

*Intergenerational Comparison of Korean Community in Chile:
1.5 and 2nd Generation Profile*

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Introduction

Studies on adaptation process and profile of Koreans overseas are majorly studies taken place on the biggest communities that reside primarily in the US, China, Japan and former URSS².

Koreans in Latin America are a relatively new community and small in size, that represents 1,4% of the Koreans overseas population, thus studies on this groups have generally been limited to a reduced number of mainly descriptive papers. Within this reality, the Argentine and Mexican cases distinguish counting with researches from historic, sociologic, anthropologic perspectives³.

For the Chilean case, we also count with a very scarce number of studies, in which a comparative research of Korean community with other ethnic minorities with presence in the country stands out⁴.

Within this scenario, the present research has as a general objective to contribute with descriptive information on Korean community in Chile, using as reference theoretical frameworks and findings from studies conducted for the US case.

According to our view, the adaptation reality of Korean community in Chile presents convergence with the US case in terms of their adaptation process to the host country.

In specific terms, the present research aims to deepen the descriptive information on young Korean-Chileans (1,5 and 2nd generation) in comparative terms to the findings we can observe for the 1st generation.

² This four cases account for 91% of the total 6,6 million Korean overseas population (MOFAT 2007)

³ See Mera (1998, 2004, 2005), Kwon (1998), Suh (2004), among others.

⁴ See Mella and Stoehtel (1999).

The study combines exploratory and conclusive elements. We have gathered information from the existent published articles on the matters, in depth interviews and data obtained through the application of a survey to a total of 113 adult members of the Korean community in Chile⁵.

The information obtained is analyzed grouped in terms of four dimensions we have categorized as: economic activity, discrimination, educational attainment and social up scaling and dependence to the ethnic network.

Born entrepreneurs?

According to the existent bibliography, Koreans overseas have characterized themselves by developing independent economic activities⁶. In the US case, Koreans have historically shown the highest level of self employment within ethnic minorities⁷, accounting with business formation rates 70% higher than the US public at large (Noland in Bergstein, 2003: 61).

This phenomenon is explained among other factors, due to disadvantages that ethnic minorities face in the labor market caused by ignorance of the American social system, language problems, cultural shocks and discrimination⁸.

In the Chilean case, we observe similarities to the pattern that has been studied for the US case and others as Japan, China and former URSS (Yoon, 2005 and others) and for the Latin American cases (Kim, 2006 and Mera, 2006).

⁵ Although the survey didn't strictly rely on a probability sampling method it was intended to obtain the most representative sample of respondents as possible in terms of sex, age and generation.

⁶ See Yoon (2005). It analyses patterns of adaptation of Korean migrants in China, CIS, Japan, United States and Canada.

⁷ See Min (1990).

⁸ See Cummings, Bonachic and others cited by Kim, Hurh and Fernández (1989).

According to the information obtained the majority of Korean adult community in Chile develops independent economic activities⁹, being this in small business owner format or independent professionals.

This reality is understandable taking in account the barriers to develop professions from “origin” by the same restrictions observed that Koreans face in the U.S case¹⁰. In the Chilean case as the host country, we observe language barriers, ethnic and different educational models and discrimination in some degree that have been previously studied as explicatory variables to the preponderance of independent economic activities for migrant minorities.

In the Chilean case, Koreans find themselves in a Spanish speaking country, with a Hispanic-Catholic cultural background and tertiary educational models with important differences to the Korean case. Added to this element, showing differences to the US case, the host community has a very low level of historic interaction with ethnic minorities of immigrants. Immigrants have historically represented less than 5% of Chilean population and according to national census (INE Chile, 2002) actually this number has reduced to 1,2% of the total population.

This elements are joined by the existence of successful entrepreneurial opportunities based in the comparative advantages that Koreans residents in countries of lower level of development. This element has been motivated by the possibility of development of trading and commercial opportunities based in the higher level of development of Korean industries and language and network resources.

In the case of the Korean community in Chile, there is a high dependence on imports and wholesale and retail sales activities in apparel concentrated in the commercial area known as “Patronato”.

⁹ According to our survey, 90% of respondents develop independent activities.

¹⁰ See Kim, Hurh and Fernández (1989).

