

**THE POST-1965 KOREAN IMMIGRANTS:
THEIR CHARACTERISTICS AND
SETTLEMENT PATTERNS**

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Although Korean-American immigration history covers nearly one hundred years, the Korean-American community before 1965 was almost negligible in terms of population size. It was the 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act that has contributed to an influx of Korean immigrants to the United States. This paper overviews the post-1965 immigration, immigration motives and characteristics of the new immigrants, and their settlement patterns.

The United States is very often called a country of immigrants. This indicates that the United States consists of different immigrant groups from all over the world. Since different ethnic groups have moved to the United States in different periods, it may be very difficult to make a generalization of immigration patterns. However, most immigration historians seem to agree that there have been three major turning points in U.S. immigration history. The first major turning point came in 1880. It is a well known fact that a large influx of Catholic and Jewish immigrants from Eastern and Southern European countries began with the year of 1880, whereas almost all immigrants before that year came from Northwestern Protestant countries. The second major turning point came when a very conservative immigration act was passed in 1924 to curb the massive immigration from non-Protestant countries. The 1924 immigration act, commonly known as the National Origins Quota System, justified discrimination in immigration based on national origin. Thus it severely curtailed immigration from Eastern and Southern European countries and completely abolished immigration from Asian countries.

The last major turning point came in 1965 when a very liberal immigration act was passed, replacing the old conservative one. The Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 opened the door for immigration to all countries by abolishing discrimination based on national origin. More significant for

Asian immigration is that the new immigration law abolished Asiatic Exclusion, which had eliminated Asians for quota immigration for nearly forty years. As a result, the new immigration law has encouraged immigration from non-European countries, particularly from Asian countries. European immigrants constituted approximately 80% of total immigrants in 1960 and eight of the ten largest source countries were European countries (Arnold *et al.* 1987). The pattern reversed after 1965. For example, in 1984, immigrants from European countries made up only 18% of total U.S. immigrants and all ten major source countries were non-European countries (Arnold *et al.* 1987). Number of immigrants from Asian countries has achieved dramatic gains since the enforcement of the new immigration law. The proportion of Asian immigrants increased from 9% in 1960 to 25% in 1970 and 44% in 1980 (Immigration and Naturalization Service 1960, 1970, 1980). Asian countries sent 40-47% of total U.S. immigrants in the 1980s.

The passage of the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 has probably had the most significant effect on the Korean American community. Although the immigration of Koreans to the United States is one century old, the Korean American community before 1965 was insignificant in terms of population size. Allowing for a large error margin in the 1970 census estimation (69,130), the Korean population in 1970 may have been less than 100,000. However, as will be shown later in this paper, some 700,000 Koreans have immigrated since 1970. Thus the current Korean community in the United States is largely the by-product of the liberalization of immigration law in 1965.

This paper intends to provide an overview of the post-1965 Korean immigrants based on data issued by the Immigration and Naturalization Service and the U.S. Bureau of the Census. It will focus on trends in patterns of Korean immigration over the past 25 years, characteristics of the new immigrants, and their settlement patterns. It will use graphs and charts as well as tables to help readers to see trends very easily. This paper basically provides descriptive information on the post-1965 Korean immigrants. But the descriptive information is important for understanding the nature of the Korean American community, which, as previously indicated, consists mainly of the post-1965 immigrants.

A RADICAL INCREASE IN KOREAN IMMIGRATION

Annual Korean immigrants numbered a few thousands in the early 1960s. However, as is clear in Table 1 the annual number of Korean immigrants gradually increased in the later 1960s and the early 1970s. It reached the

30,000 mark in 1976 and maintained an immigration flow of over 30,000 in the 1980s. A total of 600,000 Koreans immigrated to the United States between 1965 and 1989. Korean immigrants accounted for 6-8% of total immigrants to the U.S. over the last fifteen years. Korea is the third largest source country of U.S. immigrants during recent years, following Mexico and the Philippines.

The Korean American community has consequently witnessed a radical population growth. The 1990 census estimated the Korean population to be close to 800,000 (see Figure 1). It seems to be an underestimation. Considering Korean students, visitors, and illegal residents the Korean population may

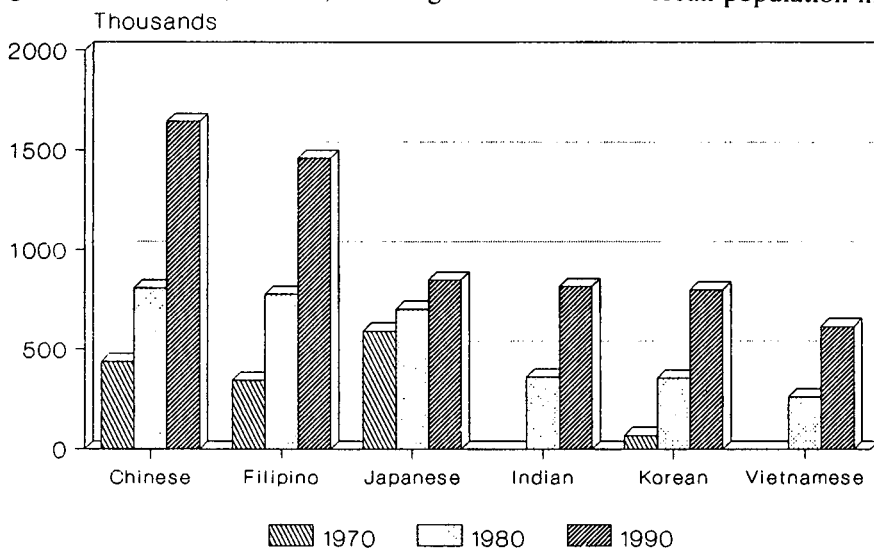


FIGURE 1. POPULATIONS FOR SELECTED ASIAN GROUPS IN 1970, 1980, AND 1990
 Source: Adjusted from *Census of Population, 1970, 1980, and 1990* by U.S. Bureau of the Census.

have been close to one million as of December 1990. The Korean American population has experienced a ten-fold growth since 1970. Although all major Asian ethnic groups experienced a high rate of population growth in the 1980s, the Korean group, along with Indian and Vietnamese ethnic groups, achieved a radical population growth. Although the 1990 census estimated the Japanese and Indian American populations respectively slightly larger than the Korean American population, in actuality, Korean Americans may have outnumbered either Japanese or Indian Americans, since the Korean American population included more illegals and recent immigrants who may not have been included in the census tabulation. One million Koreans in the U.S. make up 22% of approximately 4.5 million overseas Koreans. They comprise the second largest overseas Korean group, next to over two million Koreans

in China.

