical doctors and a few professors at U.B.C. [sic]. You know Dr. Bom Shik Chang...around five or six families were here when I arrived."⁸⁴

Together, this group of early pioneers began to actively lay the foundations of a Vancouver Korean community. The first formal community structure to be built was the Korean Canadian United church. On March 6, 1966 the Korean United Church of Vancouver was founded under the auspices of the Union Theological College.⁸⁵ Reverend Lee served as the church's first minister and on that first Sunday of March, "about 20 adults and several children attended."⁸⁶ Encouraged by non-Christian Koreans, on August 17, 1966, the Korean Fraternal Association of Greater Vancouver (changed to the Korean Society of British Columbia for Fraternity and Culture on March 17, 1987) was formed to "provide a general forum for Koreans in Vancouver regardless of their religions."⁸⁷ Initially, the Society held its meetings on Sundays after church service at

⁸³ Sung Ung (Jack) Cho, Personal Interview, 14 February 1997.

⁸⁴ Sung Ung (Jack) Cho, Personal Interview, 14 February 1997.

⁸⁵ Sin Kun (Steven) Choi, Personal Interview, 21 January 1997.

⁸⁶ Shim, *Journey*, 140.

⁸⁷ Shim, *Journey*, 149.

Union College. Reverend Sang-Chul Lee was nominated as the first president, and the Society's early gatherings were largely social in nature:

The Korean [Society] was founded back in 1966 at U.B.C., at the Union College. Reverend Lee was the founder. At that time, he was in Richmond servicing the Japanese United Church. Then he thought that we should establish a Korean community...He was elected first president. He preached on Sunday to the Koreans...All families gathered at that time. After service, we visited each family and we'd sit there all night and chat.⁸⁸

The Society's other inaugural executives included: Dr. Henry J. Lee, vice president; Dr. Dr. Choo Whan Kim, treasurer; and Dr. Sun Shik Shim, secretary.⁸⁹

During the formative years of Vancouver Korean history, community activities, whether religious or social, took place at the Korean United Church. The church was the centre of the infant community, a place where Korean immigrants could find spiritual satisfaction and cultivate new social bonds. Reverend Byong Sub Van, who replaced Sang-Chul Lee in 1970 as the second minister of the United Church, reflected that :

At that time, there was only one congregation. So, all Korean People automatically were church members. Every newcomer came to church on Sunday. If someone was non-Christian, someone was catholic or of a different denomination, it did not matter because the church was the centre of Korean society. So some people attended the church service, someone else only attended the fellowship hour. We had service and a social hour. After that of course, we had sports, especially basketball. So everybody came to church...Men played sports in the gymnasium, ladies talked, and the children played in the playground.⁹⁰

British Columbia, Ministry of Finance and Corporate Relations, *Korean Society of British Columbia for Fraternity and Culture Constitution Amendment* (Victoria: Corporate and Personal Property Registries, 1987)

⁸⁸ Gae Nam John, Personal Interview, 19 January 1997.

⁸⁹ "30 Year History of the Korean Society Executive Member List," In *1996 Telephone Directory of Korean-Canadian In British Columbia*, (Vancouver: Korean Society of British Columbia for Fraternity and Culture, 1996) 27. (Translation).

⁹⁰ Reverend Byong Sub Van, Personal Interview, 28 March 1997. Reverend Van was born in Manchuria, China on April 15, 1924. After the end of the Second World War, he went to Seoul where he graduated from Kōn'guk University. He studied theology at the graduate level in Japan and Chicago. After he completed his studies in Chicago, Van immigrated to Vancouver in 1969 at the request of Reverend Sang-Chul Lee.

For the first few years of community development, the institutions of the Korean United Church and the Korean Society supported group cohesion and met a primary group need of pioneer settlers. In view of immigrant alienation and isolation, these formal structures provided a support network and acted to cultivate social affinities. Over the years, with the growth of the Vancouver Korean community, these two organizations, the church and the Society, were joined by a number of other formal community associations. These institutions continue to help Koreans adjust to the Canadian context.

CHAPTER 3

STATUS AT WORK: CONSOLIDATING A KOREAN ETHNIC IDENTITY

In *Making Vancouver*, McDonald asserts that “ethnic associations are excellent examples of status at work, linking people who share a common cultural identity while excluding others who do not.”⁹¹ Ethnic associations, similar to other groups, are understood by McDonald to give their members a sense of high social status through a process of exclusion or closure. In the case of ethnic minorities, McDonald’s comment infers that the creation and conservation of a privileged position depends largely on the construction and upkeep of a racial, or ethnic identity which is strongly promoted within the community. In this way, ethnic collectivities use the notions of race and ethnicity as “significant sources of status differentiation.”⁹²

Although McDonald’s comments were made *vis-à-vis* turn of the century immigrant populations, the theme of race being utilized as an instrument of status can be extended to the experience of more recent ethnic communities. For example, Canadian historians Gunter Baureiss, Julia Kwong, and Steven Totosy De Zepetnek have all illustrated that post 1945 ethnic organizations maintain a distinct ethnic character through the emphasis of the ethnicity of their members. According to Baureiss, current Chinese Canadian businessmen’s organizations appeal to the “Chineseness” of potential members. By doing so, these organizations maintain the closure and resilience of Chinese Canadian

⁹¹ McDonald, *Making*, xvii.

⁹² McDonald, *Making*, 201.

Kay K. Anderson also examines how the Anglo Canadian community of Vancouver historically has used “Race [as] an influential language with which to cement the collective sense of an in-group.” See Anderson, *Vancouver’s Chinatown*, 46.

communities.⁹³ Julia Kwong asserts that among the Chinese of Winnipeg, Chinese ethnicity is the “focal point of group activities and solidarity.”⁹⁴ Winnipeg Chinese associations are organized according to cultural criteria because Winnipeg Chinese “share a strong sense of being Chinese with a distinct culture, history and descent which sets them apart from other Canadians.”⁹⁵ Tototsy De Zepetnek has similarly shown that the Edmonton Hungarian Society during the 1980s was “designed to maintain a specific Hungarian cultural environment.”⁹⁶

Central to both the Chinese and Hungarian experience is the notion of status. By creating a space in which an ethnic group's own unique and cherished collective values, norms, and stigmas can be expressed and maintained as distinct from those of the dominant society, these ethnic associations have created a status group based on the construction and maintenance of a racial or ethnic category. As Kwong has articulated, the prime goal of Chinese ethnic institutions is to “defend Chinese ethnic status and interests in Canada.”⁹⁷ Through a process of resilience, recent ethnic associations bind and connect people who have similar cultural identities into a legitimate position within the wider context of a multicultural society.

