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# Challenges and changes in the parenting experiences of Korean immigrants in New Zealand

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# Challenges and changes in the parenting experiences of Korean immigrants in New Zealand

## Abstract

Immigrant parents are often confronted with the challenging task of reconciling cultural differences with regard to socialization practices. This paper explored the parenting experiences of 21 Korean immigrant parents of young children (ages 6-10), after immigrating to New Zealand. Most parents reported positive parenting changes following their migration to New Zealand, including greater encouragement of their children's autonomy and decreased emphasis on children's academic performance. The findings also highlighted challenges, such as parent-child disagreements and reduced parenting self-efficacy as parents adapted and adjusted to the new cultural context. In addition, the study identified some unique parenting challenges faced by fathers and Korean transnational parents.

## Keywords

Korean immigrant parents, parenting challenges, parent-child relationship, parenting practices, New Zealand

## Introduction

Immigration poses pressures on immigrant parents attempting to adapt to a new environment that is physically, socially and culturally different from their country of origin (Cheah et al., 2013). In the process of immigration, parents are often exposed to several acculturative stressors including the challenges of adapting to unfamiliar parenting styles, which can lead to stress (Bornstein and Bohr, 2011). With the rapid growth in the number of immigrants in Western countries, there has been a corresponding increase in the demand for research to provide information to improve our understanding of parenting within the context of immigration (Cheah et al., 2013; Costigan and Koryzma, 2011; Kim et al., 2013).

The current study focuses on Korean immigrant parents in New Zealand (NZ), a relatively young and skilled immigrant group. Migration from a number of Asian countries has increased over the last 20 years and this growth was mainly driven by increased economic, political and cultural connections between NZ and Asia (Friesen, 2015). This growth is illustrated by statistics showing that from 2001 to 2013, the number of people from the four major countries of birth of immigrants from Asia (China, India, the Philippines and the Republic of Korea) increased from 87,906 to 220,200. All four ethnic populations in NZ are projected to experience growth (Research New Zealand, 2014). Korean immigrants comprise the fourth largest Asian ethnic group in New Zealand, with 26,604 people (Research New Zealand, 2014). The Korean population in NZ differs from Korean immigrant populations elsewhere, such as Canada and the US, because Korean immigration to NZ is comparatively recent, with most immigration occurring over the last two decades, facilitated by business investment or high socio-economic pathways offered by the NZ government. However, Korean migration to NZ, as with the US, is motivated by the aspiration to secure a better future for their children (Chang et al., 2006; Choi and Kim, 2017). Increasing immigration to NZ in recent decades, thus, make it imperative to learn

more about these immigrant families. Some evidence suggests that when Korean immigrant parents decide to migrate to NZ, they may leave their homeland with a great sense of hope of building a new life, including strong expectations about better educational opportunities for their families and children (Chang et al., 2006). However, the same study found that for many, this dream was tempered by the reality (e.g., difficulties of fitting into the new society, discrimination and social exclusion) or actual experience of living in NZ.

## Parenting and culture

Parents' views about parenting and how they care for children are influenced by a range of contextual variables, including social class, religion, and ethnicity and culture (Bornstein, 2016). A definition of culture that many scholars agree with is that culture embraces patterns of beliefs and behaviors, acquired through socialization, that distinguish social groups (Boyd and Richerson, 2005). While theory and research often emphasize cross-cultural differences, it should be acknowledged that many developmental milestones, parenting practices and family processes are likely to be similar across cultures (Bornstein and Lansford, 2010). What may vary according to culture are parents' ideas about how to rear children, what traits in children are desirable, and parents' childrearing practices, which are influenced by cultural forces, such as current trends on childrearing, advice from family and friends, and observations of parenting practices of other parents (Bornstein and Lansford, 2010).

However, when parents migrate to a new culture, some of their parenting beliefs and practices may be challenged as they encounter new socialization goals and childrearing practices in their host culture (Cheah et al., 2013). Within this context, parenting becomes a complicated interplay between enculturation and acculturation. Immigrant parents, then, must negotiate new cultures and decide which practices to retain from their indigenous culture and which new conventions to adopt (Bornstein and Bohr, 2011). There is some evidence that

among immigrant families, parenting beliefs instilled in their culture of origin may endure when they relocate to countries that advocate different parenting beliefs (Bornstein and Cote, 2001). On the other hand, some cultural elements may be discarded quickly.

