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An Exploration of the Korean-Canadian Community in Vancouver

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An Exploration of the Korean-Canadian Community in Vancouver

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Abstract: This paper is the first in a series of two studies (the other is “Transnational Economies of Export Education”). Here, a current portrait of the Korean-Canadian community in Vancouver is provided. Drawing upon qualitative and quantitative sources of information, the overall characteristics of Korean settlement and economic development are examined. Some major issues arising within the community are also discussed. The community has experienced a major transition, with the recent influx of new immigrants and temporary residents. Two key ingredients in this change have been: the rising number of immigrants who have been arriving with higher qualifications and significant financial assets; and the unprecedented flows of foreign students and visitors who have arrived since the visa exemption granted to Koreans in the mid 1990s. However, it is too early to understand the full impact of these changes. To some degree, Korean-Canadians are experiencing the same difficulties in the Vancouver labour market as other newcomer groups. In an effort to overcome these difficulties, Korean-Canadians have, in large numbers, established their own businesses. This process actually began in the 1960, but we are now seeing the emergence of new forms of Korean-Canadian entrepreneurship, especially in the field of “export education.” The emergence of the industry reflects and heightens the growing significance of transnationalism. The second half of this pair of working papers on the Korean-Canadian community in Vancouver will explore the emerging industry of export education in greater detail.

Introduction

Since the end of World War II, Canadian cities have experienced significant socio-economic changes that have been registered in their cultural landscapes. Along with economic restructuring and changes in the demographic structure and living arrangements of native-born Canadians, the flow of international migration has been an important factor in this urban transformation (Murdie and Teixeira 2000). Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver, the three largest census metropolitan areas (CMAs) of Canada, have drawn much attention from policy makers as well as academics because these cities have attracted large proportions of new immigrants whose impacts have been notable. Arriving from non-traditional source countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America, many new immigrants have enriched the cultural mosaic of Canadian urban landscapes. This “new” immigration began in the 1960s when the Canadian government removed discriminatory selection policies, and has intensified since the 1980s when the government of Canada decided to double the target of its annual immigration intake.

With the influx of new immigrants, mainly from Asia, Vancouver has experienced dramatic changes in its ethnic composition. 2001 census data reveal that about 40 percent of Vancouver’s population was born outside Canada (Statistics Canada 2001). Among immigrants, the number of Koreans has been growing the most rapidly, with some. 69 percent added to the population of this group since 1996. The growth rate of Koreans in Vancouver has been even higher than that of Toronto (49 percent), the city with the largest Korean population in Canada. In addition to about 24,000 Korean-Canadians with permanent residency rights, Vancouver has become the most-favoured city for Korean visitors and students holding temporary visas. In 2002, the Korean consulate general office in Vancouver estimated that there were about 10,000–15,000 Korean students with a temporary permit in the city, pursuing various educational goals (the Vancouver Korean Press 2003).

The increasing Korean population has resulted in several residential and commercial concentrations in Vancouver. According to the 2001 census, Koreans seem to be scattered throughout the region but their recent growth has been largely a suburban phenomenon. Except for those international students (and sometimes their lone parents) who choose their residences in the downtown area and Vancouver's west side, a large proportion of recent Korean immigrant families have settled outside the City of Vancouver. Some pockets of Burnaby, Coquitlam, Port Coquitlam, Surrey, Langley, and Maple Ridge have experienced higher growth in their Korean-origin population than other municipalities.

In response to the suburbanization of the Korean-Canadian community, several commercial concentrations have emerged, forming small scale 'ethnoburbs.'¹ For the last two decades or so, the strong presence of the ethnic Chinese population and their residential and commercial development projects in Vancouver have sparked public attention (Edgington et al. 2003; Ley 1999). The socio-spatial expansion of the Korean-Canadian community, however, has been less controversial but, at the same time, largely neglected by commentators. Given the growing visibility of ethnic Koreans in Vancouver and the lack of formal knowledge about this group, research effort on the community as a whole seems long overdue.