For Korean Canadians, the maintenance of a distinct Korean identity and heritage has been and continues to be an extremely vital cultural enterprise. Immigrant, or *Ilse*, generation Korean Canadians consistently express the importance of consolidating a

⁹³ Gunter Bareiss, “Ethnic Organizational Theory: the Chinese Case,” In *Racial Minorities in Multicultural Canada*, eds. B. Singh Bolaria and Peter S. Li (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1983) 115.

⁹⁴ Kwong, “Ethnic Organizations,” 385.

⁹⁵ Kwong, “Ethnic Organizations,” 385.

⁹⁶ Steven Tototsy De Zepetnek, “A History of the Hungarian Cultural Society of Edmonton, 1946-1986,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies* XXV (no. 2, 1993):107.

⁹⁷ Kwong, “Ethnic Organizations,” 383.

sense of ethnic identity and pride, especially in the hearts and minds of their children. Over the course of an interview session with participant Suk Do Jee, the theme of second generation cultural confusion repeatedly surfaced. In Jee's opinion, the Canadian born, and raised Koreans are currently facing a crisis of identity:

Our Korean immigration history is about thirty years old now. That means that one generation has already gone...Our children have already grown up in Canadian society. This is the confused generation. At home things are Korean. Every family member is pushed to become Korean. When you go out doors, this society wants you to be Canadian. [Caught] between two different cultures, our second generation is confused.⁹⁸

For Jee, the solution to this perceived identity crisis lies in the legitimization of Korean cultural traditions:

If you do not know your own roots, you cannot survive...Israeli people, they succeed because they keep their roots very strong...If people do not know where they are from, they can have no identity. No identity; no roots. They have nothing to be proud of. Our parents have only one duty to our second generation: give them roots...that's important.⁹⁹

Jee's comments concerning the need for the cultivation of a strong Korean identity bespeak of a general condition which confronts cultural minorities in Canada; that is, the negative estimation of visible minority cultural merit by the dominant society.

According to philosopher Charles Taylor, Canadian society has prevented certain groups from developing a positive cultural identity. Taylor concedes that Canadian society, through the exclusive promotion of white European civilization in public institutions and visual print media, unjustly provides certain collective identities, such as ethnic minorities, with negative and demeaning life scripts. Equipped with these

⁹⁸ Suk Do Jee, Personal Interview, 8 December 1996.

⁹⁹ Suk Do Jee, Personal Interview, 8 December 1996.

Chan Sook Kim similarly commented that she "would like to teach the Korean second generation more about Korea...That's our job I think." Chan Sook kim, Personal Interview, 12 January 1997.

degrading life scripts, many marginalized groups are “induced to adopt a deprecatory image of themselves.”¹⁰⁰ In this line of thought, although since the 1960s Canada has become increasingly less European and more mondial in its ethnic composition, this democratization process has yet to achieve equal representation of cultural minorities within public spheres. The Euro-Canadian heritage continues to be primarily celebrated as the paragon of human civilization while other cultural backgrounds are denigrated as inferior or peripheral.

In the face of this hegemony, which cultivates a lack of self-confidence and self-respect in ethnic minority psyches, The Vancouver *Ilse* have come to believe that the success of their community is contingent on the raising of a positive Korean self-esteem concept. For Korean first generation immigrants, the fruition of Korean self-esteem is perceived to be dependent on the enrichment of Korean heritage. Put another way, a driving force behind the resilience of a unique Korean cultural identity is the urgent need for positive social status within the Canadian context.

Historically, the Korean Society has provided the space in which Korean Canadians could affirm their cultural background; and it was in this space that a scramble for a positive status position took place. The first instance of such an occurrence

¹⁰⁰ Charles Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition,” In *Multiculturalism*, ed. Amy Gutmann (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994) 25-26.

Vis-à-vis the Chinese Canadian experience, again refer to Kay J Anderson’s *Vancouver’s Chinatown*. Anderson documents how the Canadian government continues to “insult the Chinese community” and “perpetuate the worst stereotypes.” Although specific degradation of Korean Canadians may not take place, this does not necessarily mean that 1) Koreans are not affected by the misrepresentation of other Asian cultural groups like the Chinese and 2) that they are not affected by the process of omission. See Anderson, *Vancouver’s Chinatown*, 242. It should also not be assumed that Koreans do not exercise ethnocentrism within their own communities. As one community member commented: “[Canadians think that] all the history of the world comes from European countries...but we think that all culture, everything comes from Asian countries.”

transpired in 1967. In the spring of this year, the second administration of the Society organized the first Korean festival. With “the entire 60 families of the Korean community” in attendance, the festival celebrated Korean food, art, and popular culture.¹⁰¹ Community elder Sin Kun (Steven) Choi, financial manager and accountant of the Korean society in 1968, recalled the Korean festival with great fondness:

[When] Dr. Shim was the Korean Society president, we had the Korean night at the U.B.C. theological campus [Union College]. [That] consisted of the display of Korean articles and the singing of Korean music and the showing of Korean traditional dress and a barbecue of *bulgogi* [Korean marinated beef]. So that thing was done in 1967...I think we invited the Korean general consul from Ottawa, Mr. Paik Son Yok. I think he came in. A lot of Canadian people were invited from our neighborhoods. Some of the medical doctors, they invited their friends. Some of the professors invited their close friends. It was a mingle between the Korean and Canadian people...It was quite successful...Koreans showed very well their skills. Of course, most of the immigrants from Korea were college graduates, a lot of women had specialized in music and dancing...We were very proud when we were exposed to Canadian society.¹⁰²

Steven Choi's recollection brings into light an important point. By inviting Canadian guests to the festival, the Korean Society acted in the interests of improving the status of its community members within the eyes of Canadian Society. By informing and educating the host society of the beauties of the Korean cultural heritage, the Society worked to deconstruct any negative conceptions of the Korean people. At one level, the first Korean festival can be understood as a proactive step to build Korean prestige and honor by promoting “consciousness and acceptance of the Korean identity to the people of Vancouver.”¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Lee and Lehmann, “Korean Immigrants,” 59.

¹⁰² Sin Kun (Steven) Choi, Personal Interview, 21 January 1997.

¹⁰³ Lee and Lehmann, “Korean Immigrants,” 59.