MOTIVATIONS AND CAUSES OF MASS EXODUS

Economic Opportunity

Recent Korean immigrants like other Asian immigrants, with the exception of Indochinese refugees, are largely economic immigrants. That is, the prospectus for a higher standard of living in the United States has motivated most Asian immigrants to choose a trans-Pacific migration. This is proved by the fact that less than 5,000 people have annually immigrated from Japan recently, whose standard of living is as high or even higher than that of the United States. Recent Korean immigrants, particularly those who came to the United States in the 1970s, decided on a U.S. bound migration largely because of their expectation for a higher standard of living (Hurh *et al.* 1979). This view gains support from the fact that the United States maintained a standard of living approximately ten times as high as South Korea in 1975.

Structural Linkages between the United States and South Korea

However, as international migration is determined by a combination of multiple factors, the movement of Koreans to the United States cannot be completely explained by economic motivation alone. If the gap in the standard of living between the host country and the source country is the only determinant of international migration, why has India with a lower standard of living than South Korea sent a smaller number of immigrants to the U.S. than has South Korea? As indicated by several other scholars (Kim, I. 1987; Light and Bonacich 1988), the close military, political, and economic connections between the United States and South Korea have also contributed to a large influx of Korean immigrants to the United States.

Although we recognize the structural linkages between the United States and South Korea as an important factor for the massive migration of the post-1965 Korean immigrants, we consider certain structural explanations, which do not pay attention to the decisions of immigrants themselves at all, not very useful. For example, using the world capitalist system perspective Bonacich argues that the strategy to develop cheap labor mainly to serve the interests of U.S. corporations led to dislocations in South Korea, which resulted in pressure on individuals and families to relocate (Bonacich 1988; Light and Bonacich 1988). Thus Bonacich's interpretation suggests that recent Korean immigrants are mainly those who have been dislocated by the U.S.

military and economic involvement in South Korea. As argued elsewhere (Min 1989b, 1989c), whether the military and economic connection between the United States and South Korea has resulted in an one-sided exploitation of Korea by the United States is a complicated issue that cannot be resolved by empirical data. What is clear, however, is that most recent Korean immigrants are not, as suggested by Bonacich, victims of this exploitation. It is well documented that the new Korean immigrants, especially those admitted to the United States in the 1970s under Bonacich's consideration, represented the upper-middle and middle-class segments of the Korean population. They were generally the more successful people in their homeland, and they were able to come to the United States mainly because of their advantages in resources for immigration such as education, money, and knowledge.

To explain the motives of the post-1965 Asian immigrants, Portes and Rumbaut (1990) suggest that those groups most exposed to the contradictions between reality and the attraction of modern life are most likely to choose immigration. We believe their argument is very useful for understanding the motives of many Korean middle-class immigrants. Koreans, particularly middle-class Koreans, have been well exposed to American life through the presence of U.S. servicemen and the American mass media, including *the American Forces in Korean Networks (AFKN)*, since the Korean War. Many Koreans chose immigration in the early 1970s because of the exposure to American life. In this sense, the U.S. military and economic involvement in South Korea is important for the mass exodus of Koreans to the United States mainly because of its cultural influence on the aspirations of middle-class Koreans for the higher standard of living.

The U.S. military presence in South Korea has had a direct influence on the international movement of Koreans to the United States in that a large number of Korean women have immigrated to the United States as wives of U.S. servicemen since the breakdown of the Korean War. As will be shown later in this paper, the number of Korean women admitted to the U.S. through interracial marriage has increased since the early 1970s. The interracial marriages between Korean women and U.S. servicemen have had far more significant effects on the influx of Koreans to the United States than the number of those intermarriages indicates, since most interracially married Korean women have invited their relatives to this country. The U.S. military presence in other Asian countries such as Japan, the Philippines, and Vietnam has also contributed to the Asian-U.S. international migration.

Opportunity for Children's Education

Koreans put emphasis on the value of education, and consideration of a

better educational opportunity has been another important factor for the mass migration of Koreans to the United States during recent years. "A better educational opportunity for children's education" is found to be one of the frequently cited reasons for immigration next to "a better economic opportunity" (Hurh *et al.* 1979; Min 1983). Moreover, most Koreans who came as alien students for further study have changed their status to permanent residents (Fawcett and Carino 1987). In the 1960s and the 1970s the Korean Government discouraged Korean students from going abroad for further study through the national qualification examination. However, the Korean Government loosened its tight restriction on Koreans' studying abroad by abolishing the qualification examination in 1979. It restored the qualification examination in 1985. The Korean Government adopted the most liberal policy in 1988 by abolishing the qualification examination again and allowing even high school graduates to go abroad for further study. As a result, the number of Korean students abroad has significantly increased since 1988.

Political Unrest and Fear of Another War

Between 1961 and 1986 South Korea was ruled by two military governments, first led by Park Chung Hee and then, after the assassination of Park in 1979, led by Chun Doo-Hwan. Two military governments ruthlessly oppressed opposition parties, radical students, and other intellectuals to continue their illegitimate rule. Many intellectuals came to the United States in the 1970s and the early 1980s to escape oppression and political persecution. Many Korean students who had completed higher education in the United States did not go back to Korea because of political problems. Although the Korean War came to a formal end in 1953, military conflicts between North and South Korea continued until recently. The possibility of another war in Korea and quasi-war conditions also pushed many Koreans to the United States (Kim, I. 1981).