This paper aims to sketch out the development of the Korean-Canadian community in Vancouver over the last four decades. Drawing upon both quantitative and qualitative data sources, I show how new immigrants and temporary migrants are providing new forms of community development and discuss a series of issues raised by community members. Focusing on the entrepreneurial activities of Korean-Canadians, I explore how their locational preferences have

¹ The term, ethnoburb, indicates new ethnic enclave economies associated with ethnic residential clusters in contemporary North American suburbs (Li 1998)

helped transform and revitalize several stagnant commercial areas of Vancouver and may be in the process of transforming them into Korean ethnoburbs. Finally, I suggest that all these changes require further research that will situate the Korean-Canadian community in a broader context of transnationalism.

Data Sources

The data used in this paper were initially collected for a collaborative research project with Dan Hiebert. We explored the business activities of Korean-Canadian entrepreneurs in export education between Vancouver, Canada and Korea.² With so little information existing about the Korean-origin group in Vancouver, it was necessary for me to collect background information and build a community profile at the outset of our research. This paper is a by-product of that preliminary effort.

I used both quantitative and qualitative information. First, I compiled statistical and existing data from various sources. In order to capture information on the total ethnic Korean population rather than focusing on the immigrant population only, I collected data for those of 'Korean visible minority status' from the 1996 and 2001 censuses. Data specially ordered from the LIDS³ (Landed Immigration Data System) were used to identify the social and economic characteristics of Korean immigrants who arrived between 1980 and 2000. Special reports published by CIC (Citizenship Immigration Canada) also provide important insights on recent immigrants and international students in Canada. Lastly, I have obtained relevant information about the community through local ethnic media. The websites of three Korean local newspapers (*The Korea Daily*, *The Vancouver Korean*

² For the separate report on the project, see Hiebert and Kwak 2004.

³ The LIDS (Landed Immigration Data System) is administrative data collected and managed by CIC (Citizenship Immigration Canada). Since the data are collected only once at the time of arrival for each immigrant, we cannot detect any longitudinal changes after the time of initial settlement. However, LIDS records useful and detailed background information about immigrant inflows each year.

Press, and *Coreamedia*) have been regularly visited to retrieve information on day-to-day events and issues in the community.

Two different qualitative methods were employed: participant observation (3) and individual interviews with significant members of the community (17). The seventeen informants include two community leaders, three Korean social workers, and ten entrepreneurs and business professionals who are in the international education and tourism sectors. I also interviewed a Korean realtor and an investment advisor employed within the BC Ministry of Competition, Science and Enterprise. The two community leaders were representatives of ‘the Korean Society of BC for Fraternity and Culture’ and ‘the Korean Businessmen’s Co-op Association of BC’. The three social workers were working in SUCCESS and MOSAIC at the time of the interviews. Among the ten business managers and professionals, there were four travel agency operators, three international education consultant agency owners, and three ESL school coordinators. I did not select my interviewees on the basis of their sex but later I found that I interviewed almost equal numbers of men (9) and women (8). In terms of time of arrival, however, there were more new immigrants (11) than earlier arrivals (6).

The year, 2003, was the fortieth anniversary of Korea’s first diplomatic relations with Canada. There were many official events and cultural festivals organized by the Korean Consulate General office and different community organizations in Vancouver. Some of the events that I attended were:

1. The second Korean Heritage Day Festival: (The Plaza of Nations: May 31, 2003)
2. A Korean Immigration Workshop: Jointly organized by the Korean Consulate General & CIC Pacific Regional Office (Italian Community Centre: June 23, 2003)
3. The Korean National Choir Performance: Organized by the Korean Society of BC.(New Westminster Massey Theatre: June 24, 2003)

A study based on interviews with a small number of community members with different backgrounds could produce incomplete and inconsistent results. For various reasons, there could be many things unsaid about organizations and the community itself. In this project, I believe these observations at significant events were helpful additions to the interviews as a means of understanding the discursive relations between organizations and members of the community in general.