The *ilse* also endeavored to uphold community prestige in 1973 and 1977 when the Korean Society coordinated the *Yet Tongsang* (old hill) musical performance and the Korean Classical Concert night at U.B.C. Similar to the first Korean festival, these communal celebrations did more than maintain traditional rituals. At a deeper level of analysis, the concerts were a means of cultivating "more acceptance of the ethnic group by mainstream Canadians."¹⁰⁴ Regard the following recollections of Sung Ung (Jack) Cho and Gil Sang (Gilbert) Kang, vice-president of the Society in 1977:

At that period, these people [Canadians] did not know much about Korea...Korea? They thought at that time that we were all orphans, *koa*...So we showed that we had a background, our own heritage that is many thousands of years old. That's why we started that. We just had to show them!...For me, it was successful, I was proud. People said, 'Oh! We did not know Korea. We just remember the war. Oh! you have a history and a culture- a beautiful culture!' We were very proud.¹⁰⁵

And:

I vividly remember the Korean classical concert because it was my brainchild. I initiated it to show the B.C. and Vancouver people what we had...This was quite an achievement for us. I assembled a lot of talent...[That] I felt best represented our community...We had a Korean fan dance and also a Korean moon dance and piano, and violin, basically all talent. And lady vocal songs and *kayagum* [a Korean zither]. Four or five actually Korean traditional musical performances including piano, which is not typically Korean, but we had really talented people. We wanted to show the world that we had these people; that we were not just boondocks.¹⁰⁶

The promulgation of traditional Korean cultural forms worked to establish the uniqueness of the Korean people in the Canadian setting. By distinguishing the festivity and elegance of Korean culture to a Canadian audience, the Korean Society organization again employed Korean ethnicity as source of social status.

¹⁰⁴ Ng, "Ethnicity and Community," 124.

¹⁰⁵ Sung Ung (Jack) Cho, Personal Interview, 14 February 1997.

¹⁰⁶ Gil Sang (Gilbert)Kang, Personal Interview, 13 February 1997.

Over the course of four days in June, 1985, the Korean Society held a Korean Folk performing arts concert. Sixty one Korean community youth and adult performers participated in the event which celebrated traditional folk songs, music and dance. On the first day, senior and junior members of the Korean language school choir performed the *hwagwanmu* (classical royal court dance), the *pomdongsan*, and the *sogonori* (children's folk dances), and the *puch'aech'um* (fan dance).¹⁰⁷ Other performances of the concert included the *sŭngmu* (monk's folk dance), performed by Mrs. Y.S. Lee, the *t'alch'um* (mask dance), the *changgo ch'um* (drum dance) and the *nong'ak* (farmer's dance).¹⁰⁸

In June 1989, in cooperation with the Toronto Korean Association, the British Columbia Korean Society invited the Seoul Kim Daek Dong dance team to perform in Canada. At the Vancouver performance, the event was attended by both Korean and Anglo Canadian guests. The mayors of Burnaby and Vancouver were among the honored invitees.¹⁰⁹ Once again, the main impetus behind the celebration was to show the greater society the unique grandeur of Korean ethnicity. According to Kyu Whan Lee, then vice-president of the Society, "We were introducing Korean folk dancing. So we were really happy. We did a good job. The fan dance is a famous dance in Korea. So we showed them." When asked if he felt proud during the event, Lee exclaimed, "Oh Yes! After that yes. A lot of people said, 'Oh that's the first time I'd seen Korean dancing, that kind of dancing.'" ¹¹⁰ Kyu Whan Lee's comments clearly illustrate that the ritual performance succeeded in fostering a sense of cultural pride among community members. During this

¹⁰⁷ Vancouver, Korean Society of BC, *Korean Folk Performing Arts Concert* (Vancouver: Korean Society of British Columbia for Fraternity and Culture, 1985) 2.

¹⁰⁸ Korean Society, *Korean*, 3.

¹⁰⁹ Kyu Whan Lee, Personal Interview, 13 March 1997.

¹¹⁰ Kyu Whan Lee, Personal Interview, 13 March 1997.

event, community members acquired personal status through the elevation of their Korean heritage. Cultural performances acted to confirm group prestige because they buttress a positive sense of group consciousness. As historian Wing Chung Ng has observed, during collective rituals:

Participants [are] invited to come to renew their sentiments of pride, loyalty, and unity. The collective identity [is] exalted...by taking part in congregational activities, individual members would feel secure and gratified as they refreshed their sense of belonging to the [community].¹¹¹

Throughout Vancouver Korean community history, the celebration of cultural rituals has been an extremely important endeavor. Over a twenty year period, from 1972 to 1992, Korean Society records indicate that the Society organized twenty one major Korean cultural events.¹¹² These events were designed to cement a positive Korean group identity.

With specific regard to the needs of the second generation, the Korean Society's struggle to establish Korean prestige continued in 1973, with the use of education and the founding of the Korean language school. Then president of the Society, Sung Ung (Jack) Cho, along with Reverend Van, Myong Jun Choi, of the Korean Consul, and Dr. Sun Shik Shim opened the institution on December 26th.¹¹³ The school's first principal was Dr. Shim and Mr. Yoon Won and Ms. Han were the first teachers. Initially, classes were held after church service at the Korean United church, which by 1973 had established a

¹¹¹ Ng, "Ethnicity and Community," 159.

¹¹² "30 Year History of the Korean Society," In *1996 Telephone Directory of Korean-Canadian in British Columbia*, (Vancouver: Korean Society of British Columbia for Fraternity and Culture, 1996) 22-26. (Translation).

¹¹³ "30 Year History of the Korean Society," 22.

congregation at 16th and Burrard.¹¹⁴ Jack Cho described the creation of the first Vancouver Korean language school in the following way :

At that time, I was the president of the Korean Society. We had meetings together quite often with the consulate general and the minister of the United Church. We met together to talk about the society...Sooner or later, this society would need a language school for the next generation...So we agreed together all three of us. The Korean consulate supplied the books and all the material for the school. the United Church provided the space and the Korean Society managed and operated the school. We shared with each other. But, the school was organized under the Korean Society.¹¹⁵

Reverend Byong Sub Van recounted that:

Day by day, year by year, our society increased in number. At that time, most Korean immigrants were young, so they had children. So we needed to teach them Korean language and history...[The school] was [formed] in cooperation with the *Hanin Heo* and also the general consul. The consul provided the materials and the *Hanin Heo* provided the agenda and some finance. But the church provided the space, teachers and financial support.¹¹⁶

According to Dr. Sun Shik Shim, the Korean school was opened because "We thought that the language school would give our next generations opportunity to learn their mother language and to keep up their cultural heritage...the school would promote their self-esteem and identification."¹¹⁷ Implicit in this comment is a desire to teach Korean children about their own Korean language and culture in an effort to imbue the next generation with Korean pride and self love; the foundations of a positive status conception.

Challenged by the devaluation of Korean cultural merit, leaders of the Korean Society of British Columbia have acted to improve the social status of two generations of

¹¹⁴ Shim, *Journey*, 152.

¹¹⁵ Sung Ung (Jack) Cho, Personal Interview, 14 February 1997.

¹¹⁶ Reverend Byong Sub Van, Personal Interview, 28 March 1997.

¹¹⁷ Shim, *Journey*, 152.