The few existing studies of the parenting challenges of Korean immigrants have been limited to specific topics, such as barriers to participating in school-based programs and intergenerational acculturation conflict (Bang, 2009; Choi et al., 2013). The conflict may be more pronounced among children of immigrants in general because they are being socialized into different cultures. For example, a qualitative study of Korean-American parents of adolescents by Choi et al. (2013) reported that the majority of parents perceived that their children were becoming less respectful to adults the longer they lived in the US. As a result, these parents struggled with parent-child relationships as they felt inadequate, ashamed and powerless. This type of acculturation is known as acculturation-based conflict which is rooted in cultural value differences between parents and children and is viewed more negatively and as a threat to relatedness with parents rather than the normative assertion of autonomy (Juang et al., 2012). While the study by Choi et al. (2013) provides some insight into the parenting stress of Korean immigrant parents, their findings were based on a sample of parents of adolescents and the results may be different for Korean immigrant parents of younger, school-aged children. Given the different normative developmental changes and parenting issues faced by parents in middle childhood compared to adolescence (Collins et al., 2002), further research is needed to explore the parenting challenges of Korean immigrant parents with children between the ages of 6 to 10 years. Furthermore, there is limited research on Korean immigrant fathers' perceived parenting challenges. Our study tries to address these gaps in the literature.

**Korean transnational mothers**

Among the subgroups of transnational families worldwide are Korean transnational migrants that have come to be known as *kirogi*[1] or wild geese families. The *kirogi* is a split-household transnational family where one parent, often the mother, accompanies the child/ren overseas to English-speaking countries such as NZ and the U.S. while the other parent, often the father, typically remains in Korea to support their family‘s overseas stay financially (Chang and Lee, 2017).

Mothers from this type of family arrangement are often referred to as *kirogi* mothers among Koreans. Korean *kirogi* mothers are attracted to NZ by the relaxed lifestyle, acquisition of English language, and cleaner and less crowded living conditions. In particular, what distinguishes NZ from other destinations is that it allows children of all socio-economic backgrounds to have study abroad opportunities with relatively affordable tuition fees (Kim et al.,2005), thereby making it one of the most popular study destinations in recent years among Koreans.

The transnational family arrangement of *kirogi* families not only changes the roles and relationships within the family but also significantly affects family functioning (Kim et al., 2014). These families, especially mothers may face more post-immigration challenges than two-parent immigrant families as they have to adjust to a new country, new parenting role and family separation. Unlike two-parent immigrant families living together, living as *kirogi* meant renegotiating traditional gendered roles. That is, in addition to their traditional responsibilities, mothers had to assume masculine roles at home to fill in for the physical absence of their husbands. Such new responsibilities among *kirogi* mothers were associated

[1] The term *kirogi* (wild geese in English) parents refer to parents whose spouses remain in Korea while the other spouses currently reside in NZ. Settled immigrant parents refer to both parents residing in NZ. The term immigrant parents in this study is used as the generic term that includes both *kirogi* parents and settled two-parent immigrants

with very high stress levels and mixed feeling toward their roles as mothers (Jeong and Belanger, 2012; Jeong et al., 2014). Similarly, for the husbands based in Korea, they had to take care of traditionally feminine tasks, such as cooking, cleaning and doing the laundry (Lee and Koo, 2006).

On the other hand, *kirogi* mothers appreciated the greater freedom and independence in addition to reduced conflicts with their in-laws (Jeong and Belanger, 2012). Overall, little information currently exists about *kirogi* parents in NZ and, as a result, little is known about how they raise their child(ren) as a solo parent, given their transnational set-up. Therefore, more research is needed in this emerging area of *kirogi* parenting to better understand their unique role and experiences. Another value-added aspect of this study is the inclusion of both *kirogi* and settled immigrant parents in the same study. This will allow the parenting challenges experienced by *kirogi* and settled Korean immigrant parents to be compared and to see whether there are challenges which are unique to each group.

The issues raised by Korean immigrant parents in this study may provide new insights into how they perceive typical Korean and NZ parenting practices; changes and challenges in parenting after immigration, and their views about the parenting patterns in Korean and NZ cultures. This paper gave opportunities to Korean immigrant parents to reflect on their parenting practices in NZ, to review changes in parenting and parent-child relationships after immigrating to NZ, and to understand how perceived parenting challenges affected Korean immigrants' parenting practices in NZ.