Improvements in South Korea and Moderation of Immigration

The economic, political, and social conditions in South Korea have been recently improved. First of all, South Korea has made a great improvement in economic conditions over the last ten years or so. For example, Koreans experienced a growth in per capita income from \$843 in 1977 to \$2,199 in 1987 (Korean National Bureau of Statistics 1984, p. 451; 1988, p. 467). Many middle-class householders in Seoul and large cities have their own cars. Moreover, social and political insecurity, which pushed many Koreans to the

United States, has been substantially reduced recently. South Korea had a popular presidential election at the end of 1987, putting an end to the 16 year-old military dictatorship. Although the Roh Tae-Woo Government still involves many undemocratic elements, it is a great improvement from the two previous military governments. Militarily, the unification of Germany in 1990 and the breakdown of Communist Governments in Eastern European countries during recent years, which climaxed with the collapse of the Soviet Union, have helped to reduce tensions in the Korean peninsula. North and South Korean Governments have taken some positive measures to reduce tensions and establish communications since 1990. The North and South Korean Governments have just reached an agreement to eliminate nuclear weapons from the Korean peninsula, thus substantially reducing the chance for a nuclear war in Korea.

The significant improvements in economic, social, political, and military conditions in Korea during recent years have mitigated the influx of Koreans to the United States. As shown in Table 1, the number of U.S.-bound Korean immigrants has slightly decreased since 1988. Consideration of several factors leads us to speculate that it will be further reduced to below 30,000 in

TABLE 1. KOREANS IMMIGRATED AND NATURALIZED, 1965-1988

Years	Total U.S. Immigrants	Total Korean Immigrants	Korean Immigrants as % of U.S. Immigrants	Koreans Naturalized
1965	296,697	2,165	0.7	1,027
1966	323,040	2,492	0.8	1,180
1967	361,972	3,356	0.9	1,353
1968	454,448	3,811	0.8	1,776
1969	358,579	6,045	1.7	1,646
1970	373,326	9,314	2.5	1,687
1971	370,478	14,297	3.9	2,083
1972	387,685	18,876	4.9	2,933
1973	400,063	22,930	5.7	3,562
1974	394,861	28,028	7.1	4,451
1975	386,194	28,362	7.3	6,007
1976	398,613	30,830	7.7	6,450
1977	462,315	30,917	6.7	10,446
1978	601,442	29,288	4.9	12,575
1979	460,348	29,248	6.4	13,406
1980	530,639	32,320	6.1	14,073
1981	596,600	32,663	5.5	13,258
1982	594,131	30,814	5.2	13,488
1983	559,763	33,339	6.0	12,808
1984	543,903	33,042	6.1	14,019
1985	570,009	35,253	6.2	16,824

Years	Total U.S. Immigrants	Total Korean Immigrants	Korean Immigrants as % of U.S. Immigrants	Koreans Naturalized
1986	601,708	35,776	6.0	18,037
1987	601,516	35,849	6.0	14,233
1988	643,025	34,703	5.4	13,012
1989	1,090,924	34,222	3.1	11,301
Total	12,362,279	597,940	4.8	211,635

Source: Adjusted from *Annual Reports* by the Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1965-1989.

the 1990s. It is important to note two new developments in this connection. *The New York Times* and other major U.S. media have criticized South Korea for never stopping sending orphans to the United States in spite of a great improvement in her standard of living. Under the pressure of U.S. media criticisms, the South Korean Government is beginning to take some measures to discourage sending Korean orphans to the United States for adoption and thus the immigration of Korean adopted children is expected to be drastically reduced in the future. Withdrawal of U.S. military forces from South Korea seems impending, as North and South Korean Governments have significantly improved dialogues to reduce tensions. And the absence of U.S. military servicemen in South Korea will put an end to immigration of Korean women to the United States through intermarriage.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE POST-1965 KOREAN IMMIGRANTS

Korean immigrants, like immigrants from other countries, do not represent the general population in Korea. They are a select group in terms of their demographic, socioeconomic, and religious characteristics. This section will analyze the characteristics of recent Korean immigrants, with special attention to changes in their characteristics over time.

Demographic Characteristics

Figure 2 shows the sex composition of Korean immigrants admitted to the United States between 1965-1989. Female immigrants outnumbered male immigrants in all the years, although the sex imbalance in favor of female immigrants has been substantially moderated during recent years. This trend makes a good contrast with the earlier Korean immigrants at the turn of the century, who consisted mainly of young men (Choy 1979, p. 77).

The numerical dominance of female immigrants over male immigrants can be explained by three major factors. First, as previously noted, a large num-

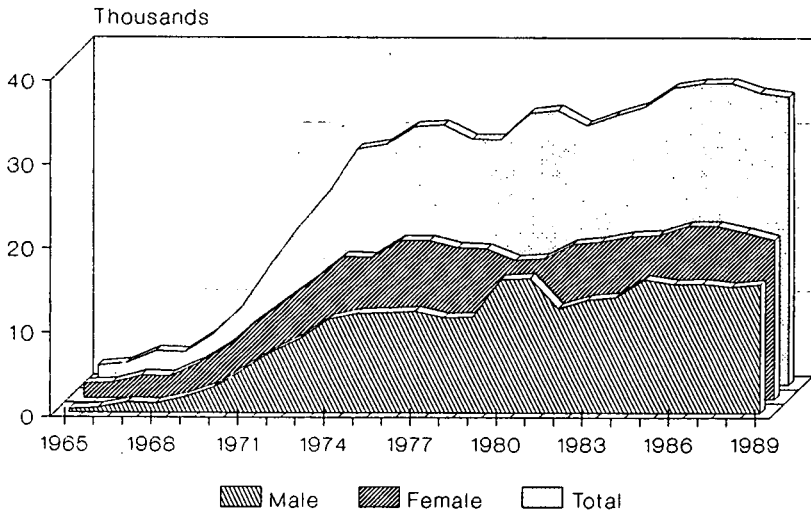


FIGURE 2. SEX COMPOSITION OF KOREAN IMMIGRANTS, 1965-1989

Source: Adjusted from *Annual Reports, 1965-1989* by the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

ber of Korean women have married U.S. servicemen and subsequently immigrated to the United States. Table 2 indicates that the sex imbalance is most severe in the 20-29 age category. This is so because most Korean women married to servicemen are in this age category. Second, a large number of Korean children have been adopted by U.S. citizens, who tend to prefer girls over boys. Most adopted children are under the age of 10, and Table 2 shows