Korean Canadians. These cultural architects were determined to achieve the self-worth and prestige of their members through the legitimization of traditional Korean cultural forms. Korean Society activities have consistently revolved around the differentiation and transmission of the Korean cultural heritage to the young and the wider society.¹¹⁸ According to the constitution of the Korean Society, one of the main reasons that the organization was created was “to promote cultural activities that introduce the indigenous culture of Korea to Canada.”¹¹⁹ For first generation Korean Canadians, identity and status arise from their common characteristics of race, language, and culture. Through the celebration of Korean cultural events, and the maintenance of language, the Korean Society has acted to build a positive status concept within the Vancouver Korean community. The socially constructed notions of race and ethnicity functioned to demarginalize Korean Canadians. In other words, they functioned as agents of status.

¹¹⁸ Kwong, “Ethnic Organizations,” 385.

¹¹⁹ British Columbia, Ministry of Finance and Corporate Relations, *Korean Society of British Columbia for Fraternity and Culture Constitution* (Victoria: Corporate and Personal Property Registries, 1981).

CHAPTER 4

DOWNWARD OCCUPATIONAL ADJUSTMENT AND THE STRUGGLE FOR SOCIAL STATUS

Although ethnic organizations, such as the Korean Society of British Columbia for Fraternity and Culture, create a sense of common social status for their members through the celebration of a unique cultural identity, within immigrant communities, the search for self worth and dignity is not limited to the ideas of ethnicity. To apply the ideas of K. Anthony Appiah, not all individuals organize their lives around a conception of ethnicity; identity can be formed from a multiple number of social locations.¹²⁰ Ethnic minorities, similar to other heterogeneous communities, are also divided along non-ethnic lines. Following Korean social distinctions, the Vancouver Korean community can be understood to be separated into status rankings which are differentiated according to education and occupation. One of the ways in which individuals and groups distinguish themselves from others is through occupational status. According to McDonald, "claims to social esteem are founded upon lifestyle, formal education, heredity, or occupation."¹²¹

Donald J. Treiman asserted that:

Occupational roles locate individuals in social space, thereby setting the stage for their interaction with one another...Every adult member of society ordinarily is able to locate occupations on a hierarchy of prestige. These perceptions for part of the *conscience collective*. This permits one to rank oneself and others with respect to the social honor derived from occupational status.¹²²

¹²⁰ K. Anthony Appiah, "Identity, Authenticity, Survival," In *Multiculturalism*, ed. Amy Gutmann (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994) 163.

¹²¹ McDonald, *Making*, xvii.

¹²² Donald J. Treiman, *Occupational Prestige in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Academic Press, 1977) 1. See also *Social Stratification: Class, Race, and Gender*, ed. David B. Grusky (San Francisco: Westview Press, 1994). For more literature concerning status groupings and occupational hierarchies.

In the case of Korean Canadians, the use of occupation as an instrument of status must be viewed in light of the aforementioned phenomenon of downward occupational adjustment.

First and second wave Koreans that came to North America were highly educated professionals. They were typically doctors, nurses, engineers, pharmacists, white collar managers, and accountants who could not find employment in their chosen fields. As a result, many run grocery stores, and other small businesses in order to survive. For example, in the United States, despite a high level of education, occupational skills, and professional training, many Koreans change professions and engage in low income employment or small, self-owned businesses. In a recent publication of Korean American life stories entitled *East to America*, Elaine H. Kim and Eui-Young Yu observe that:

It is difficult for the [Koreans] to find employment commensurate with their education and experience, Korean immigrants are three times more likely than other Americans to be engaged in small business enterprises such as dry cleaning, small grocery stores, fast food shops, clothing stores, and photo processing businesses.¹²³

In 1984, a survey of 159 Koreans in the Atlanta metropolitan area, sociologist Pyong Gap Min found that while 70 percent of respondents were college educated, 67 percent were employed in blue collar occupations, most of which were non-skilled factory, food services, or janitorial positions.¹²⁴

In Canada, a similar situation exists. In 1988, 43 percent of Toronto Koreans operated small businesses. Only 9 percent of Toronto Koreans reported that they were

¹²³ Elaine H. Kim and Eui-Young Yu, eds., *East to America: Korean American Life Stories* (New York: the New Press, 1996) xix.

¹²⁴ Min, "White-Collar Occupations," 346.

professional white collar employees.¹²⁵ Currently In Montreal and Vancouver, 57 percent are their own employers.¹²⁶ According to the *Vancouver Province*, in 1990, there were over 200 Korean run convenience stores in the Vancouver area.¹²⁷

Within Canadian society, two main reasons behind this phenomenon of downward occupational adjustment can be discerned. First, there is the issue of credentials. In Canada, the educational and professional credentials of Korean immigrants are typically not recognized by government and industry. According to B. Singh Bolaria, foreign-born professionals in Canada face a number of obstacles which prevent them from accessing employment opportunities in their areas of training. In the medical profession, for example, immigrants have to overcome rigid licensing and training requirements which help the medical profession maintain its right to exercise "closure"- the process by which professions "regulate market conditions in their favor, in the face of actual or potential competition from the outside."¹²⁸ This process results in: "Marginal positions becoming the only viable employment opportunities for immigrant professionals."¹²⁹ A related concern is the language barrier. Because of English language difficulties, Korean immigrants find it hard to function in the Canadian work force. Without adequate language abilities, the attainment of proper accreditation becomes a problematic endeavor.¹³⁰

¹²⁵ Yu, "Koreans in Canada," 137.

¹²⁶ Yoon, "Second," 84.

¹²⁷ Susan Richie, "Shrimps," 12.

¹²⁸ B. Singh Bolaria, "From Immigrant Settlers to Migrant Transients: Foreign Professionals in Canada," In *Deconstructing a Nation: Immigration, Multiculturalism and Racism in 90s Canada*, ed. Vic Satzewich (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 1992) 220.

¹²⁹ Bolaria, "From," 225.

¹³⁰ Yoon, "Second," 163.

The phenomenon of downward occupational adjustment is a recurrent theme in the history of the Vancouver Korean community. Interviews with local community members confirm the prevalence of this reality. In 1971, Mr. Yong An Ko was a general staff member of the Korean Society of British Columbia for Fraternity and Culture. Born in Kyōnggi province in 1936, Ko settled in Seoul after the Korean War where he served as an officer in the South Korean army. From 1962 to 1964, during his military service, he studied guided missile technology in Huntsville Alabama. Yong An Ko immigrated to Vancouver in 1969. According to Ko, the main obstacle to his professional life in Canada was the denial of his pre-immigration credentials:

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.¹³¹

In the face of his disadvantaged situation, Ko eventually took up janitorial work. After a period of two years, he found work with a friend in a T.V. service shop.