In historic terms, there was also a development of confection activities but smaller than in the Argentine or Brazilian case (Stroehrel, 1997 and Mera, 2005).

We observe a low level of dependence to the mainstream Chilean market as labor source for the development of adult Koreans in Chile, in line to findings observed in the US case.

Nevertheless, we also observe an important difference to the American case. Koreans in Chile show a low level of dependence to the ethnic economy. According to our survey, only one third of Korean adults in Chile manifest to participate as employers or employees of Koreans, very different to the US case in which more than 50% of Koreans depend on ethnic economy (Berstein, 2003).

In relation to the minority that develops a professional activity, we observe a high level of preponderance of “independent professions” in line to the U. S case (Yoon, 2005). The information obtained, shows the existence of lawyers, medical doctors, professors that account for the 7% of the sample.

Separating the information within the community into the 1st generation and 1,5 - 2nd generation as a group (diminishing the interference of language barrier and education overseas as barriers for “professional exercise”), in the first generation there is no respondent working as a professional with 87% of the group manifesting to develop imports and sales. Regarding Koreans formed in Chile, 20% of them answer to be working as professionals.

Another, finding is that for the 1st generation, 63% of answers consider that their actual economic activity is not related with their studies and this number drops considerably for the 1,5-2nd generation group to 36%. An additional, interesting feature is that only in this group we find the incorporation of exports from Chile as a sub activity developed accounting for a change in the resources being employed, being them Chilean network to develop suppliers, knowledge on Chilean products with market potential in Korea, among others.

An additional interesting phenomenon observed, is that in the 1,5 -2nd generations that manifest to be “employed” in companies, the majority works in “Korean companies”, being them Korean branch offices in Chile. Regarding this subgroup, according to information obtained through in depth interviews, it characterizes for considering that their management of Korean language and culture are the main assets to explain their presence in the companies they work for, and in terms of their professional profile various elements are interesting to consider.

First of all, they stand out for managing not only Spanish in bilingual level, some Korean and a high proficiency in English. Also, an interesting element is that they do not necessarily come from traditionally business related backgrounds as management or engineering undergraduate studies.

We could observe the presence of veterinarians, designers, among others in junior management positions, explainable by their language and cultural managing ability. An interesting element that came out during the study is that in the case of 1,5 and 2nd generations working as employees in Korean companies, there was a higher presence of female Koreans rather than men. According to the interviews, in part may be explained by the need of taking in charge of family business by their male siblings.

Discrimination?

According to existent literature, Koreans overseas have suffered disadvantages and different levels of discriminations from receptor countries that have determined their adaptation processes.

We can point out “social under grading” and “status inconsistency” (Min, 1990) experienced by Koreans immigrants especially in the US case. Even though it is one of the communities with the longest settlement history (Yoon, 2005), the phenomenon of the

“periferization of Korean immigrant workers” is observed, especially in the labor market independent if they are professionals or non skilled workers (Shin and Chang, 1988).

This phenomenon is transversal to different immigrant groups and explains the concentration of immigrant workers in periphery areas and the dependence of the non professional immigrants to the ethnic enclaves through part time jobs (Bonacich and Modell among others cited in Shan and Chang, 1988).

This reality is studied with the concentration of Korean communities in the small business ownership in industries underdeveloped by natives as: confections, pedicures, laundries and in locations of low income, of ethnic minorities and high level of insecurity (Cheng and Espiritu, 1989).

The Chilean repeats the pattern described above, the community residing majorly in special terms in the Municipio de Patronato, Recoleta, one of the commercial areas of the highest level of violence, an area that was traditionally developed by other ethnic minorities as the Palestinians arrived in Chile.

Also, according to our study, in spite of the high educational level of the community the majority develops an economic activity that has no relationship to their university degrees, this response is independent to the amount of years lived in Chile, gender and generation.

Also, the community manifests to have felt some level of discrimination by the Chilean community, even though they don't share the opinion that Chileans are discriminatory with Koreans. This discrimination perception doesn't shows to be related to the level of proficiency of Spanish, educational attainment, nor number of years lived in Chile, but it is a shared appreciation of the major part of the adult community.