TABLE 2. AGE AND SEX DISTRIBUTION OF KOREAN IMMIGRANTS, 1965-1989

Year	Sex	Under 10	10-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+	Total
1965	Male	9.6	2.6	2.3	3.3	0.4	0.2	0.2	18.6
	Female	15.8	6.5	45.7	11.9	0.6	0.3	0.6	81.4
1966	Male	6.5	3.2	4.2	8.3	1.1	0.3	0.3	23.9
	Female	14.3	5.8	39.6	14.0	0.9	0.7	0.8	76.1
1967	Male	6.9	3.4	4.9	13.0	2.0	0.3	0.3	30.8
	Female	11.0	6.5	33.5	14.9	1.6	0.9	0.8	69.2
1968	Male	7.1	3.7	5.9	10.2	1.7	0.5	0.1	29.2
	Female	12.6	5.9	35.6	13.0	1.7	1.2	0.8	71.8
1969	Male	7.8	3.2	6.4	10.8	1.9	0.5	0.4	31.0
	Female	11.7	5.9	35.3	12.6	1.8	1.0	0.9	69.0
1970	Male	7.9	4.1	7.5	10.0	2.0	0.8	0.3	32.6
	Female	11.8	6.0	33.2	12.4	2.1	1.1	0.8	67.4

Year	Sex	Under 10	10-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+	Total
1971	Male	8.7	4.2	6.9	12.8	2.1	0.7	0.5	35.9
	Female	12.3	6.0	29.2	12.8	2.1	0.9	0.8	64.1
1972	Male	9.4	4.9	7.4	12.2	2.8	0.9	0.6	38.2
	Female	13.7	6.4	25.1	11.7	2.5	1.3	1.1	61.5
1973	Male	11.1	5.9	7.1	9.7	3.0	1.0	0.7	38.5
	Female	14.7	7.7	22.3	10.4	2.8	1.0	1.7	61.5
1974	Male	11.6	6.9	6.6	9.4	3.6	1.1	0.7	39.9
	Female	14.1	8.2	21.3	10.6	3.1	1.4	1.4	60.1
1975	Male	12.9	8.0	7.4	8.2	3.4	1.1	0.8	41.8
	Female	15.9	8.8	18.2	9.4	3.0	1.4	1.5	58.2
1976	Male	13.0	6.6	7.2	7.0	3.0	1.1	0.9	38.8
	Female	16.1	8.3	22.1	8.4	2.9	1.7	1.7	61.2
1977	Male	11.7	6.9	7.7	6.9	3.3	1.4	1.3	39.2
	Female	15.4	8.4	21.1	8.3	3.1	1.9	2.5	60.2
1978	Male	10.5	6.4	6.9	7.6	3.8	1.7	1.7	38.6
	Female	14.1	8.1	20.8	8.6	3.7	2.6	3.5	61.4
1979	Male	9.5	7.5	7.6	6.7	3.6	1.9	2.2	39.0
	Female	11.8	7.8	21.8	8.3	2.8	3.4	4.1	61.0
*1980		20.7	15.2	29.3	15.0	7.8	5.3	6.7	100.0
*1981		17.9	14.3	30.8	14.4	7.6	6.7	8.3	100.0
1982	Male	14.7		11.4	5.5	3.5	2.2	3.0	40.3
	Female	18.0		19.7	6.8	4.0	4.7	5.6	59.7
1983	Male	17.0		10.1	6.1	4.1	2.1	2.5	41.7
	Female	21.0		18.1	7.2	4.3	3.6	3.9	58.1
1984	Male	17.8		9.4	5.9	4.0	2.0	2.6	41.7
	Female	21.8		17.3	7.2	4.2	3.8	4.0	58.3
1985	Male	18.2		9.4	6.0	3.8	2.0	2.7	42.0
	Female	20.7		16.9	7.6	4.1	4.0	4.7	58.0
1986	Male	18.2		8.7	6.4	3.7	2.3	3.2	42.5
	Female	20.8		15.5	7.4	3.9	4.7	5.2	57.5
1987	Male	18.2		8.9	6.3	3.8	2.3	3.2	42.7
	Female	20.2		15.9	7.5	4.2	4.5	4.9	57.3
1988	Male	18.5		7.2	7.0	4.7	2.8	3.0	43.2
	Female	19.5		14.5	8.3	5.2	4.6	4.8	56.8
1989	Male	17.0		8.0	7.6	5.2	3.6	3.2	44.6
	Female	16.2		15.2	9.1	5.5	4.5	4.8	55.4

*Immigration data for 1981 and 1982 were not tabulated by sex.

Source: Adjusted from *Annual Reports* by Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1965-1989.

that there is a greater sex imbalance in the age category of under 10 than for total Korean immigrants. Third, a large number of Korean nurses immigrated to the United States in the 1970s as medical professionals and most of them were in the age category of 20-29. The sex imbalance for the age group of 20-29 is less conspicuous in the 1980s than in the 1970s, because the immigra-

tion of Korean nurses virtually came to an end in the 1980s (see the next section).

Figure 3 shows age composition of Korean immigrants admitted between 1965 and 1989. The category of 20-29 is the largest age group. In addition to immigrants in general who are in the age category, two special groups—Korean women married to U.S. servicemen and Korean nurses—are greatly overrepresented in this age category. That explains why Koreans in their twenties constitute the largest age group. Children under 10 constitute the second largest age group, which is due to the fact that many Korean children under 10 have been adopted by U.S. citizens. Those in the age category of 30-39 also constitute a fairly large proportion of Korean immigrants, ranging from 15% to 25%. This means that the new Korean immigrants consist largely of young, economically active people.