Kyu Whan Lee was born on July 12, 1947 in Kyōngju city, South Korea. From 1970 to 1976, he worked as an architect. He immigrated to Vancouver in July of 1976 because of the political instability at home and the possibility of economic opportunity abroad.¹³² Similar to many Vancouver *ilse*, Lee could not continue his profession in Canada: "It was pretty hard. I had a Korean architecture license and everything. But they did not trust it. It was not easy to get a job that was true...Twenty years ago, you know I

¹³¹ Yong An Ko, Personal Interview, 5 Dec 1996.

¹³² Kyu Whan Lee, Personal Interview, 13 March 1997. According to Lee, "At that time in Korea, politically it was not stable...That's why I decided to come to Canada. Secondly, Korea is a small land, so I wanted to go to a bigger country and get some better opportunity."

tried hard at that time, but you know [there were] problems, lots of problems."¹³³ Today, Kyu Whan Lee operates a lighting fixture store in Vancouver.

The issue of language surfaced in the comments made by other community members. Aforementioned Elder Gil Sang (Gilbert) Kang was educated as a chemical engineer at Yonsei University in Seoul. He immigrated in 1967 with only 150 dollars in his pocket. After spending two days at the Y.M.C.A. in downtown Vancouver, Kang settled into an affordable boarding house and immediately began to seek employment.¹³⁴

When asked about his search for work Kang commented:

When I came here, I was a chemical engineer. I worked for two years as a processing engineer. I couldn't get a job [here] as an engineer because my English was not par. And also, I had never worked here, so they could not trust my ability. So they didn't give us jobs as engineers...That's one of my stories. It's a very important story...I hoped to get a job as a chemical engineer. Then I realized what the reality was...Because I was a chemical engineer, I checked the Yellow Pages for any chemical companies and phoned. I just phoned and said, 'I'm a chemical engineer, my name is Gil Sang Kang, I'd like to apply for a job.' They said, 'okay, come on over.' Then at the interview, they realized that I didn't really speak English and then there was my experience [only] in Korea. So they gently declined my offer...After about forty days, I realized that I couldn't get a job with my qualifications.¹³⁵

After a few weeks, Kang found work as a general laborer at a pulp mill in Prince Rupert.

Sin Kun (Steven) Choi was born in 1939 in P'yongyang, the capital of North Korea. During the Korean War, Choi escaped to Seoul where was educated as a pharmacist. In 1965, Choi graduated from the College of Pharmacy at Seoul National University. After gaining acceptance into the U.B.C. graduate program in the Faculty of Medicine, Steven Choi immigrated to the Vancouver area in June of 1967. A year later,

¹³³ Kyu Whan Lee, Personal Interview, 13 March 1997.

¹³⁴ Gil Sang (Gilbert) Kang, Personal Interview, 13 February 1997.

¹³⁵ Gil Sang (Gilbert) Kang, Personal Interview, 13 February 1997.

instead of pursuing graduate work, Choi became Canada's first licensed Korean pharmacist.¹³⁶ Steven Choi was one of the few Korean immigrants who managed to continue in his field of expertise. According to Choi, the majority of pioneer Korean immigrants experienced downward occupational adjustment because of language difficulties:

I came here on Wednesday [1967] and I met some of the people who came here a few weeks and months earlier. Those people were graduates from college and their careers [in Korea] were very wonderful. But they had a lot of problems getting jobs. So, I was very disappointed. They advised me to not get too excited to get a job right away. And the stories were very sad because they didn't get jobs....Most of the professionals, they wanted to go back to their professions. But a very little [sic] percent went back to the professions they had in Korea. Most of the people realized, practically, that they had to do whatever they could find. The hardship was because it was a new country, [we had] language problems...The colloquial language was very hard to learn...Most of the real conversation here is slang...We don't know very much slang. Of course sometimes we swear too, but swearing wise, in Canada it's far greater than in Korea, especially in the work force...I found it very intimidating because you cannot catch all the details of conversation.¹³⁷

The preceding commentary illustrates another important point about the language issue. Even for those who did find employment in their chosen professions, inexperience with vernacular English made it very tough for Koreans permanently to resume their former occupations. Note the following quote made by Suk Do Jee, a mechanical engineering graduate of Seoul's Hanyang University:

My [first] job was an engineer, a technical engineer. But from the first day, I got into trouble because of language. I couldn't understand anything. The master engineer went around in the mines, he called on the radio...[but] I could not hear what [he was] talking about...We studied a long time in Korea. Everybody from junior high school, they study English. They know how to read and write, but they do not know how to speak. I could not hear what they were talking about. Also, I

¹³⁶ Sin Kun (Steven) Choi, Personal Interview, 21 January 1997.

¹³⁷ Sin Kun (Steven) Choi, Personal Interview, 21 January 1997.

could not talk. That's why I worked only for one month at that engineering job, then I quit.¹³⁸

It should be noted that downward occupational status was not only experienced by men. Several well-educated Korean women also experienced the same phenomenon. As Ellena Yang, current president of the Korean-Canadian Education Center, has mentioned: "Korean women, no matter how skilled they were, many professional [women] doctors and even professionals came here and could not use their skills...that's a fact."¹³⁹

Confronted by language and licensing barriers which prevented them from accessing employment opportunities in their areas of expertise, many *Ilse* experienced feelings of low self esteem concomitant with their lower occupational status. To refer once again to Suk Do Jee:

One day I became a machinery mechanic, a mechanic helper. In Korea, an engineer and a mechanic helper are very different things...I was so sad. I had never worked that kind of repair help. Before I came here, I had a high position, as soon as I came here, the bottom. That impacted on my mind, I was very sad. I did not come for this.¹⁴⁰

Gil Sang Kang commented:

We Korean people always have a feeling that you have to be working at the level at which you are educated...So we feel shame to work as laborers. It is a different class in our perception. You know, you're university educated, how can you work as a laborer?...You have a prestige complex in your mind. You can't say to your parents in Korea that I'm working as a laborer..[We] have a different perception...At that time, [we] Koreans had a vision: we were the elite, we wanted to succeed. But in Canada, we realized that there was a language barrier which we never thought about when we left. We had high hopes.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Suk Do Jee, Personal Interview, 8 December 1996. Suk Do Jee was born on August 20, 1945 in Kangwondo. Initially, he immigrated to Grand Cash Alberta.

¹³⁹ Ellena Yang, Personal Interview, 2 November 1996. Ellena Yang was born, Son Kyung Ja in Osaka Japan. When she was 7 years old, she moved to Seoul. Between 1982 and Dec 1995, Yang served as a Korean social worker for Mosaics, a non-profit government organization which assists new immigrants adjust to Canadian society. She and her family immigrated directly to Richmond in 1969.

¹⁴⁰ Suk Do Jee, Personal Interview, 8 December 1996.