Korean Migration Flows to Canada

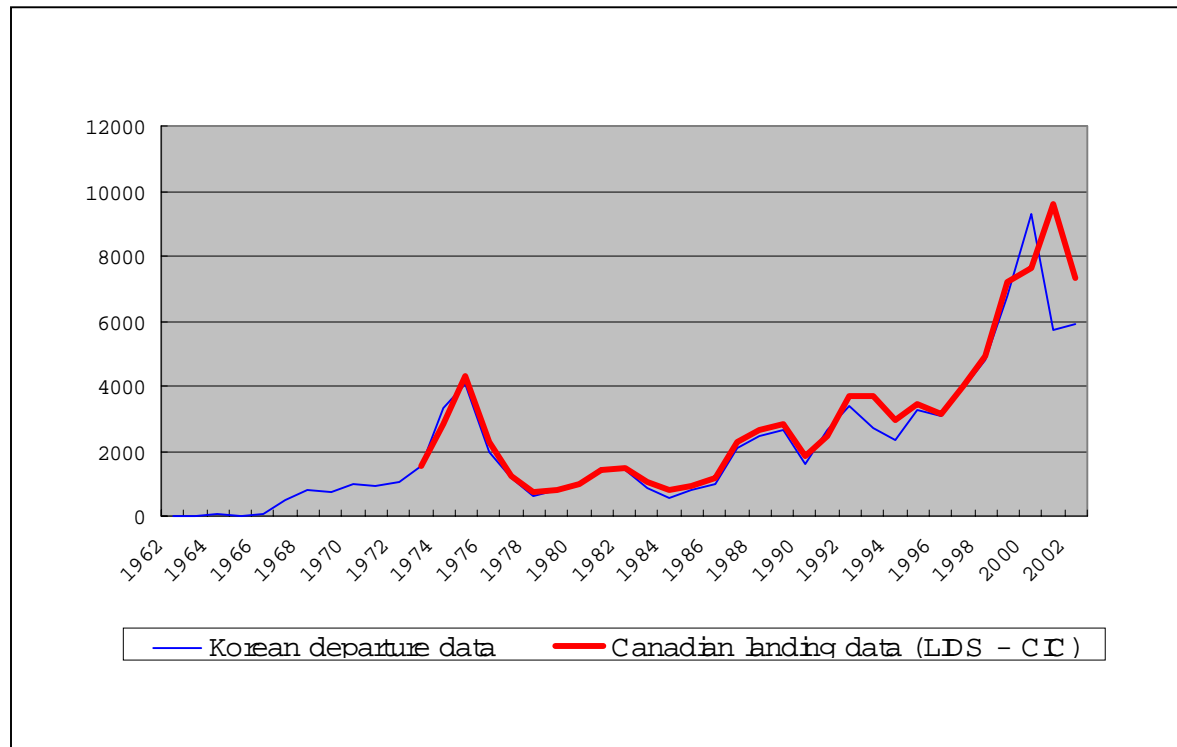
1. Immigration

International population movement can be classified crudely into two types: permanent migration (immigration); and temporary migration for employment, education or casual visits. However, as Castles and Miller (2003) argue, international migration has been more complicated and diversified in recent years. In this section, I examine three distinct types of Korean migration to Canada: permanent; temporary visits by international students; and temporary visits related to tourism.

Korean immigration to Canada began officially in 1962, after the government of Canada removed discriminatory policies against people from countries outside Europe and the Commonwealth. The first diplomatic relations with the Korean government in 1963, and the introduction of 'point system' in 1967, accelerated migration from Korea. Except for the period from 1977 to 1986, Canada has experienced a steady growth in the total Korean-Canadian population in each of the last four decades. Korean immigration into Canada in the late 1990s has been unprecedentedly high (see Fig. 1). According to the Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Korean MOFAT 2001), in 1999, the number of Korean emigrants who reported their landing

destination as Canada surpassed those who did so for the United States, the most favoured destination for Koreans for almost 35 years.

Figure 1. Korean Immigration to Canada (1962-2002)



Source: The Korean MOFAT & CIC reports

Shifting our perspective to Canada, between 1999 and 2001, Korea was the fifth largest immigration source country, with an annual number of more than 7,000 arriving each year (CIC 2002). After the newly revised immigration policy in June 2002, this number will most likely fall. In 2002, about 7,300 Korean landings were processed but the number had already dropped by 24 percent from the previous year. Although CIC reduced the threshold of passing points for skilled workers in the following year, the latest system still values higher standards of educational qualification as well as proficiency in English or French—meaning that fewer Koreans will be admitted. There were also changes in the business immigration programs that will have an impact. Those qualifying as

entrepreneurs now need at least one year of actual business management experience (www.cic.gc.ca), for example.