Looking at Table 2 and Figure 3 closely, the proportion of Korean older

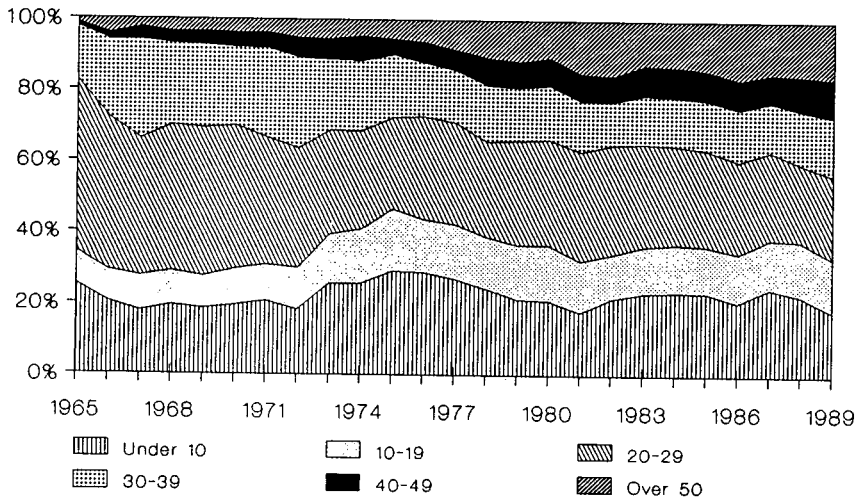


FIGURE 3. AGE COMPOSITION OF KOREAN IMMIGRANTS, 1965-1989

Source: Adjusted from *Annual Reports*, 1965-1989 by the Immigration Naturalization Service.

immigrants has gradually increased over the years. The Korean immigrants 50 and over constituted less than 5% of the Korean immigrants admitted up to 1975. But it increased to over 10% in 1979 and maintained approximately 15% in the late 1980s. This increase in the proportion of Korean elderly immigrants in the 1980s was due to the fact that more and more Korean immigrants who had come in the 1970s were able to bring their elderly parents through naturalization. As previously noted in Table 1, the number of Korean immigrants naturalized greatly increased in the late 1970s. Most

Koreans naturalized seem to have changed their legal status to naturalized citizens mainly because of the benefit of inviting their family members, including elderly parents, for permanent residence in the United States. In addition to the increase in the number of Korean elderly immigrants, many Korean immigrants who came in their late forties and the early fifties are reaching retirement ages. Accordingly, the elderly population in the Korean community is currently rapidly expanding.

Middle-Class and Urban Background

Another significant effect of the 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act on immigration patterns is a significant change in the socioeconomic background of immigrants. While the earlier immigrants consisted largely of farmers and unskilled workers, the post-1965 immigrants, with the exception of some Hispanic groups, were mainly recruited from the urban middle-class strata of each source country. Recent Asian immigrants in particular represent high levels of socioeconomic background. As can be seen from Table 3, 37.4% of the 1970-1980 Asian adult immigrants (25 years old and over) completed four years of college in comparison to 22.2% of all new immigrants admitted during the given period and 16.2% of the U.S. total.

TABLE 3. COMPARISON OF KOREAN IMMIGRANTS WITH OTHER IMMIGRANT GROUPS IN % OF COLLEGE GRADUATES

Korean	Chinese	Indian	Filipino	All Asian	An New Immigrants	U.S. Total
31.6	27.6	63.1	47.9	37.4	22.2	16.2

Source: Adjusted from *1980 Census of Population*, PC80-1-D1-A by the U.S. Bureau of the Census, Table 255.

Recent Korean immigrants, like other Asian immigrants, generally represent the middle-class strata of the Korean population. The 1980 census indicates that 32% of Korean immigrants 25 years old and over completed four years of college. Indian and Filipino immigrants surpass Korean immigrants in the rate of college graduates. However, a much smaller proportion of the U.S. total population than Korean immigrants completed four years of college. Moreover, recent Korean immigrants surpass the general population in Korea in educational level. The 1980 Korean census indicates that only 7.8% of Korean adults completed four years of college (Korean National Bureau of Statistics 1983, pp. 120-121).

The high educational levels of Korean immigrants are suggestive of their high pre-immigrant occupational background. U.S. census data do not provide information on pre-immigrant occupations of recent immigrants. However, several case studies shed light on the professional and white-collar background of recent Korean immigrants. For example, nearly 50% of the Korean respondents in Chicago indicated professional, administrative, managerial, and technical occupations as their pre-immigrant occupations and only 7% were found to have been engaged in blue-collar occupations in Korea (Hurh and Kim 1988). The 1986 Los Angeles data also show a similarly high pre-immigrant occupational background (Min 1989a). As shown in Table 4, 54 percent of the respondents who worked in Korea at the time of immigration held occupations classifiable as professional, administrative, executive, and managerial occupations, and only 4% were engaged in blue-collar occupations.

Another important set of findings reflected in Table 4 is a large proportion

TABLE 4. KOREAN IMMIGRANTS' PRE-IMMIGRANT OCCUPATIONS BY SEX

Occupation	Male		Female		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Professional	81	28.7	32	41.6	113	31.5
Executive & Administrative	29	10.3	7	9.1	36	10.0
Managerial	37	13.1	6	7.8	43	12.0
Proprietors	69	24.5	9	11.7	78	21.7
Technical	14	5.0	4	5.2	18	5.0
Sales & Clerical	11	3.9	12	15.6	23	6.4
Blue-Collar	13	4.6	2	2.6	15	4.2
Military Service & Others	28	9.9	5	6.5	33	9.2
Total Employed	282	100.0	77	100.0	359	100.0
Total Employed	282	76.8	77	43.2	359	65.8
Not Employed	4	1.1	53	29.8	57	10.5
Students	81	22.1	48	27.0	129	23.7
Total	367	100.0	178	100.0	545	100.0

Source: Min (1989a).

of Korean immigrants who have business experience in Korea. Twenty-five percent of male respondents who worked in Korea at the time of immigration were engaged in one or another kind of business. Including those who held managerial positions, close to 40% of Korean male immigrants held occupations relating to business transaction in one way or another. Although most Korean immigrant entrepreneurs were not engaged in Korea in the same type of business they operate in the U.S., a significant proportion of them were exposed to the business environment in Korea. This pre-immigrant occupational background of Korean immigrants partly explains a higher self-employment rate of Korean immigrants than other Asian immigrant groups (Min 1986-87).