## Methodology

### *Participants*

The sample consisted of 21 Korean immigrant parents with at least one child between the ages of 6 and 10 years living in NZ. All the parents in the study were Korean immigrants.

Their ages ranged from 33 to 50 years with a mean age of 39 years. All parents had a university degree and two fathers had postgraduate qualifications. The length of time since their immigration to NZ ranged from 1 year to 16 years, with an average of 5 years. Thirteen parents had daughters whose mean age was 9 years while eight parents had sons whose mean age was 8 years. Of the 21 interviewees, five were *kirogi* parents (four mothers and one father) and the rest were co-residing in NZ with their spouses. Table 1 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the participants.

**Table 1.** Characteristics of interviewed parents.

| **Mothers from settled immigrant families** | **Age** | **Child** | **Child's age** | **Length of residence in NZ** | **Income (in NZD)** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mira | 46 | Daughter | 10 | 16 years | 40,001-60,000 |
| Wendy | 50 | Son | 7 | 9 years | 80,001~100,001 |
| Hyun Ju | 41 | Daughter | 5 | 8 years | 60,001~80,000 |
| Aelyn | 42 | Daughter | 10 | 10 years | 60,001~80,000 |
| Su | 34 | Daughter | 10 | 4 years | 40,001-60,000 |
| Jung Ah | 43 | Daughter | 10 | 1 year | 40,001-60,000 |
| Min Jung | 39 | Daughter | 6 | 5 years | 80,001~100,000 |
| Jiyu | 48 | Son | 10 | 14 years | 100,001~120,000 |
| Suah | - | Daughter | 9 | 5 months | 80,001~100,000 |
| Yura | 40 | Daughter | 6 | 2 years | 80,001~100,000 |
| ***Kirogi* mothers** | | | | | |
| Hemi | 32 | Daughter | 9 | 3 years | 60,001~80,000 |
| Sujin | 36 | Son | 9 | 6 years | 80,001~100,000 |
| Leah | 38 | Daughter | 9 | 4 years | 60,001~80,000 |
| Yejin | 36 | Son | 10 | 2 years | 100,001~120,000 |
| **Fathers** | | | | | |
| Minu | 40 | Son | 10 | 2 years | 40,001-60,000 |
| Dong Won | 34 | Daughter | 10 | 1 year | 40,001-60,000 |
| Jae | 38 | Daughter | 8 | 11 years | 60,001~80,000 |
| Charlie | 37 | Son | 6 | 3 years | 80,001~100,000 |
| Hansu | 39 | Son | 7 | 2 years | 40,001-60,000 |
| Jisu | 33 | Son | 6 | 6 years | 60,001~80,000 |
| ***Kirogi* father** | | | | | |
| Eun | - | Daughter | 10 | 1 year | 60,001~80,000 |

Notes: All participant names have been changed to pseudonyms. All mothers and five fathers have received undergraduate degrees while Minu and Eun had postgraduate degrees. In terms of marital status, all were married, except for Yura, who is divorced.

*Data collection*

This study was part of a larger survey of the child rearing practices of Korean immigrant parents in NZ (Lee, Keown, and Brown, 2018). This study reports the qualitative analyses of the interview data only. The parenting interview questions were originally constructed in the English language and were translated into Korean by a bilingual translator using translation and back-translation to ensure that the intended meaning of the questions was maintained. All discrepancies were discussed between the first author and translator until a consensus was reached.

*Interviews on parenting.* Structured individual interviews were designed to elicit the thoughts, opinions and feelings about parenting of Korean immigrant parents in NZ, and what changes (if any) occurred in their own parenting practices after migration. The interviews focused on specific areas that we wished to gain a better understanding of: (1) What has changed about your parenting since you immigrated to NZ? (2) What are the major barriers to childrearing in NZ for you?; (3) How do these barriers affect your relationship with your child? (4) What are the most difficult challenges you have had to deal with as a *kirogi* parent in NZ?; and (5) Tell me about your strengths as a *kirogi* parent. The first question was aimed at investigating whether there had been any changes in their parenting since moving to NZ in regard to their parent-child relationship. The second and third questions sought to gain an understanding of how perceived childrearing barriers affected Korean immigrants' parenting practices in NZ. The last two questions were asked of *kirogi* parents only to examine their perceived barriers and perceived personal strengths as a solo parent in NZ.