Searching for an explanation to this element, according to the experience of 1,5 -2nd generation cases, during interviews, we could observe that they manifest that the main source of this perception resides in the sense of discrimination on the streets, explained

basically in the staring of people rather than having experienced further discriminatory experiences.

In terms of discrimination when meeting people, with peers at school or searching for a job, the majority consider that they haven't felt discriminated by Chileans. Some even pointed out, during interviews, that they felt in the case of job searching a positive attitude towards Korean origin young professionals. Regarding this element, several interviewees pointed out that in their opinion, Korean professionals were highly appreciated by Chileans due to the fact that they position themselves with the commonly related as "Asian values" as hard workers and respectful among other positive appreciation that they consider to be part of their identity as Koreans.

High Ethnic identity determinant of social networks

Koreans characterize themselves for being one of the most homogeneous ethnics in the world, as a result of geographic, historic and cultural variables. This element has resulted according to different studies in a high interest and effort to maintain and transmit Korean values, language and traditions especially in Korean overseas.

Within this context, in the case of the US, several studies have analyzed ethnic organizations and its role in the socialization of Korean immigrants. In the different Korean communities' existent in the US, we can find ethnic organizations in the religious field (mainly Presbyterian and Methodist Churches), Korean language schools, cultural associations, alumni clubs among others that interfere the socialization process of Koreans in their residence countries.

In the Chilean case, in spite of the relatively short history of settlement of the Korean community in the country, and its reduced size, specially compared to the US case, we count with a highly organized and institutionalized community. An "Association of Korean community in Chile" operates in the country since 1978 with an office, a newspaper is

distributed every two weeks since 1994, Korean language is being taught during weekends since 1983 (Korean Association in Chile, 2007) and finally almost a dozen of different sized religious organizations congregate followers during the weekends (majorly Presbyterian and Methodist Churches).

Within this context, Churches are the ones that show the highest level of participation and affiliation in line to findings for the American case¹¹.

To understand this phenomenon, we must take in account the different roles that Churches play in the social dimension of immigrants based in the existent studies of the US case (Min, 1992) that gives us a framework to understand the phenomenon that is repeated in the Chilean case.

According to Min (1992), churches play a central role in Korean ethnic communities playing roles that can be summarized in: support network, cultural heritage maintenance, social services and social status, therefore being one of the ethnic organizations with the highest level of participation from Korean immigrants in the US.

In terms of the role of support or “fellowship”, we observe that churches play a similar role that synagogues play for Jewish communities overseas, having a central role as space for interaction and friendship development, in response to the “alienation” immigrants suffer in realities with high differences in terms of culture, race and language. Within this context, religious organizations develop activities that allow the socialization within the ethnic group through activities such as lunch after mass, gatherings, seminars, etc.

For the Chilean case, we observe that Churches –in line to the US case- count with lunches, organizations of the community in subgroups according to the “neighborhood” of residence within others, to promote the development of recreational instances for the members. Sunday lunches after liturgy are an institutionalized event to which the major part of

¹¹ More than 70% of surveyed answer to be active participants of Korean churches, the

members assist, and after which football matches, meetings among teenagers, among others are developed and have a central place in the formal and informal network formation.

Also, according to the studies taken place for the US case, churches play a central role in the cultural heritage maintenance, in a formal and informal way. In institutional terms, Korean language classes are held in the church infrastructure and in an informal way, the use of Korean is promoted and the respect for Korean tradition is taken care among community members. In the case of Korean churches in New York, 50% of them count with Korean language teaching programs (Min, 1992).

For the Chilean case, a Korean Language Weekend School exists since the late 70s in Santiago, to which the majority of parents send their children for which Churches don't play an institutionalized role in the language teaching but do play a central role in the promotion of the use of the language.

Also, churches play a central role in social services. According to the US case, they play a central role in the giving information for settlement, legal advice and support, choosing of schools for children, health system and access to financing (Min, 1992). In the Chilean case, Churches also play a central role in the support network for new arrivers, and also "kyes" are organized generally within members of the same churches.

Regarding, the role that churches play for social status giving, especially to adult men, as was developed previously, taking in account that the Korean immigrant community characterizes by a high educational level but that have to develop as immigrants businesses of low social recognition (Kim, 1981 and Min, 1992), a social "downgrading" takes place, motivating the supplementation of this need though other roles that enhance their status perception.