Recent Asian immigrants are characterized by their pre-immigrant urban background, which makes a good contrast with the earlier peasant immigrants (Kim, B. 1978). This urban background is probably most conspicuous for Korean immigrants. Approximately 1,800 of the 1986 Korean prospective immigrants were interviewed at the U.S. Consulate in Seoul at the time of the visa interview. More than half the respondents in this pre-departure survey reported to be the residents of Seoul at the time of interview, although only one-fourth of the Koreans lived in the capital city (Park *et al.* 1990, p. 31). The survey showed that more than three-fourths of the respondents lived in the five largest cities in Korea at the time of interview. Although many of the residents in Seoul and other large Korean cities are migrants from rural areas, they became familiar with urban life styles before their departure for the U.S., which have many similarities to life styles in large U.S. cities. Thus, the interurban migration of Koreans to U.S. cities could reduce a sense of crisis, isolation, and alienation experienced by the earlier white immigrants from Southern and Eastern European countries (Thomas and Znaniecki 1927).

Changes in Entry Mechanisms and Socioeconomic Background

The 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act admits aliens as legal immigrants using three criteria: (1) having a relative in the United States (immigration based on family unification), (2) possession of an occupational skill needed in the U.S. (occupational immigration), and (3) vulnerability to political persecution (refugee immigration). Few Koreans have immigrated to the United States as political refugees, since refugee immigration has usually been awarded to aliens in Communist countries. Thus, almost all Korean immigrants have come to the United States by virtue of their relationship to those already settled here or occupational skills in demand in the U.S. labor market.

In the early 1970s a large proportion of Korean immigrants were admitted through occupational preference categories, which include primary occupational immigrants and their family members. For example, 45% of Korean immigrants in 1972 were admitted under occupational preference categories (see Figure 4). A substantial proportion of the Korean occupational immigrants were medical professionals, consisting of nurses, physicians, surgeons, and pharmacists. However, as the unemployment rate rose in the United

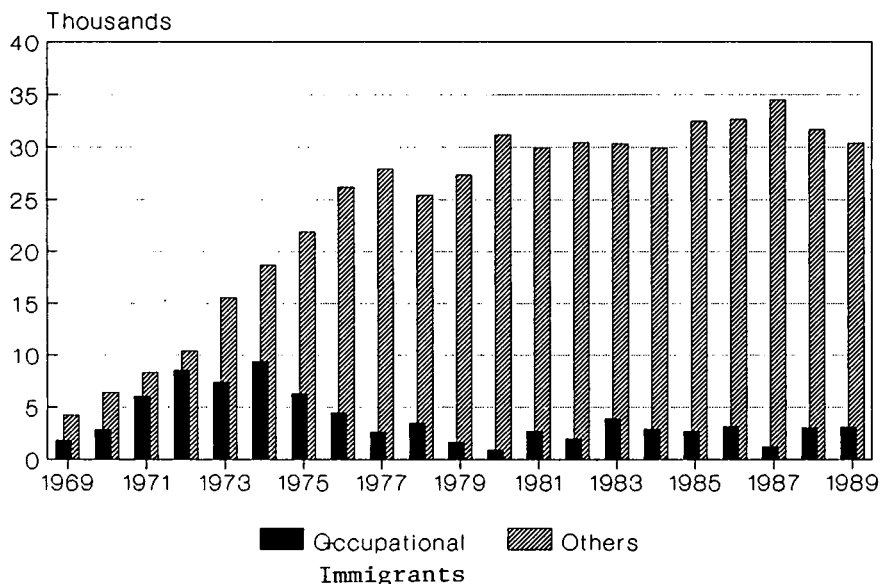


FIGURE 4. RATIO OF KOREAN OCCUPATIONAL IMMIGRANTS TO OTHER IMMIGRANTS

Source: Adjusted from *Annual Reports, 1965-1989* by the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

States with the economic recession in the late 1970s, the U.S. Congress passed the Eilberg Act and the Health Professional Assistance Act in 1976 in order to discourage the immigration of alien professionals (Yochum and Agarwal 1988). The Eilberg Act required alien professionals to gain a job offer from a United States employer to be admitted as legal immigrants. The Health Professions Act stated that alien physicians and surgeons are inadmissible unless they pass the National Board of Medical Examiners Examination. The enforcement of the two acts since 1977 has resulted in a drastic reduction in the immigration of professionals, particularly those in medical professions (Yochum and Agarwal 1988). It has inflicted a terrible blow particularly to Korean professionals, who have more difficulty in passing

the qualification examination in English due to their serious language barriers than other alien professionals. Consequently, Korean occupational immigration has significantly declined since the late 1970s. Korean occupational immigrants have accounted for less than 10% of total Korean immigrants since 1979.

This change in Korean immigrants' entry mechanisms involved a change in their socioeconomic characteristics. Recently arrived relative immigrants received lower levels of education and held lower levels of occupations in Korea than those occupational immigrants in the 1970s. This change in social background is well reflected in the 1986 Los Angeles data. The data indicate that 67% of the respondents who immigrated in 1977 and earlier completed college, in comparison to 53% of those who immigrated after that period (Min 1989a). This difference in socioeconomic status between the early 1970s occupational immigrants and recent relative immigrants was found in other studies of Korean immigrants and other Asian immigrant groups (Carino *et al.* 1990; Hurh and Kim 1988; Park *et al.* 1990). Since more recent immigrants have acquired lower levels of education than earlier occupational immigrants, the overall educational level of Korean immigrants in the 1990 census is likely to be lower than that reflected in the 1980 census.

Heavy Christian Background

Recent Korean immigrants are also a select group in terms of their heavy Christian background. Although only a little more than 20% of people are affiliated with Christian churches in Korea (Korean National Bureau of Statistics 1987), the majority of Korean immigrants are found to have had Christian background in Korea. For example, in a survey of the 1986 cohort of Korean immigrants conducted in Seoul (Park *et al.* 1990, p. 60), 54% of the respondents reported that they were affiliated with Protestant (41.6%) or Catholic (12.3%) churches in Korea. A Chicago survey also indicates that 52.6% were Christians in Korea (Hurh and Kim 1990). Their heavy Protestant background clearly separates Korean immigrants from other Asian immigrant groups.