*Procedures*

After receiving ethics approval from the University's Human Participants Ethics Committee, participants were recruited from Korean churches, Korean language schools and the Korean Single Mothers Support Group. In addition, notices on Korean community websites, the Korean community newspaper and in places frequented by Korean parents were posted. Research findings suggest that about 90 percent Korean immigrants in NZ attend church (Meares et al., 2010), thus the recruitment through churches enabled the study to reach a good representation of Koreans in NZ.

Interview consent forms were attached to the end of the questionnaire that parents completed for the larger survey study. Participants who were willing to participate in an individual interview provided their contact details to the first author and were later contacted to schedule a home visit. Written consent was obtained from all study participants. All interviewees asked that the interview be conducted in the participants' first language, Korean.

All interviews were conducted at the participants' homes. At the start of the interview, the first author gave detailed information about the research purpose and explained the nature of the research. After securing their consent, the interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed verbatim by the first author and a native Korean postgraduate student. The interview translation from Korean into English was also done by the first author. On average, the interviews lasted for 30 minutes.

*Data analysis*

In order to ensure accuracy of translation, the translation was overseen and double translated by the first author. The transcribed and translated data were then analyzed using inductive

content analysis as outlined by Thomas (2006). This approach is a method for identifying meaningful themes by analyzing documents systemically and objectively. The intention is to describe the phenomenon in a conceptual form. All transcripts were read several times to gain a broad understanding of the content. Based on the initial reading, a coding system for the major themes was inductively developed and identified. Next, quotations within the transcripts that corresponded to each theme were identified. This process of 'repeated reading' (Braun and Clarke, 2006) promotes data immersion and fosters greater familiarity with the data and the insights they suggest. Upon completion of coding and classifying themes, these were reviewed and discussed between the researchers and where discrepancies arose, a consensus was reached. Both researchers agreed on the four major themes and the nine sub-themes.

The main themes that emerged from the interviews were: (1) Changes in parenting after immigration; (2) language barrier; (3) unique challenges experienced by *kirogi* parents; and (4) greater independence, responsibility and self-reliance. In the discussion of the findings, the relevant quotations which illustrate the sub-themes are presented below.

## Changes in parenting after immigration

### *Encouraging independence*

Korean immigrant parents talked about changes in their parenting practices in NZ, one of which relates to fostering children's independence. While some children in Korea depend on their parents to do everything for them, especially with regard to their daily routines, three Korean immigrant mothers were opposed to raising their children in such a dependent manner, after they moved to NZ. These parents criticized the Korean way of parenting as being overprotective of children, which they believed will keep children from developing autonomy. Their views suggested a belief that children of overprotective parents have fewer

opportunities to develop autonomy. Their perception of NZ parenting practices included an emphasis on the child developing a strong sense of independence. One mother illustrated this point with a comment about how she changed her parenting by talking to her NZ colleagues at work:

> NZ parents encourage their children to act independently and I like that. So, I'm raising my child freely and independently now (Min Jung, mother of a 6-year-old girl).

One mother who has lived in NZ for 16 years reported that she had an opportunity to observe NZ mothers and was able to compare her parenting with her counterparts in Korea:

> When I visited Korea, what I realized was that Korean parents are just too protective of their children. I felt that I'm doing my job well as a parent, by not being too protective. I think it is more efficient to raise children independently like NZ mothers (Mira, mother of a 10-year-old girl).

A few *kirogi* parents commented that by dealing with difficult situations well by themselves, they provided their children with a model of independence and responsibility. For example, they provided opportunities at home (e.g., helping with simple household tasks) for children to gain independence and handle their own daily self-care and chores.

> I learned to be independent and even my daughter is learning how to do things for herself and taking part in household chores. She helps me a lot these days. She prepares a simple meal when I'm busy and she folds her clothes after laundry (Hemi, mother of a 9-year-old girl).