¹⁴¹ Gil Sang (Gilbert) Kang, Personal Interview, 13 February 1997.

The Korean immigrants who came to Canada during the first two waves of immigration were tremendously ambitious individuals. They were some of the brightest and most talented people of their fields in Korea. For these men and women, Canada was seen as a place which was more challenging, advanced, and opportune than Korea. Obstructed from realizing their dreams, hopes, and aspirations in Canada, their sense of personal honor and prestige was significantly damaged.

Within the context of downward occupational adjustment, the Vancouver Korean community has utilized white collar occupation as a measure of social status. To illustrate, after a year of labour at the Prince Rupert pulp mill, Gil Sang Kang managed to change his line of work and apply his knowledge as a lab technician. This shift in occupation gave Kang a renewed sense of personal pride:

I applied for a technician job as a chemical tech...My wage was lower, but you put on a neck tie, get a monthly salary, no more shift work...I felt better because I was white collar, you know, necktie. So you can tell your friends...: 'Oh, I'm working in a laboratory'...It's a perfectly right place. So I gained some prestige reducing my income.¹⁴²

Gilbert Kang also stated that during the late 1960s, "doctors' level was the most desirable position that the people wanted like for respect and money...Everybody looked up there."¹⁴³ Chan Sook Kim has asserted that first generation Vancouver Koreans tend to recognize medical doctors and lawyers as the highest status professions.¹⁴⁴

In the face of the economic pattern of downward occupational adjustment, and the concomitant use of occupation as a source of status differentiation, the Korean Society of British Columbia for Fraternity and Culture became a political space where certain *ilse*

¹⁴² Gil Sang (Gilbert) Kang, Personal Interview, 13 February 1997.

¹⁴³ Gil Sang (Gilbert) Kang, Personal Interview, 13 February 1997.

¹⁴⁴ Chan Sook Kim, Personal Interview, 12 January 1997.

were distinguished as the most respectable Korean Canadian citizens.¹⁴⁵ Society leaders have traditionally been characterized as first and second wave immigrants who are not only highly educated, but who are also successfully engaged in mainstream, white collar professions. For example, the Society's first president, Reverend Sang-Chul Lee was a "two point charge minister" for both the Korean United church and the Steveston English and Japanese-speaking congregations. Sun Shik Shim, the president in 1967, was a successful medical doctor. In 1966, he had been recognized by the Medical Research Council of Canada as a research scholar.¹⁴⁶ In the same year, he was appointed by the U.B.C. Faculty of Medicine as an assistant professor.¹⁴⁷ Inaugural executives Henry Lee and C. W. Kim were also successful medical doctors.¹⁴⁸ The 1974 Korean Society president was physician James Hong Kim. The president in 1979 was Gae Nam John, a commerce graduate and successful insurance salesperson.¹⁴⁹ These individuals were held in high regard by the rest of the community because of their educational backgrounds and the occupational success that they had achieved in Canada. As Yong An Ko reminisced:

Every year, we selected a chairman [president] of the Korean Society. We didn't elect or vote. Somebody would just recommend someone among us, somebody who we thought was respectable, highly educated and of good personality to become chairman. It was pretty good, we enjoyed each other.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁵ This thesis focuses on how the Korean Society reflects the status hierarchy of the Vancouver Korean community; however, other community institutions also reveal the nature of the ranking of the community. For instance, only more prestigious schools in Korea have alumni associations in Vancouver and certain churches are held in higher regard than others. Donald Baker, Personal Correspondence.

¹⁴⁶ Shim, *Journey*, 140.

¹⁴⁷ Shim, *Journey*, 127.

¹⁴⁸ Shim, *Journey*, 149.

¹⁴⁹ "30 Year Listing of Executives," 27, 28.

Gae Nam John, Personal Interview, 19 January 1997. Mr John came to Canada in April of 1966. At first, he was unable to find white collar work. He worked as a diamond driller, a labourer, and a hospital orderly. He started work for Sunlife Insurance in 1970. In 1979, John established the first Korean language community newspaper, *Sang Cho* (published bimonthly). He also founded the first Korean Society community center at 6307 Chester Street, Vancouver.

¹⁵⁰ Yong An Ko, Personal Interview, 5 December 1996.

During the early history of the Vancouver Fraternal Society, a respected community member was a white collar professional, or intellectual Korean man who had obtained a high level of education. An ideal president of the Korean Society for Fraternity and Culture was a man who had a "well educated background, some education in Canada, very fluent English, and a good relationship with Canadian society. For example, Dr. Shim was a good leader." As far as the profession of the chairperson, "doctors, and professors [were] better, or accountants, and businessmen."¹⁵¹ This type of individual occupied the highest status position in the immigrant collectivity. This "leading group" was given the privilege to guide the community, the honor to direct its collective affairs and the responsibility of building its key institutions.¹⁵²

Over the past few years of Korean Vancouver history, local Korean community members have experienced ugly political antagonisms inside the structure of the Korean Fraternal Society.¹⁵³ As Sang-Bin Seo asserted: "[Over] the past few years, the Korean Society is too bad because they argue and back bite, like dogs fighting."¹⁵⁴ Suk Do Jee has commented: "Our Korean Society has many problems...In the last three years, we have sued each other, hated each other, always fighting between Koreans...This is a shame to talk to our second generation about."¹⁵⁵ The reasons behind the current infighting can be comprehended through the status concept. Political conflicts within the Korean Society involve those individuals of the first and second waves who are struggling to achieve a

¹⁵¹ Sang-Bin (Steve) Seo, Personal Interview, 24 February 1997.

¹⁵² Personal Interview, Tape 1, 27 January 1997.

¹⁵³ Suk Do Jee, Personal Interview, 8 December 1996.

¹⁵⁴ Sang-Bin (Steve) Seo, Personal Interview, 24 February 1997.

¹⁵⁵ Suk Do Jee, Personal Interview, 8 December 1996.

sense of prestige that has traditionally been held by the intellectual or professional status group. Given the steady increase in the numbers of investment Korean settlers in Vancouver after 1985, and the ongoing reality of downward occupational status, the need for status differentiation among first and second wave non-professional Korean immigrants has grown. Consider the following statements:

In Canada, even millionaires do not show off. But lots of [investment] Koreans demonstrate that they are rich. That's a problem. They express that they are rich. That's why older immigrant's Hearts' break. Because they worked hard. In Canada, we worked hard but it is hard to save money.

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 or 15 years to finally have a house and some safety. That's a very long time to work hard. Nowadays, investment immigrants they do not have to 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.¹⁵⁶

The recent influx of more affluent Korean immigrants has exacerbated the need for social status among working class pioneer and second wave Vancouver Koreans. The immigration of *t'ujain* has further decreased the position of many older immigrants on the social hierarchy of the Korean community. Fierce political infighting is indicative of a community under stress; a community which is undergoing further stratification. For those *ilse* who experienced downward occupational adjustment, this additional challenge has made the need to acquire the secondary immigrant needs of prestige, power, and status more critical, competitive, and desperate.