Even though, a big number of Koreans reach economic success through their self employment, "blue collar" businesses they develop don't help them to upgrade their social status (Min 1984, 1988, 1992). This element is related to the search for status giving

positions within the ethnic group, in which churches provide important religious and non religious positions (Min, 1992).

This phenomenon is repeated in Chile, with an important percentage of its members holding positions related to the Church as “elders” or “deacons”, who are also recognized as leaders within the community¹².

Another dimension we analyzed regarding the impact of the ethnic network in the socialization dimension was the ethnic dependence in terms of social activities and the friendship.

Within this dimension, 63,5% of the community manifests that the majority of their social activities are held with Koreans, this indicator showing no variation related to the number of years of Chilean residence.

Regarding friendship, 80% of the surveyed point out that more than half of their closed friends are Koreans or Korean descendants.

Analyzed in comparative terms, in the case of the 1st generation, 86,4% of their friends are mainly Koreans and for the 1,5-2nd generation this number drops to 52,3% showing a increase in the friendship development with Chileans with generation passing.

Regarding the Chilean networks, 1,5 -2nd generation Koreans point out that their Chilean friends are school or university peers and consider it easy to make friends with Chileans.

Consulted regarding the reason for which nevertheless their friends are mainly of Korean origin, in depth interviews allow us to give as an explanation that they share cultural codes, understand themselves better among Korean-Chileans, rather than with Chileans. Elements

¹² As an indicator, all the presidents of the Korean Community Association from 1978 up to now, with the exception of only three didn't possess relevant positions in the main two churches (Koreans in Chile Association 2008).

as food eaten in their houses, parental relationship, family history, values, etc are better understood and shared with other Korean-Chileans.

Additional to this element for “natural bonding” explained by similar family experiences, cultural codes and values, we were also able to observe a special interest and seek to develop and preserve Korean friends as a mean to maintain their cultural and ethnic identity.

Related to this item, they explain their participation in Korean activities as the attendance to Korean Church, in which we see the same rate of affiliation of 1st generation, being this 73% of the surveyed, by their interest in preserving their Korean roots.

Within the same line, consulted about their disposition towards marriage with Chileans, even though we see a lower rate of opposition they would have if their children would marry a non Korean (69,7% of rejection in the 1st generation vs 43,3% in the 1,5 -2nd generation), the answer to their own disposition shows that only 40% of surveyed don't manifest any problem to marry a Chilean, being this rate comparable to the ones that answer that they would “go out” but not marry a Chilean.

Regarding their identity, a bigger group manifests to feel more Korean than Chilean, and only a minority of 27% feels more Chilean than Korean.

In terms of their language proficiency, comparing both generations, we can observe a lower degree of Korean spoken and written proficiency that 1,5- 2nd generation have. 87% manifest to have a perfect management of spoken and written Spanish but this number drops to 21,7% for spoken Korean and to 17,4% for written Korean.

On regards to the use of Korean, 60,9% speak only in Korean with their parents, with 26,1% speaking half Spanish and Korean. Nevertheless, with their siblings 65,2% speak mainly or exclusively in Spanish vs only 13% that does in Korean.

An interesting data is that with other Korean origin friends, they speak mainly in Spanish among them. Counting with 30,4% who uses only Spanish among friends, mainly in Spanish with 21,7% and in Spanish with some Korean 13%.

According to our study, the major source of formal training in Korean language was their attendance to Korean Language Weekend School, to which 72,7% of the surveyed attended and for which they attribute an important or quite important role in the formation of the Korean identity.

High educational level as key for economic success?

Studies of the economic impact of Korean immigration in the US (Bergstein et al, 2003) reach to establish that there are positive correlations between the variable of presence of Korean diaspora and economic results in US states¹³.

Within the explicatory variables of these results they name: high levels of savings, business formation and educational attainments specially compared to national average (Noland, 2002).

In several researches taken place to study the economic adaptation of Korean diaspora, special attention is given to the economic success attained by 2nd and 3rd generations related to the high level of educational level they present¹⁴.