The revised policies, while reducing the scope of application for permanent migration from Korea, may encourage more temporary migrants from Korea to apply for permanent residency rights while staying in Canada. According to the Korean MOFAT (2004), more than 2,000 Koreans residing in Canada reported their acquisition of permanent residency rights to local consulate general offices.⁴ With a rapidly growing number of international students and visitors from Korea, the trends suggest that migrants with temporary permits will be an important source of future immigrants.⁵

In terms of entry class, most recent Korean immigrants have arrived in Canada as economic immigrants rather than through the family reunification or other programs. The economic class consists of five sub-categories: assisted relatives, other independents (skilled workers), entrepreneurs, self-employed, and investors. The business program includes the last three of these sub-categories. About 76 percent of the total Korean-Canadian immigrant population arrived as economic class migrants in the period from 1991 to 1995. The percentage climbed to 91 percent between 1996 and 2000 (LIDS 1980-2000). The number of business class migrants who arrived between 1991 and 2000 is especially significant, reaching nearly 20,000. The annual number of Korean business class applicants and their dependants has been large enough for Korea to be ranked as one of the top source

⁴ The data for local landings are only available from 2002 when the Korean MOFAT became able to collect information through consulate general offices.

⁵ In the case of the U.S. where a large pool of temporary and undocumented migrants exists, local landings have also become more common. In 2003, while there were 4,200 Koreans who reported their departure to the U.S. for immigration, more than 8,200 Koreans earned permanent residency rights in the U.S. (the Korean MOFAT 2004). It is hard to predict a long term trend for Canada here. However, I believe that more strict immigration policies, coupled with a difficult labour market situation in Canada, will result in an increasing number of local landings.

countries between 1997 and 2002 (see Table 1). This indicates that a large proportion of recent Korean immigrants are likely to be involved with business activities in Canada.⁶ The already high propensity of self-employment among Korean-Canadians will seemingly persist for some time (Ornstein 2000, Razin and Langlois 1996).

Table 1. Canadian Landings, Business Class, by Top Source Countries (1998-2002)

Country	1997		1998		1999		2000		2001		2002	
	#	Rank	#	Rank	#	Rank	#	Rank	#	Rank	#	Rank
P.R.of China	930	4	1,319	4	1,517	3	2,845	1	4,192	1	2,804	1
R. of Korea	1,775	3	1,750	3	2,700	1	2,471	2	1,918	2	1,747	2
Taiwan	3,706	2	2,338	2	2,090	2	1,203	3	1,186	3	919	3
Iran	794	5	738	5	655	5	709	5	738	5	858	4
Pakistan	757	6	415	6	382	9	447	8	960	4	544	5
Hong Kong	6,350	1	2,689	1	1,102	4	794	4	473	6	256	10

Source: Facts and Figures 1999 & 2002, CIC

2. International Students and Visitors

Many Koreans stay in Canada to pursue their educational and career objectives with temporary permits. The rapid growth of international students and visitors from Korea has been phenomenal since a visa exemption was granted to Koreans in 1994. In the late 1990s, Korea was the leading source of international student inflows to Canada (CIC 2003). The inflow dropped temporarily in 1998 as a result of the Asian financial crisis. However, the number fully recovered in 1999 and has kept growing since. There were 13,479 Korean students who received study permits to enter Canada

⁶ However, this does not necessarily mean that they are experienced entrepreneurs. As Ley (2002) found in his study of immigrant entrepreneurs in BC, Korean business migrants are less likely to have entrepreneurial experience in their country of origin. Unlike their counterparts from Hong Kong and Taiwan, most Korean principal applicants to the business program worked as managers in large corporations.

in 2001.⁷ The number of Korean students accounted for about 18 percent of total foreign student inflows to Canada in that year. In the latest report, CIC counted the number of students with an official study permit at one point in the year to estimate resident student volumes.⁸ In 2001, Korean visa students accounted for about 15 percent of the total student stock with an approximate number of 20,000 (CIC 2003). An additional data source from CIC identified more than 100,000 Korean students who applied for or renewed their study permit for the five year period from 1998 and 2003.⁹

While these numbers are already substantial, it is important to note that CIC reports do not take account of the number of students on tourist (visitor) visas. Korean students who plan to study for less than six months are allowed to enter Canada as visitors. In addition, it is tacitly known that extending the tourist visa period is not too onerous for Korean students as long as they prove their student status and financial stability. In general, interviewees in the international education industry agree that the number of students with visitor visas increases during the summer. One agency worker estimated that the average annual share of the students with tourist visas would account for about 40 to 50 percent of the total student inflow from Korea. It can therefore be estimated that, in 2001, the actual number of Korean students in Canada could have been nearly 30,000.