Increasingly, the search for social status for some older immigrants has involved the executive positions of the Society. In the first few years of the Korean Society's

¹⁵⁶ Sang-Bin (Steve) Seo, Personal Interview, 24 February 1997.

existence, executive positions themselves were not perceived to be status symbols. As it has already been noted, early community leaders already enjoyed a high status ranking. However, over the years, social status has become directly associated with these positions. In a conversation between myself and Ellena Yang, Yang commented: "Before 1989, just a sole person wanted to volunteer for the Korean community. But for some reason, from 1990, great competition developed. People wanted to have a hat."¹⁵⁷ In other words, what they wanted was status. One elder similarly observed of the late political competition within the Society: "If their life or their job or their situation...if they are not proud of themselves, maybe they need a kind of job title or something."¹⁵⁸ Another member of the Korean community commented that recently, some "guys have become president not really to serve the Society but to become famous."¹⁵⁹

It is important to analyze the reasons behind the emergence of executive positions as symbols of social status. How could an individual gain personal prestige through voluntary community service in the Korean Society? In Chapter 2, it was argued that Koreans have historically used conceptions of ethnicity as important sources of status. Korean first generation immigrants were able to gain a sense of status through the consolidation of Korean traditional forms. However, at cultural activities Korean immigrants could also gain prestige in other ways. For example, at the Korean festivals, volunteers could gain a sense of honor through their service to the community. Korean concerts gave performers the opportunity to obtain a measure of esteem because their

¹⁵⁷ Ellena Yang, Personal Interview, 2 November 1996.

¹⁵⁸ Personal Interview, Tape 1, 27 January 1997.

¹⁵⁹ Personal Interview, Tape 2, 10 March 1997.

“personal achievements [would] reflect positively on the group.”¹⁶⁰ For community leaders, their individual status could be improved by “demonstrating leadership qualities such as skills in making public speeches, willingness to contribute financial resource, and above all, enthusiasm for organizational affairs.”¹⁶¹ As Gil Sang (Gilbert) Kang commented:

[The Korean classical concert of 1977] turned out way more than what we expected. The Canadian friends looked up to me: ‘Ah Gil Kang, you are m.c. [master of ceremony] of a very good performance, a very professional performance.’ I was very proud of it, extremely proud of it. For a few years, I was very well known because of that thing. People really appreciated the performance. I was very proud.¹⁶²

Collective rituals which affirmed the Korean cultural background also gave executive participants the chance to become the heroes of the community, to improve their personal images, and to have their self worth aggrandized.

An executive of the Korean Society could also gain status via interactions with government officials. For certain occasions and issues that concerned the Korean community, the Canadian government would need to consult with key community members. For instance, during multicultural events or an official visit from a Korean politician, as an umbrella organization, the Korean Society and its executives would act as “the first channel of liaison.”¹⁶³ In the Vancouver Korean community, acquaintance with government improves one’s standing in the collectivity. For example, Steven Choi asserted that:

The Korean Society felt a difference between previous years and certain years later when we had the Korean consulate office established in Vancouver [January 12, 1970]. [After] they came in, the Korean

¹⁶⁰ Ng, “Ethnicity and Community,” 160.

¹⁶¹ Ng, “Ethnicity and Community,” 160.

¹⁶² Gil Sang (Gilbert)Kang, Personal Interview, 13 February 1997.

¹⁶³ Ng, “Ethnicity and Community,” 182.

Society played a prominent role in terms of building up of his [an individual's] personal status.¹⁶⁴

According to Sang-Bin Seo, today "the president gets different treatment from the Korean government. The Korean government [gives] some v.i.p. treatment . It is an honorable position."¹⁶⁵ It is the Korean Society president and his staff that are given the opportunity to attend dinner meetings with high government bureaucrats, take funded trips to Korea, and gain official recognition at public events.¹⁶⁶ The executive memberships of the Korean Society for Fraternity and Culture are currently being contested over because they can be used as political platforms from which one can earn the accolades of the community.

Barred from obtaining occupational status within the Canadian work force, first and second wave immigrants have begun to challenge the established social order of the Korean community. At one level of analysis, political rivalries can be understood as a new adaptational strategy; an attempt by some members to redefine the respectable identity beyond the symbols of Korean heritage, education, and occupation.

Consider the following observations made by Suk Do Jee and Ellena Yang:

I was [Korean Society] president in Vancouver in 1991. [In that year] big competition, everyone wanted to be president. Thousands and thousands of dollars were spent on the campaign. Recently two or three guys have begun to compete with each other. If they fail, they always criticize the winner...if something goes wrong, they sue him...they want to be a leader, they want to control the entire society.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ Sin Kun (Steven) Choi, Personal Interview, 21 January 1997.

¹⁶⁵ Sang-Bin (Steve) Seo, Personal Interview, 24 February 1997.

¹⁶⁶ Sang-Bin (Steve) Seo, Personal Interview, 24 February 1997.

¹⁶⁷ Suk Do Jee, Personal Interview, 8 December, 1996.

And: "From 1991, if you want to become the Korean president you have to spend around 100 000 dollars for your campaign and to buy ballots."¹⁶⁸ Unable to secure the traditional symbols of status, first and second wave *Ilse* who have accumulated capital as small business operators are increasingly employing wealth as a new, alternative means to an end. That end is the position of Korean Society president- which has come to be perceived by many to be the summit of the Vancouver Korean social structure.

Some individuals have also challenged the presumed notion that only men could become Society presidents. According to Ellena Yang, in 1994 Mrs. Kum Ran Algard became the Korean Society's first woman president, after spending over 100 000 dollars on her campaign.¹⁶⁹ In fighting in the Vancouver Korean community can be comprehended as part of a wider immigrant struggle to re-establish lost social status within the framework of a vertical Canadian mosaic. "The status-anxiety which stems from the marginality" of *ilse* in the Canadian work force has precipitated fierce political strife within the space of the Korean Society.¹⁷⁰ Increasingly, lay Koreans are challenging the professional and intellectual group for the right to lead the Korean community and shape its collective future. Political schisms may involve those individuals of the first and second waves who want to either obtain, or hold onto the honor and power that is associated with the role of leadership. The development of intra-community factionalization reflects the general segmentation of the Vancouver Korean collectivity.

¹⁶⁸ Ellena Yang, Personal Interview, 2 November, 1996.

Sang-Bin Seo stated: "[Some] years, 100 000 dollars is spent to become a president! To buy voters. They pay the membership fee of 30 dollars for one family, they buy [them] dinner and drinks." Sang-Bin (Steve) Seo, Personal Interview, 24 February 1997.