As discussed elsewhere (Min 1992a), three major factors seem to have contributed to the overrepresentation of Christians among Korean immigrants. First, the Christian religion is very strong among urban, middle-class people in South Korea, and as previously noted Korean immigrants have drawn largely from the urban, middle-class segment of the Korean population. Second, many Christians fled from North Korea to South Korea before and during the Korean War, and North Korean refugees, who have no strong kin and regional ties in South Korea, have immigrated to the U.S. in greater

proportion than the general population in Korea (Kim, I. 1981). Moreover, many North Korean refugees have immigrated to the U.S. during recent years, especially for the benefit of visiting their relatives in North Korea. Third, Korean Christians, who are more Westernized than other Koreans, are more likely to choose immigration to the U.S. than Korean Buddhists, Confucians, and those not affiliated with a religion. In this connection, it is interesting to note that Korean Buddhist, immigrant women in the U.S. showed a significantly high level of stress than Korean Christian immigrant women (Shin 1992). This has also contributed to the heavy Christian background of Korean immigrants.

SETTLEMENT PATTERNS

Prospective immigrants report their intended place of residence in the U.S. in their pre-departure visa interview. Immigration data based on this report provide information on the distribution of Korean immigrants in the U.S. As is clear in Figure 5, almost 60% of annual Korean immigrants have settled in seven major states—two West Coast states, four East Coast states, and

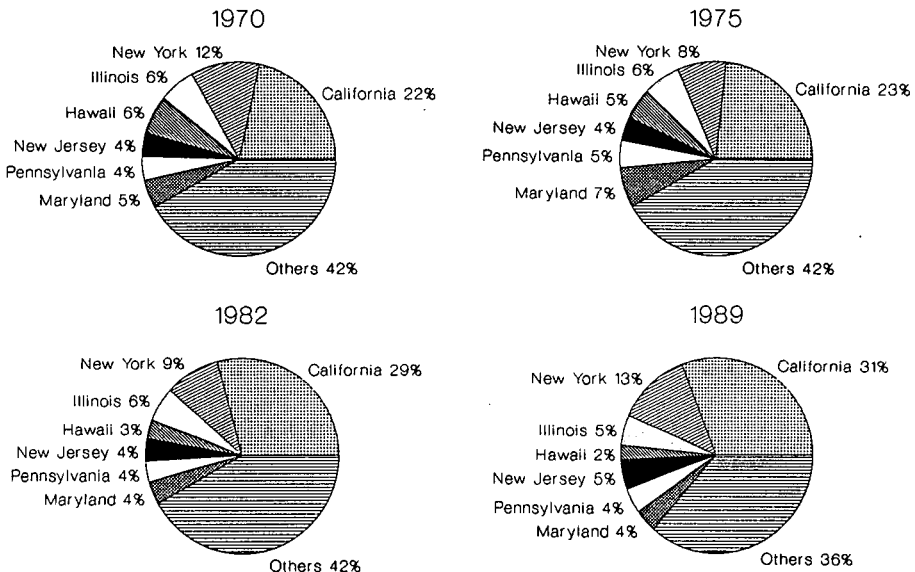


FIGURE 5. KOREAN IMMIGRANTS' INTENDED PLACE OF RESIDENCE (STATE), 1970, 1975, 1982, AND 1989.

Source: Adjusted from *Annual Reports*, 1970, 1975, 1982, and 1989 by the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

Illinois. Of course, California has received more Korean immigrants than any other states; approximately 20-30% of annual Korean immigrants chose California as the state of residence. It is important to note that the proportion of Korean immigrants who have chosen one or another city of California as an entry point increased from approximately 20% in 1970 to almost 30% in 1979 and has been stable throughout the 1980s. This suggests that Los Angeles and its neighboring areas as a major Korean enclave began to attract a large number of Korean immigrants at the end of the 1970s. In addition to the Los Angeles-Long Beach metropolitan area, Orange County, San Jose, San Francisco, and San Diego have also received a large number of Korean immigrants. Interestingly, the proportion of Korean immigrants settled in the state of Hawaii has steadily declined over the years. Honolulu, the center of the earlier Korean immigrants, is no longer an important Korean enclave.

In the beginning of the 1970s some 12% of annual Korean immigrants came to the state of New York. The proportion of Korean immigrants who chose New York decreased to 8% in the mid-1970s probably because of a bad economy in New York City associated with the city's fiscal crisis. It increased to more than 10% in the 1980s. But it increased to 13% in 1989. The vast majority of Korean immigrants who have chosen New York and New Jersey have come to the New York-New Jersey metropolitan area. The New York metropolitan area, the home of approximately 100,000 Koreans, is the second largest Korean center next to Los Angeles. Roughly one-fourth of the New York City Koreans concentrate in Flushing, and another "overseas Seoul" is in formation in the Flushing downtown area. New York has also been the major destination of Chinese and Indian immigrants. In 1985, for example, the New York metropolitan city was the destination of 27% of Chinese immigrants from mainland China and 10% of Asian Indian immigrants (Portes and Rumbaut 1990, p. 38). New York has received more Chinese and Indian immigrants than any other U.S. city in the 1980s.

Illinois, Maryland, and Pennsylvania have also received a large number of Korean immigrants. Each of these three states has a major metropolitan city — Chicago, Baltimore, and Philadelphia respectively. Thus, this reflects the tendency of the new Korean immigrants to concentrate in large metropolitan cities. The other cities with a large Korean population are Washington, Atlanta, Dallas, Seattle, and Denver.