The inflow of Korean temporary workers has not been as significant as other types of entries. However, it has also experienced a moderate increase over the last five years. The annual growth rates have been uneven but positive, with a 25 percent increase in 1998 and another 5 percent in 2003.

⁷ To measure 'flows,' the CIC special report only counted the number of students entering the CIC system (presumably the country) for the first time. Thus, the number does not include those students who renewed their visas in that particular year.

⁸ In the report, the chosen date was December 1st.

⁹ Data source: FOSS Data Warehouse Cubes, May 27, 2003. This information has been provided by the courtesy of T. Vermette, a program specialist at CIC Pacific Regional Office.

According to FOSS data, the total number of Korean temporary workers entering to Canada between 1998 and 2003 was 10,688.¹⁰

Since the 1960s, the tourism industry has become a more important element of the Canadian economy. For the province of British Columbia, the trend has been even more significant than for other parts of Canada. Today, the tourism in BC accounts for nearly one fifth of the national tourism economy (the Coreamedia 2003). Among many contributors, Korea has become a major source of tourists to Canada, and more specifically to BC, in recent years. In 2002, more than 150,000 Koreans visited Canada and two thirds of the inflow came through BC customs.¹¹ In 2001, total spending by Korean tourists was estimated at 264 million dollars, ranking 6th among the largest overseas tourist markets (www.tourismcanada.com). According to Tourism British Columbia, Korea was the 7th largest source of visitors to Canada and the 4th largest to the province of BC in 2002 (see Table 2).

Table 2. Overnight Customs Entries to BC & Canada (2002)

Country	B.C. (% change from 2001)	Canada(% change from 2001)
U.S.A	3,774,947 (3.8%)	16,152,067 (3.7%)
Japan	273,699 (8.2%)	436,510 (4.3%)
U.K.	199,671 (- 7.2%)	749,659 (- 11.7%)
R of Ko rea	106,425 (7.3%)	151,476 (6.0%)
Taiwan	96,752 (- 8.6%)	105,139 (- 10.1%)
Australia	96,047 (- 9.5%)	157,610 (- 4.6%)
Hong Kong	86,423 (- 1.0%)	119,449 (- 5.9%)
China	77,184 (21.1%)	96,142 (18.3%)
Germany	73,127 (- 22.8%)	295,715 (- 13.3%)

Source: Tourism British Columbia (2003)

¹⁰ Again, by the courtesy of T. Vermette.

¹¹ This number does not include the number of immigrants and temporary visa holders (e.g. international students and temporary workers).

These different types of Korean migration have had major impacts on the growth of the Korean-Canadian community in recent years. In fact it would be fair to say that recent arrivals have changed the basic character of the community, a point which I will elaborate upon below. In the following sections of the paper, I discuss how the different migration flows have transformed the overall socio-economic characteristics of the community and its local landscapes. Following that, in the discussion section, I examine several issues raised within the community and suggest future research directions.

The Korean-Canadian Community in Vancouver

Reflecting on the overall trend of Korean immigration to Canada, one of my interviewees testifies that:

At that time [1981], I heard that there were about 6,000 Koreans in Vancouver. ... From 1975 or 76 to the early 1980s, in '82 and '83, there were no Koreans coming in. The community was so small that everyone knew each other. Since 1986 when the new immigration program called 'investors immigration' was introduced, some Korean investors started to come. From that point, the community began to grow rapidly. (Mr. T3, a travel agency owner, who immigrated in 1975)

As Mr. T3¹² noted, Korean immigration can be roughly divided into three different time periods: before 1976, 1977-1985, and 1986-present (see Fig. 1). Each period reflects a major revision in Canadian immigration policy. The introduction of the 'points system' in the late 1960s enabled the first large volume of Korean migration to Canada. Before that, there were a very small number of

¹² In order to keep anonymity of all respondents, I used a simple combination of alpha-numeric identification codes in the text. The first letter in the identification indicates his/her job category and the number indicates the sequence of the interview within the category. The categories are: community leaders (C), social workers (S), travel agent (T), international education agent (I), ESL school representative (E), Realtor (R), and Government official (G). For example, Mr. T3 means that the third travel agent I spoke with.

pastors and students from Korea.¹³ The more inclusive family reunification program also played an important role in this period. Extended sponsorships beyond parents and children, to relationships such as siblings, uncles and aunts, became possible. During the first period, the vast majority of Korean immigrants were admitted under the family reunification program.

