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KOREANS BETWEEN KOREA AND NEW ZEALAND

International Migration to a Transnational Social Field

BON GIU KOO

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology,
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ABSTRACT

This study examines the experience of transnationalism within a migrant group from Korea to New Zealand. It focuses on the transnational practices of participants from the Korean middle class in the recently created social field spanning the home country and New Zealand.

The aim of this research is to document the migration processes of Korean international migrants and to explore the meanings of this movement for the participants and the sending and receiving countries, drawing on the theoretical framework of transnationalism. This research is a multi-sited ethnography conducted in several cities in Korea and New Zealand. The main research method is life history interviews along with participant observation.

The research found that a new social field between the two countries has been created since New Zealand allowed mass immigration from Korea, and some Korean middle class have used this transnational social field to amass symbolic capitals for their status escalation and reproduction in Korea. As Korea had undergone rapid neo-liberal reform, after the economic crisis in 1997, this social field has been used by Koreans to access membership of another nation state which has a well-equipped welfare system and to gain entry to the education system in an English speaking country. In terms of settlement, these immigrants concentrate on achieving a transnational livelihood, building their community as part of the transnational social field where they can be embedded simultaneously in Korea while living in New Zealand. They adopt transnational and cosmopolitan identities to maximise their opportunities in this social field.

Korean international migration to New Zealand is one example of global population movement where people use transnationalism as a passage created by globalisation to cope with crises caused by globalisation itself. Here transnationalism is a deterritorialisation strategy against nation states’ monopolistic hegemony in defining their nationals’ social mobility channels.

Key words: Middle class, Immigration, Transnationalism, Social field, Korea, New Zealand
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