*Less parental pressure on children*

A number of Korean immigrant parents shared their perceptions that parents in Korea tend to pressure their children to succeed in school and limit their social activities. In NZ, they changed toward valuing a safer, amicable and less-competitive academic environment that allowed both parents and children to enjoy their lives. Both mothers and fathers reported shifting from a strict and intense focus on academic achievement to increased child-initiated activities and emphasis on fun. For example, one mother spoke about decreasing the

academic pressure she previously placed on her child and encouraging her child to take a break:

> When we were in Korea, I pressured my child to study harder and so she did not have enough time to hang out with her friends. But in this country, the study pressure is not as strong as in Korea so I let my child to enjoy her life and allow her to take a break (Suah, mother of a 9-year-old girl).

One mother realized that she has become less emphatic on children's academic performance in NZ; her friends in Korea also mentioned the change in her parenting in relation to children's education.

> I have changed a lot. If I were still in Korea, I would probably have sent my children to cram schools. But, I'm not like that here anymore. I'm surprised at myself because I see myself not pushing and pressuring my children. When I talk to my friends in Korea, they said that I have changed (Jung Ah, mother of a 10-year-old girl).

Similarly, the fathers in this study also appeared to put less academic pressure on their children. One father spoke specifically of wanting to provide his children with a more relaxed and tolerant environment as well as more opportunities for physical activities.

> Children should just play on the field or ground with bare feet. I even let my children play out in the rain. Childhood is all about fun. Korean children in Korea are very physically weak because they don't exercise (Minu, father of a 10-year-old boy).

*Reduced parenting self-efficacy*

In contrast to the positive changes mentioned above, some parents reported feelings of reduced parental self-efficacy and parent-child disagreements which negatively impacted parent-child relationships. Some parents expressed concerns about the effects of their limited English language skills on their children, such as limiting opportunities for their child to make friends and perceived negative impact on their child's personality. As one mother stated:

> I'm seen as a passive mother to my child because I cannot communicate well at my child's school, I'm worried this might affect my child's personality (Su, mother of a 10-year-old girl.

Further, parents perceived that their low English language proficiency made them seem less capable and confident as parents and a disappointment to their child. As one *kirogi* mother commented:

> It is sometimes difficult to help with my child's homework. Because my English is bad, it takes a lot of time to interpret and understand so I cannot explain to him straight away. So, I think my child may feel disappointed in me (Sujin, mother of a 9-year-old boy).

One father expressed similar concern and anxiety that his lack of English communication skills might unfavorably affect his child in the future:

> I worry my poor communication skills might negatively affect my child as he grows (Jisu, father of a 6-year-old boy).

*Parent-child disagreements*

Another notable change that seems to have occurred in parent-child relationships after migration was the increase in parent-child disagreements, perhaps illustrating clashes with traditional Korean parenting values. Three parents reported parent-child disagreements in the areas of independence and roles in decision making. Parents stated that their children began to disagree with them and express their opinions openly. As one mother said:

> In Korea, when parents tell their children what to do, we expect children to do so without a word on most occasions. However, my son has started to raise his voice and he disagrees with me sometimes. He was not like that before. When he is told what he should do, he will not simply say 'yes.' He expresses his opinions why he does not want to follow. Then I start to yell and it turns into an argument (Jiyu, mother of a 10-year-old boy).

One father admitted that generational gaps exist between parents and their children who were born in NZ, especially when his child is always expressing her opinions.

> When I was my daughter's age, I was never outspoken or freely expressed my opinions when I disagreed with my parents. But my child has a different opinion to mine and disagrees with me. It may be due to a generational gap or cultural difference. I was raised in Korea and my children were born here and raised in NZ (Jae, father of an 8-year-old girl).

*Greater involvement with the children*

All fathers admitted that they had spent very limited time with their children in Korea. Since migrating to NZ, fathers who previously left parenting responsibilities to their wives had become much more actively involved in parenting. They said that they had made significant changes in the amount of time spent with their children, emphasizing closer relationships with their children. One father expressed satisfaction with his involvement in parenting:

> I appreciate the fact that I'm able to help my wife with household duties and I get to spend more time with my children after work (Charlie, father of a 6-year-old boy).

*Decline of authority*

Some fathers said they felt their parental authority was being undermined when they could not discipline their children which, they believe, is essential to prevent or reduce behavioral problems. They were still figuring out how to maintain parental authority while disciplining their children in a reasonable manner.