Their backgrounds and reasons for migration to Canada were varied. There were many skilled workers, health care professionals, guest workers from Germany and agricultural migrants from Latin American countries (Park 1997). In the late 1960s, the Park regime was very committed to reduce high unemployment rate in Korea and became interested in labour export to the places in need. Between 1963 and 1977, more than 8,000 mine workers and 10,000 female nurses left Korea to work in West Germany (Cho 1998). Many choose to settle in the United States or Canada at the end of their three-year contracts (Park 1997). A large proportion of Korean agricultural immigrants to Latin countries who could not settle as farmers moved to North American countries. The flow of secondary migration to Canada was not as large as that to the United States. However, the migrants who settled in Canada became the base for further chain migration by subsequently inviting families and relatives from Korea to Canada. In general, it is safe to say that Korean immigrants in this period left Korea for better economic opportunities.

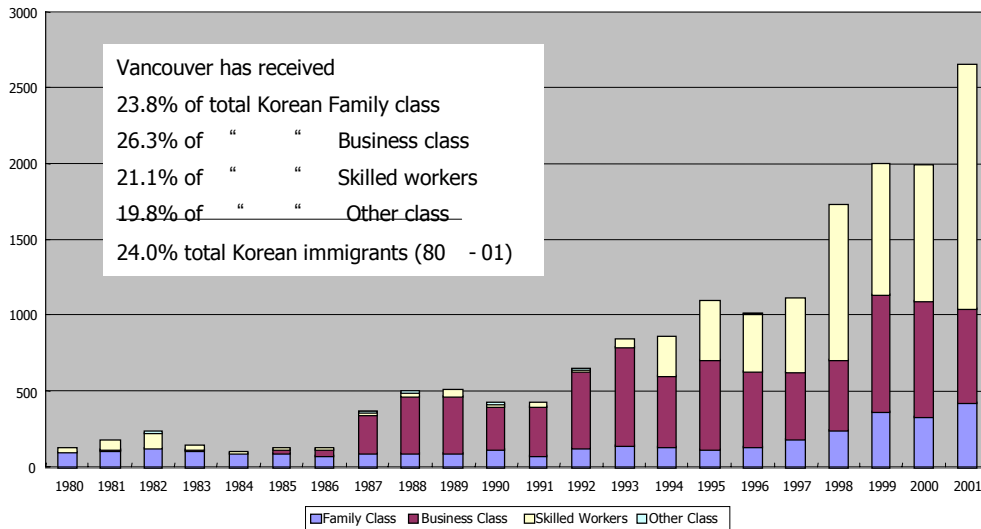
The second period was characterized by a lull in Korean immigration to Canada while large flows of immigrants to the U.S., Latin American and European countries were sustained (Korean MOFAT 2000). Due to the 1976 revision of policy, which excluded siblings and other relatives from the family reunification category, Korean communities in major Canadian cities experienced minimal growth for a decade. While many skilled workers found jobs as wage employees, most of the earlier

¹³ Some significant members of the community recollected that there were about 30 Koreans living in Toronto in 1961 and 50 Koreans in Vancouver in 1964 (Park 1996).

immigrants who had to start their lives from scratch in Canada turned to self-employment in this period, after years of hard work and saving in order to establish their own shop (Lee 2002). This is the period when the first Korean grocery stores, travel agencies, and restaurants appeared in Vancouver (Lee 2001).