¹⁶⁹ Ellena Yang, Personal Interview, 2 November, 1996.

¹⁷⁰ Park and Shin, "Causes of Schisms," 242.

CONCLUSION

Over the short history of Koreans in Vancouver, the status ranking of the community has evolved into a complex order replete with several symbols of prestige. Similar to mainstream Vancouver, Korean community status symbols transcend ethnicity; the markers of education, occupation, gender, and leadership further complicate Korean social life. Traditionally, the highest status group consisted of highly educated, white-collar male professionals and intellectuals. These individuals were entrusted by other community members to lead the community within Canadian society. In positions of authority, Korean Society executives aimed to increase the social status of Korean Canadians through a process of legitimization. The consolidation of Korean ethnicity as a valid cultural form has been an important way of building prestige for the community. As the Vancouver Korean community has grown, lay immigrants have begun to struggle for status within the framework of the Korean Society organization. As a result, the symbols of community status are currently being challenged and disputed.

Although the Korean Society of British Columbia for Fraternity and Culture has acted as a space where Korean immigrants can reestablish lost personal status, the future of the organization might be untenable in light of increased factionalism and the increasing diversification of the Vancouver Korean community. Furthermore, newer investment immigrants who enjoy a high standard of living currently have no motivation for participating in the Korean Society. These Koreans often see no need to contest for positions of authority within the Society because their status is not directly challenged by professional or economic marginality. As members of the first two waves of Korean

immigration acculturate into Canadian society, and their children move into adulthood, the significance of the Society for Korean Canadians may also decline. Having been raised and educated in Canada, the second generation do not face the same barriers to employment that their parents did. The next generation has a better chance of achieving professional status within the Canadian labour market. Although cultural discrimination still pervades Canadian social life, integrated immigrants and the second generation also may not organize their sense of status around a narrow conception of Korean ethnicity. Encouraged by the notion of multiculturalism, many Koreans may desire to achieve individual status within the institutions of mainstream society. Korean Canadians may view the strict reinforcement of a traditional Korean cultural identity as an obstacle to their socialization into a wider, more culturally pluralistic framework.

The future status of the Korean Society is also threatened by changing attitudes of existing members of the association. In view of the current economic prosperity of South Korea, many members have begun to gain personal status through national pride. As one community member commented: "Koreans will prosper not because of community activity, but because of individual effort plus national image, and pride....Without the Korean community we will perish - that's nonsense."¹⁷¹ During the first few years of Vancouver Korean community history, Koreans could not find pride in the national achievements of Korea because the economy was largely underdeveloped. Finding prestige in this way is a recent phenomenon which has developed concomitant with the

¹⁷¹ Personla Interview, tape 2, 10 March 1997.

economic prosperity of the "homeland".¹⁷² Accompanying Korea's new found economic strength, however, is also a more narrowly conceived form of nationalism which also manifests itself in Canadian society, for example at the level of new religions seeking to interpret Korean history within a framework of many thousands of years. However, irrespective of "the new stages of development and maturity" of the Vancouver Korean community, the Korean Society of British Columbia for Fraternity and Culture will continue to exist as long as some members of the community perceive it to be a valuable cultural and political location where a positive status conception can be defined and realized.¹⁷³

By applying the status approach to the more recent history of Korean urban Vancouver, historians can discover how Canadian ethnic groups define and achieve status in their own communities. Employing a status-centred method can help in the exploration of how other Canadian immigrant communities come to be formed and reformed years after their initial settlement period. Scholars interested in further analyzing the Korean experience in Canada are affronted by an academic project which is at once challenging and opportune. It is challenging because of the deficiency of secondary sources; any study of Koreans will have to employ a community based methodology which utilizes oral interviews, community records, and archival documents in order to build a history of this ethnic collectivity. The enterprise is opportune because of historic timing. Since 1965, the Korean community in Canada has been rapidly

¹⁷² See Donald Stone Macdonald, *Koreans*, chapter six for details on South Korea's economic development.

¹⁷³ Park and Shin, "Analysis of Schisms," 250.

maturing into a heterogeneous community. Korean communities across the nation are quickly reaching a large enough size so that an analysis of organizational aspects of Korean Canadian life can add a valuable ethnic dimension to the larger history of Canada. In 1990, there were more than 26 Korean organizations in the greater Vancouver area including 2 dozen churches, 2 newspapers and 33 high school and university alumni associations.¹⁷⁴ As a nation built by and composed of a myriad of ethnic groups, Canada can best be understood when it is studied as a country of immigrants and newcomers. Studying the historical experience of immigrant groups- the various ways in which they respond to a wide array of receptions, the processes of their development and the evolution of their identities- helps to construct a "deeply textured history" of Canada and its people.¹⁷⁵ To come to know immigrant patterns of organization, is to avoid building a monochromatic vision of Canadian society. Through the documentation of the structure and role of the Korean community organizations, the completion of a rich and colorful cultural map of Canada will come closer to realization.

¹⁷⁴ Susan Richie, "Korean Haven," 20.

¹⁷⁵ Robert F. Harney, "Ethnicity and Neighborhoods," In *Gathering Place: Peoples and Neighborhoods of Toronto, 1834-1945*, ed. Robert F. Harney, (Toronto: Multicultural Historical Society of Ontario, 1985) 6.

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Ellena Yang, Personal Interview, 2 November 1996.

Personal Interview, 22 January 1997

Personal Interview, tape 1, 27 January 1997.

Personal Interview, tape 2, 10 March 1997.

Personal Interview, tape 3, 20 March 1997.

The following Korean community members were not formally interviewed for the project, but their comments and observations were very helpful. They have, therefore, been included as participants:

Mr. Arnold Choi.

Dr. Sun Shik Shim.

Personal Correspondence

Dr. Donald Baker.

APPENDIX A

SAMPLE OF COMMUNITY

(20 total participants)

Sample by Representation in the Korean Society

| <u>Nature of Membership</u> | <u>Number of Sample</u> | <u>% of Sample</u> |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|
| Executive Members | 12 | 60 |
| Members | 3 | 15 |
| Non members | 5 | 25 |

Sample by Age

| <u>Age Cohort</u> | <u>Number of Sample</u> | <u>% of Sample</u> |
|-------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|
| 40 - 50 | 2 | 10 |
| 50 - 60 | 8 | 40 |
| 60 - 70 | 5 | 25 |
| 70 - 80 | 2 | 10 |
| Unknown | 3 | 15 |

Sample by Gender

| <u>Gender</u> | <u>Number of Sample</u> | <u>% of Sample</u> |
|---------------|-------------------------|--------------------|
| Male | 17 | 85 |
| Female | 3 | 15 |