> The father is a main authority figure for a child. I feel, if I don't discipline my child in a strict way, I'm afraid my child will be spoiled and disobedient. I feel I need to be stricter but I don't want to use harsh discipline (Minu, father of a 10-year-old boy).

*Language barrier*

Irrespective of the parents' length of residence in NZ, perceived low English language proficiency was the most frequently cited problem related to: (1) parent-teacher communication difficulties, and (2) difficulties communicating with other parents and making friends.

Almost all the parents reported that real and perceived low English language proficiency was the major reason that hindered them from communicating with school teachers. This in turn, led to some parents expressing loss of self-confidence and feelings of frustration.

> Although my English is not good, I still attend parent-teacher meetings. I understand what the teacher talks about but I feel frustrated when the teacher often did not understand my English (Wendy, mother of a 7-year-old boy).

Similarly, *kirogi* parents reported that their difficulties with the English language constrain them from providing adequate support to their children.

> I think my lack of confidence due to my English may affect my child. Compared to NZ parents, immigrant parents play a limited role regarding school involvement due to their insufficient language proficiency (Eun, father of a 10-year-old girl).

In addition, parents reported that they were not able to communicate effectively and meet other parents to share experiences in educating their children due to their limited English language skills. They also expressed frustration at being not able to interact with the parents of their children's school friends.

> I would like to have a conversation with other parents when I visit my child's school but I find it difficult to keep a conversation going due to my limited English. I get frustrated with myself (Dong Won, father of a 10-year-old girl).

Two mothers relied on their children as translators with school teachers because their limited fluency in English made it difficult for them to express their views and concerns regarding the progress of their children:

> As an immigrant parent, English is the biggest obstacle. It is just always too difficult to speak to the teacher. I can partially understand what my child‘s teacher is saying to me but I just cannot speak and express my opinions well in English. I want to hear from my child‘s teacher about my child‘s academic progress and what she is good at or lacks at, but I have to ask my child about her progress and rely on her interpretation (Yura, mother of a 6-year-old girl).

## Unique challenges experienced by *kirogi* parents

### *Sole parental responsibility and lack of parenting support*

All *kirogi* parents said that their lives had dramatically changed upon their arrival in NZ and they were often challenged by the demands of fulfilling both parental roles and shouldering double responsibilities of educating and parenting, and trying to be both a mother and a

father. *Kirogi* parents stated that they must bear the burden of childcare and domestic responsibility alone. As one mother remarked:

> Parenting is a huge responsibility. Now I'm here, I have a double responsibility, 'mother and father.' In the physical absence of my husband, I sometimes feel great pressure to fulfil my parenting duties because I have to carry domestic and child care burdens by myself and it is difficult to negotiate parenting responsibilities with my husband because he is in Korea (Yejin, mother of a 10-year-old boy).

One *kirogi* father pointed out that he now assumes the tasks that he previously considered as mothers' tasks or those done by his wife, such as buying bedroom curtains or clothes and hair accessories for girls. He described his experience:

> When we were in Korea, my wife used to take her out to the mall and I just sat and waited around the corner. But now, if I go to the shopping mall with my daughter, I let her choose what she likes or what she needs because I know nothing about girl's clothes and hair accessories or curtains in the girl's bedroom (Eun, father of a 10-year-old girl).

*Greater independence, responsibility and self-reliance*

Despite their loneliness and difficult challenges, life in NZ allowed all five *kirogi* parents to become stronger and more independent and better able to take care of themselves, their children, and their home on their own. They learned how to handle any type of situation that came their way, how to juggle multiple tasks at the same time, and the importance of always trying and moving forward:

> I'm learning to cope better as a parent, individually and independently. Since raising my daughter alone and living in a foreign country, I have learned how to manage our lives better and deal with household matters and problems. I learned to be independent (Hemi, mother of a 9-year-old girl).

*Kirogi* mothers also experienced more responsibilities as a household caretaker and decision-maker due to the absence of her husband.

> I feel that I can take the big step towards independent living without my husband. I actually feel I have become much more independent, responsible and stronger than before. I do everything here by myself...dealing with housing, sending my child to school, making a decision on buying a car, and home management. Now, I make decisions based on my own needs and wants for my child without input from my

> husband who was the sole decision-maker of the family when we were in Korea (Sujin, mother of a 9-year-old boy).