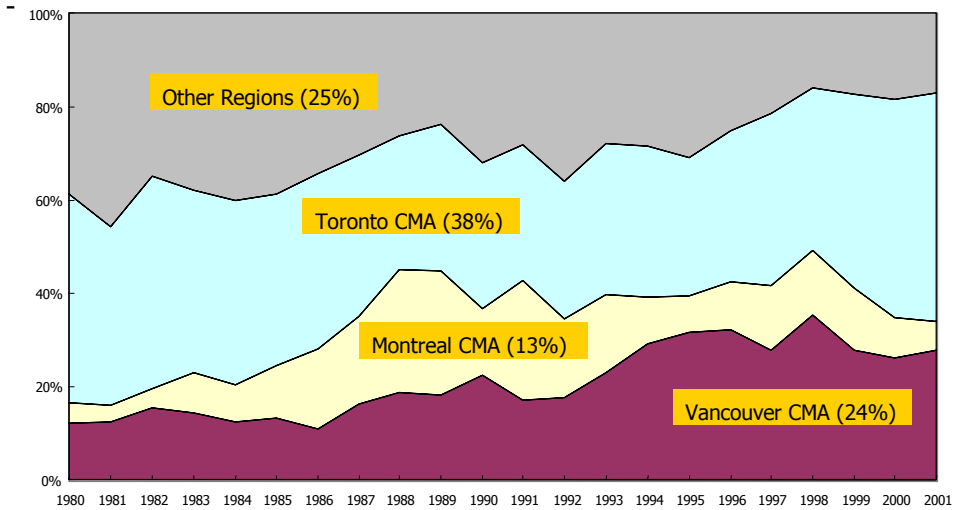
The third period is characterized by a sustained increase in the number of Korean immigrants. In 1986, the newly revised business immigration program began to attract affluent migrants from Asian countries including Korea (Nash 1994). Since 1997, the number of skilled workers also increased rapidly as the Asian financial crisis hit the Korean economy. Many affluent potential entrepreneurs and well-educated middle class families decided to leave Korea to avoid unstable socio-economic conditions, including the stressful education system for their children, and to pursue a better quality of life. These large outflows of the middle class from Korea were once referred as an “emigration syndrome” (the *Korea Times Daily* 2000). Since 1986, economic migrants under the two categories have dominated the picture of Korean immigration to Canada. This has been the trend for flows to Vancouver as well (see Fig. 2).

Figure 2. Koreans landing in Vancouver by Immigration Class (1980-2001)



Source: LIDS (1981-2002)

Figure 3. Regional Distribution of Korean Landings by Settlement Destination (1980-2001)



Source: LIDS (1981-2002)

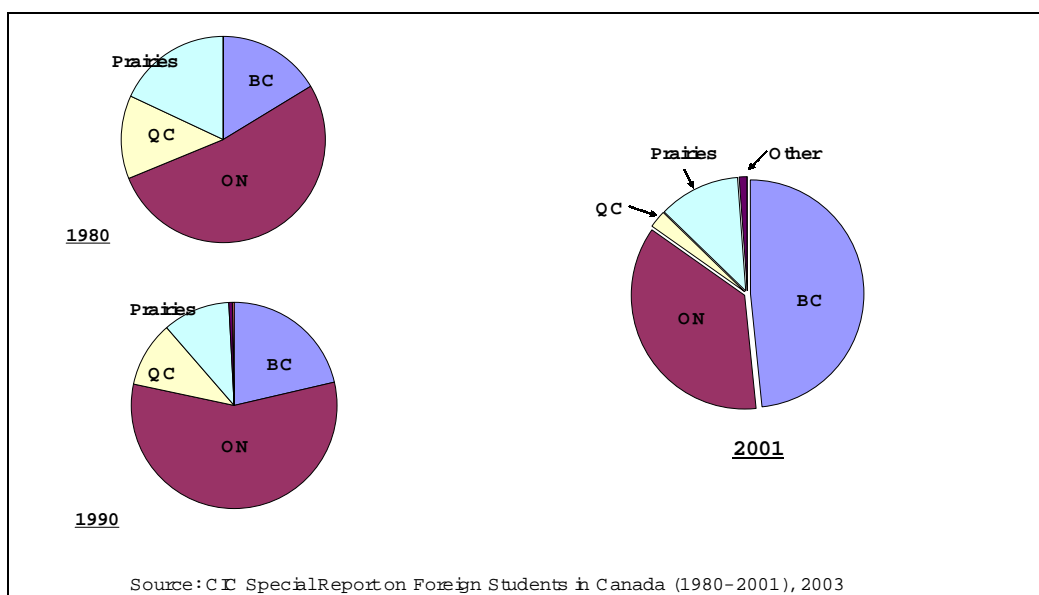
In the 1990s, the vast majority of immigrants to Canada have chosen to live in a few metropolitan areas, namely Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal (Hiebert 1996b). This is also true for Korean immigrants although it started much earlier. Even by 1980, about 60 percent of all Korean immigrants landed in one of these three CMAs and the corresponding figure rose to 80 percent by 2001 (see Fig. 3). Due to their preference to speak English, Toronto and Vancouver have been the two most important destinations for Koreans over the years. Toronto has attracted more Koreans mainly because of its larger labour market. This tendency was most notable in the early 1980s, when Vancouver experienced a major economic recession, and the late 1990s, when a large number of skilled workers arrived from Korea as a result of the Asian financial crisis. In the two time periods, Toronto has admitted more than 40 and 50 percent of total Koreans immigrant inflows to Canada, respectively. Overall, Toronto has absorbed 38 percent of all Korean immigrants who landed between 1980 and 2001.

