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KOREANS BETWEEN KOREA AND NEW ZEALAND

International Migration to a Transnational Social Field

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology,
The University of Auckland, 2010

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

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost I would like to thank all of the participants in this research for letting me into their lives and sharing their life histories with a great openness. Special thanks go to church members in the Korean Presbyterian Church in Auckland and Korean Community Wellness Group members. They helped me not only as interviewees and informants but also as the closest friends in New Zealand with whom I could get through my immigration process.

This thesis could not have been completed without my two supervisors, Associate Professor Julie Park and Dr Changzoo Song. Julie guided me from the entrance to the Anthropology Department all the way to the completion of this thesis with great patience and enduring support. She has never lost her patience despite my slow progress in work and English, and always encouraged me to go forward as well as showed concern for me and my family. Changzoo, School of Asian Studies, was an excellent mediator between me and Julie and me and the scholars in Korean studies in Australasia. He acted as a language bridge between me and Julie in supervision, which greatly facilitated communication between three of us and offered me the opportunities to present part of this research and meet many scholars and colleagues in Korean studies.

I also wish to thank the PhD writing group members in the Department of Anthropology. Professor Cris Shore, Dr Christine Dureau and Dr Mark Busse kindly facilitated my sessions and commented on my writings and all my colleagues in the group (Relinda, Tony, Sally, Anneka, Marama, Sarah, Hadas, Jane, Micah, Michelle, and Natalie) encouraged me to participate in discussion regardless of my poor English as well as gave me valuable feedback on my writings which became part of this thesis. I would also like to thank Dr Bruce Floyd in the Department who understood my struggle with English and was willing to be my talking companion on many occasions.

I thank those who generously provided me with financial support during my PhD course. This included an International Doctoral Scholarship from the University of Auckland, PBRF funding awards from the Department of Anthropology, and New Zealand Postgraduate Study Abroad Awards from Education New Zealand.

I am greatly indebted to my family. My sisters, Young Wha and Yun Jeong and sister in law, Kyeong Nam and her husband, Jong Won helped me by taking care of my

personal business in Korea and made a financial contribution to me. With their help I could concentrate on my thesis.

I would like to save my biggest thanks to my mother, wife and daughter. My mother who is still the strongest supporter of mine helped me financially, emotionally and spiritually during my PhD course as she always did. Without her support I could not have been through this tough time. My wife, Young Hee, and my daughter, Bit Saem, have been through this tough time with me without any complaint. I cannot find proper words to thank Young Hee for dedicating herself to me and our daughter and Bit Saem for giving me great joy with her being, growth and achievement. This thesis is dedicated to them. My only regret at this moment is that my late father who passed away one year ago cannot be with me. I believe he rests in peace.

May God, who has guided me so far, bless all these people.

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