*Kirogi* mothers' physical distance from the Korean household pulled them out of their traditional role and duties as daughter-in-law in Korea. For example, one mother expressed the feeling of escape and a sense of freedom from in-law pressures and duties.

> I feel less stressed here in NZ because I'm free from my in-laws. You see, in-law relationships in Korea are very complicated and stressful, and difficult. My duties as a daughter-in-law in Korea were burdensome. I was actually glad when my husband planned a kirogi arrangement. In NZ, I just feel so relieved and I'm happy that I don't have to worry about my in-laws while I'm in this country (Leah, mother of a 9-year-old girl).

## Discussion and conclusion

This study has provided some insights into the challenges of Korean immigrant parents in NZ . The interviews with 21 Korean immigrant parents have also provided new insights into how parenting changes and challenges influenced their relationship with children after immigration to NZ. The identified themes and subthemes are discussed in relation to the literature in the following section.

Our results indicate that Korean immigrant parents were exposed to choices about what is "positive" and "negative" for them and their children considering both their traditional culture and the new cultural context. During the interviews, the parents were able to identify what they viewed as typical parenting practices in each country. For example, one central issue was about child independence and the contrast between parental protection in Korea and the emphasis on child independence in NZ. The protective parenting that is highly valued in Asian culture was deemed no longer desirable in the new cultural context by some Korean immigrant parents. Through their interaction with NZ mothers, some Korean mothers learned about parental practices such as fostering independence in children. Parental protection in the Asian cultural context reflects the parental intention of keeping young

children safely nearby and fostering dependency on parents for meeting the child's needs (Wu et al., 2002).

These mothers saw some positive aspects of perceived NZ parenting practices that they appreciated and eventually adopted. They believed that parental protection will not promote children's autonomy. Some Korean immigrant parents, thus, introduced changes in their parenting practices—such as allowing their children to develop more independence by giving them tasks— after moving to NZ. In relation to the larger quantitative study, which included this sample of Korean immigrant parents, the 21 parents were found to be moderately directive. This was based on a scale that measured parenting practices emphasized in Korea, such as devotion (i.e., parents showing empathic understanding of their children), involvement (i.e., taking care of child needs), directiveness (i.e., demanding and telling children what to do), shaming and encouraging modesty (Lee et al., 2018. Fostering children's independence is less likely to occur if parents are highly directive.

At the same time, an additional theme emerged, that of Korean immigrant parents easing their academic expectations of their children's performance, which seemed to result from being exposed to and influenced by the less-competitive educational environment in NZ. Their parenting styles shifted from a strict and intense focus on academic achievement to supporting more child-initiated activities, such as free play or allowing children to make their own play choices. Considering that Asian immigrants have high educational expectations for their children regardless of their children's age, it is interesting to note that all of the Korean immigrant parents in this sample disliked the overemphasis on children to succeed academically and spoke about decreasing this academic pressure. All fathers also appeared to be adopting a more Western parenting style in the sense that they seemed to be less willing to put academic pressure on their children, and they tended to view childhood as a time for play and fun. These apparently similar patterns of acculturation in parenting practices for mothers

and fathers contrast with culturally defined gender roles in Korean society. Traditionally, Korean fathers are more concerned with strict behavioral self-regulation (e.g., proper behavior) of the child than the child's emotional stability (Kim and Choi, 1994).

While most parents experienced positive parenting practices associated with immigration, some parents shared their feelings of helplessness and frustration, which derived from being unable to support their children in their school work due to their lack of English proficiency. Some parents also feared that their limited English might negatively affect their child's personality, and make their children feel disappointed at them. Studies on Asian immigrant children have contended that the parents' lower proficiency in English can create scorn or embarrassment in the child (Kim et al., 1982). The present study also found that these mothers became more frustrated because their limited English proficiency hindered them from building effective partnerships with teachers and participating in school activities.