Figure 6 shows the distribution of Koreans in major Korean states based on the 1990 census and the increase in the Korean population from 1980 to 1990. Approximately forty-four percent of Koreans reside in the West Coast states. Korean Americans are more widely dispersed in the United States, away from the West Coast, than other Asian groups. The 1990 census indicates

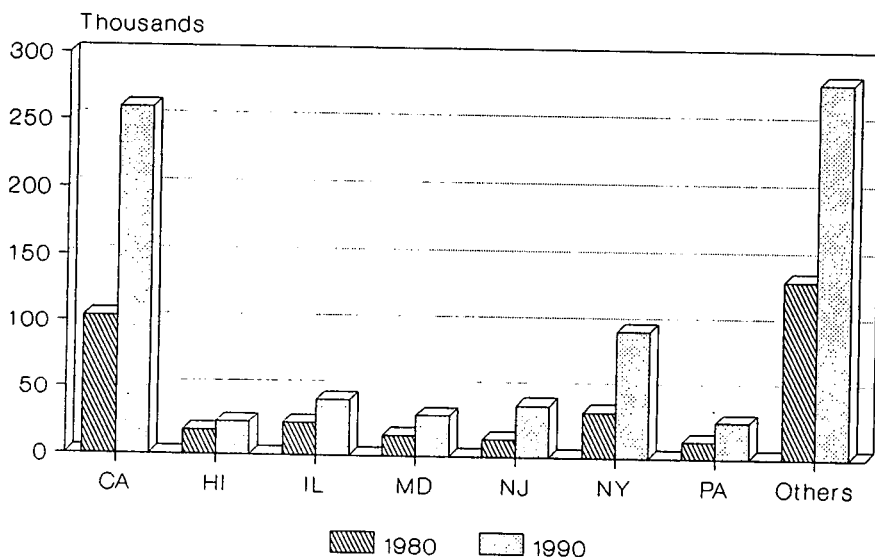


FIGURE 6. KOREAN POPULATION BY STATE IN 1980 AND 1990

Source: Adjusted from *Census of Population, 1980 and 1990* by U.S. Bureau of the Census.

that 80% of Japanese Americans and 70% of Filipino Americans are settled in the West (Min 1992b). Approximately one-third of Korean Americans live in the State of California. The proportion of Korean Americans settled in California achieved a slight increase between 1980 and 1990, and a larger proportion of Korean immigrants were settled in California in 1990 than INS data might suggest. This means that new Korean immigrants originally settled in other parts of the country have remigrated to California.

Twenty-three percent of Korean Americans reside in the states the census defined as the Northeast. Significantly, the proportion of Korean Americans settled in the Northeastern Region increased from 19% in 1980 to 23% in 1990. Two Northeastern States in particular achieved much higher growth rates than other states in the 1980s; the Korean population in New York and New Jersey respectively achieved a 180% and 200% growth rate in comparison to 125% for the total Korean population in the United States. By contrast, the Midwest Region achieved a much lower growth rate than the national average. A picture emerging from these figures is the tendency of Koreans to concentrate in two areas, Southern California connecting Los Angeles and Orange Counties and the New York-New Jersey metropolitan area. More and more new Korean immigrants are expected to choose one of these two areas for settlement in the future.

SUMMARY

The Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 abolished discrimination based on national origin and Asian exclusion, which has encouraged immigration from non-European countries, particularly from Asian countries. South Korea has been one of the major source countries of the new immigrants since the liberalization of the immigration law. Koreans ranging from 30,000 to 35,000 have been annually admitted to the United States as formal immigrants since the mid-1970s. As a result, the Korean population in the United States has achieved a ten-fold increase over the last two decades, reaching nearly the one million mark in 1992.

Many new Korean immigrants have chosen the path to U.S. immigration attracted by a higher standard of living. Whereas a better economic opportunity in the United States is a pull factor for the new Korean immigration, political problems, social insecurity, and fear of another war in South Korea are push factors. South Korea has made great improvements in economic, political, and social conditions during recent years. Moreover, the possibility of major military conflicts in Korea is very slim as North and South Korean Governments have made some positive measures to reduce tensions and establish communications during recent years. These improvements in Korea have mitigated the influx of Koreans to the United States over the last few years. In addition, South Korean Government has taken some measures to discourage sending orphans to the United States. Given these changes, it is expected that the immigration flow of Koreans will continue to decrease in the future. A large number of high school graduates cannot go to college every year, as colleges and universities in South Korea can accommodate only one-fourth of the candidates. Thus, a better opportunity for children's education is likely to be the major pull factor for Korean immigrants to the United States in the future.

Like other new Asian immigrant groups, the new Korean immigrants are characterized by urban, middle-class, white-collar background, and a large proportion of those Korean immigrants admitted in the early 1970s were professionals. Although revisions of the 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act in 1976 almost put an end to Korean professional immigration, even recent family preference immigrants have much higher socioeconomic status than the Korean general population. Another important characteristic of the new Korean immigrants is their heavy Christian background. Although Christians constitute no more than 20% of the Korean population, the majority of the new Korean immigrants have come from the Christian population in Korea. Moreover, many non-Christians in Korea have started attending

the Korean church in the U.S. Consequently, Korean churches play an important role in Koreans' community activities in the United States.

In terms of demographic characteristics, the new Korean immigrants are characterized by a sex imbalance in favor of women, which makes an interesting contrast with the numerical dominance of men among the earlier Korean immigrants. The frequent marriages of Korean women to U.S. servicemen, the immigration of many Korean nurses in the early 1970s, and the tendency of U.S. citizens to adopt more Korean girls than boys have contributed to the sex imbalance. In the early 1970s the vast majority of Korean adult immigrants were young, economically active people and few elderly Koreans immigrated to the United States. However, this trend has recently changed as more and more Korean immigrants have become naturalized citizens and thus have invited their elderly parents.

Traditionally, Asian Americans have concentrated in the West Coast States, particularly in California. The new Korean immigrants are no exception to this general pattern, as 42% concentrate in the West and 32% in California. However, the new Korean immigrants are more widely scattered away from the West than other Asian groups. The Los Angeles-Long Beach area in particular has become the largest Korean concentration and a Korean territorial community known as "Koreatown" has been established close to Los Angeles downtown. The New York-New Jersey area has also attracted a large proportion of the post-1965 Korean immigrants and another "overseas Seoul" is in formation in Flushing, New York.

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