Regarding Chilean case, we observe that Korean Diaspora in Chile stands out in educational level. 91% of the surveyed counts with tertiary studies, (including attended university and finished university degree) highly superior to Chilean reality in which only 23% of the adult population (25- 34 years) counts with complete tertiary studies (Chilean

¹³ According to the study, they reach an estimation that US GDP World rise in 0,1- 0,2 percentage points doubling the number of Korean immigrants due to the impact of economic success they attain as a group

¹⁴ Korean diaspora in the US shows an average year income of USD 50.000, very near the average American and an average per capita income of USD 20.000. Nevertheless, substantial differences are shown analyzing 2nd generations, that count with incomes 40% higher than national average and educational attainments that double the national average of the US (Noland, 2002).

Ministry of Education 2008). Also, in line to studies in the US we observe a positive correlation between generation of belonging and educational level attained.

In descriptive terms, 63% of the 1st generation counts with a university degree, for the 1,5 - 2nd generation this number reaches the 83,3%.

Analyzing in comparative terms, in the 1st generation we don't count with cases with attained graduate studies, but in generation 1,5-2nd we already observe the presence of graduate level degree possessing. What is also interesting, is that the 83% of the ones that don't count with graduate degrees have an aspiration to attain one in the mid term.

Regarding, the educational profile of 1,5 -2nd generation they mainly assisted private schools and in terms of undergraduate studies we observe a high dispersion of specializations ranging from medical school, engineering, design, humanities, etc in different institutions.

Regarding, economic success indicators, asked for monthly budget of families¹⁵ we can observe preliminary indications of economic success, taking in account that even though it is not a representative indicator; the median of answers was USD 5000 a month (being the mode USD 10000). Numbers highly superior to the Chilean average, being USD 2000 a month the percentile 90 for Chilean household.

To complement this information, the main residence area for Korean community in Chile is Las Condes an accommodated area and also asked for the health care system; more than 75% of the surveyed depend on the private health system as indicators of a privileged economic reality, specially compared to Chilean average.

¹⁵ Most of answers were lost, since the majority of the surveyed didn't answer this question.

Conclusions

We can observe that the adult Korean community profile in Chile shows several common elements to the ones that have been studied for the US case.

In terms of the economic or professional activity, we can appreciate a high level of concentration of self-employment that resides mainly in imports and sales, characterized by a low level of dependence to mainstream Chilean labor market. Also regarding the segment of professionals, a minority within the group, they exercise “independent professions”.

In terms of disaggregated information regarding first generation and the 1,5-2nd generation, we are able to observe that with the generation passing there is a growing number of Koreans working as “employees” and mainly in Korean company branch offices based in their language and cultural managing abilities. Another interesting finding is that new generations’ economic activities show a higher relation to their studies.

Other finding and that converges with the US case, is the high level of dependence in ethnic networks in the socialization dimension. For the Chilean case, the participation in ethnic networks doesn’t seem to show a difference depending on the generation of belonging. Among ethnic networks, Churches showed to play a central role in line to studies conducted in the US. The participation levels maintain high independent of generation passing, being this instance one of the main instances for the development of “Koreanness” awareness and language preservation.

Additional to the participation in Korean churches, new generations also maintain a high level of dependence of their friendships in Korean origin peers with whom they develop the major part of their social activities. Regarding a possible cause of this phenomenon in discrimination, an initial analysis shows us that the explanation seems to reside in a deliberate search of preservation of Korean identity and natural bonding elements rather than a forced relationship caused by barriers to develop networks with nationals.

According to the information obtained, the major part of the community doesn't consider that Chilean community generates barriers for Koreans.

Regarding to attitudinal elements, we can observe that new generations show a lower level of rejection to interracial marriage with Chileans in comparison to the 1st generation, nevertheless, there is a preference for marriage with a conational.

In terms of educational attainment, we observe that new generations show a higher education level compared to their parents, confirming the high level of investment done by 1st generation immigrants as a source for economic and social upgrading for their children.

In the Chilean case we can establish that 1,5 -2nd generations seem to count with elements for economic advancement in Chilean society not only through the continuing of family businesses that already show indicators of economic success, but also through the access to mainstream labor market that Korean multinationals are giving through their investments in Chile. Also an interesting finding is that they show to seek to maintain the community's values for which they show to feel a high pride, one of the patterns that have been analyzed by the segmented assimilation theory.

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