A few Korean immigrant parents experienced conflict with their more acculturated, NZ-raised children and these parent-child disagreements appeared to be related to culture clash. Their children freely expressed their opinions when they disagreed with their parents. From the point of view of the parents' cultural beliefs, talking back to parents and disagreeing with parents is disrespectful. Therefore, they were angry and felt uneasy when their children asserted their independence by disagreeing with them, which departs from Korean notions about acceptable child behavior. In hierarchical Confucian cultures, such as Korea, communication tends to be unidirectional, emanating from those in authority to those in subordinate position (e.g., parents to child rather than child to parent (Uba, 1994). Thus, disagreeing with parents is considered as disrespectful. Therefore, children's expressiveness and assertiveness may be unacceptable to the first-generation Korean immigrant parents. These findings suggest that, in order to support their child growing up to be a Korean-New

Zealander, parents need to understand the need to be flexible in their parenting approaches and to be aware of why these parent-child conflicts might occur.

One notable change for fathers was that they had become more actively involved in parenting. At the same time, they reported that one of the challenges of raising children in NZ was their children's diminishing obedience and their sense of inadequacy in their ability to exercise their parenting authority. However, NZ provided them with the opportunity to give their children better educational environment. Hence, one must accept that there are some losses along with the gains of migration (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

Unique to this study was the finding that the Korean *kirogi* parents reshaped their parenting roles and renegotiated gendered roles within the transnational family context. In the context of their transnational setup, all the *kirogi* parents were challenged and pushed to go beyond the traditional or sociocultural expectations of being a mother or father in Korea. While some parents expressed feelings of freedom from the expectations of their in-laws and spouses, all reported experiencing difficulties with role alteration within the family caused by the absence of their spouses. *Kirogi* parents were also often overwhelmed and challenged by the demands of fulfilling both parental roles. This finding is not surprising given that the transnational mothers from various ethnic groups reported difficulty with extended parenting roles after immigration (Kim et al., 2014). However, a novel finding was that *kirogi* parenting and its challenges gave parents an opportunity to cope better as a parent independently, despite the difficult parenting challenges. In a foreign country, the *kirogi* parents had to do everything by themselves in addition to their traditional responsibilities (e.g., managing household duties and childrearing). The somewhat forced and sudden need to be independent resulted in all *kirogi* parents gaining the ability to survive a challenging situation and becoming emotionally and physically independent. *Kirogi* parenting was therefore perceived as an experience that led to personal growth and maturity and boosted self-confidence. These

results are consistent with previous studies which found that living separately promoted the *kirogi* parents' independence and personal growth (Jeong and Belanger, 2012; Jeong et al., 2014).

Findings from this study have some implications for schools, given that parents' limited English proficiency was a significant barrier to building effective partnerships with teachers. Additionally, some parents mentioned wanting to access language support, such as interpreter services, from the schools. While it may not be possible for schools to provide this level of assistance, where feasible, hiring bilingual staff would facilitate communication between parents and teachers.

Parents expressed a desire for English classes, thus, disseminating information on English language learning opportunities available in the community would be helpful. The Korean parents in this study tended to access the services offered by churches and the Single Mothers Support Group; the information about English language learning opportunities can be coursed through these organizations. Findings from the current study also suggest some content that could be provided in parenting programs for Korean immigrant parents to help prevent and reduce parent-child conflict. These include content on potential intergenerational conflict and parenting strategies that could be used to help reduce conflict.

In the future, a larger, more representative survey of Korean immigrant parents can be designed. The present study has sampling limitations. It primarily included well-functioning families—the parents who participated in this study might have a high interest in parenting and parent-child relationship which inclined them to participate in the research. Also, it is possible that parents who migrate may be more open-minded in their thinking whereas parents who remain in Korea might be more traditional. These factors may have influenced our findings. Future research should include a larger and more diverse sample of Korean

parents. It should also aim to recruit a larger sample of fathers to further examine the changes in father involvement and fathering challenges reported in this study.

Future studies also need to cover questions such as parents' views on changes in child autonomy, whether parental academic pressures have decreased since immigrating to NZ, and what English language learning opportunities parents were aware of and had accessed. With respect to *kirogi* parents, survey questions could tap psychological and emotional states, such as whether parents feel more independent and liberated. Thus far, the parenting practices and views of Korean *kirogi* population is under-studied and is an important gap to fill in future research.

Finally, contemporary Asian immigrants in NZ are transnationals who sustain a strong connection to their homelands and actively engage in border-crossing activities through the use of information and communications technology, ethnic based media and frequent visits (Chan, 2017). Therefore, the role of transnational and local social ties in shaping contemporary Korean immigrant parenting should be considered in future research.

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