Vancouver is second only to Toronto as a settlement destination for new arrivals from Korea. For the last two decades, about one quarter of Korean immigrants have landed in the city. The importance of Vancouver as a destination has increased steadily over time, especially for those who arrived after 1991. As Ley (2002) notes, BC has been the most-favoured province for business migrants from East Asia. A slightly higher proportion (26.3 percent) of total Korean business migrants than average (24 percent) followed suit, landing in Vancouver (see the summary box in Fig. 2). Ironically, however, only a few informants considered Vancouver a competitive city for business activities. Vancouver is rather known to be a favourable destination for those new middle class immigrants from Asia who value easy access to a natural environment and geographical proximity with their country of origin. Mr. I2 shares this observation:

There are many Koreans wealthy enough to be not doing anything for a living here in Vancouver. It is also true that there are many geese families [the Korean phrase for astronaut families]. [MJK: Why do Koreans choose Vancouver?] I can't say that I know well enough about Toronto but I think it could be geographical reasons. First, Toronto is a bigger city with a better economy. On the other hand, Vancouver is quite small. However, Vancouver's close geographical distance to Korea helps people travel back and forth easier than Toronto. In addition, good weather can't be exempted from all the possible reasons. (Mr. I2, immigrated in 1987.)

The two pull factors of proximity and climate/environment have also been effective in drawing a large student population from Korea. For post-secondary level students, Vancouver seems to be an attractive destination because they can take advantage of its good educational facilities as well as its tourism potential. For young students and their parents, close geographical proximity to Korea is beneficial for their frequent trips across the Pacific Ocean. Since the mid 1990s, the province of BC has become the primary destination for Korean international students. In 2001, 48 percent of Korean students choose BC, followed by 37 percent for Ontario (see Fig. 4). This is a notable increase when we compare these results with the share BC had in earlier years.

Figure 4. International students from Korea, by Destination (1980-2001)



While permissive regulations at the federal level, such as the visa exemption of 1994 and the expedited medical examination process introduced in late 1997, enabled many Korean students to study in Canada in the first place, the Korean-Canadian community in Vancouver has played an important role in attracting more students from Korea. According to Mr. I2, who manages an international education agency downtown, there are three types of geese families: first, immigrant families with one parent (often the father) working in Korea; second, international students with a lone parent who plans to immigrate in the near future; and lastly, those without an immigration plan. In addition to post-secondary students, young students without either parent are another important client base for Mr. I2. The growing demand for Canadian education generated a new form of entrepreneurial specialization for Korean-Canadians. Relying on extensive transnational social networks, many new business migrants and skilled workers from Korea have participated in a business related to export education. The rapidly growing immigrant population and their active entrepreneurial activities in export education have both been influential, drawing a significant proportion of Korean students and visitors to Vancouver. Thus, I argue that the development of the Korean-Canadian community in Vancouver should be examined as an intersecting process that encompasses settled immigrants, non-permanent residents, and temporary visitors from Korea.

Census data reveal more detailed information on the composition of the community. In 2001, about 29,000 ethnic Koreans resided in Vancouver. Of these, about 3,400 were born in Canada, 6,000 arrived before 1991, and nearly 15,000 landed between 1991 and 2001 (see Table 3). The category of non-permanent residents includes a substantial number of Koreans holding temporary visas. In comparing the two communities in Vancouver and Toronto, the former has much smaller proportions of Canadian-born Koreans (12 percent) and the earlier arrivals (21 percent). While newcomers account for 51 percent of the total Korean population in Vancouver, the share of non-permanent

residents (16 percent) also exceeds that of Toronto and the national average.¹⁴ Despite the four-decade-long immigration history, Vancouver has a less “settled” Korean community; instead the vast majority of this population is still going through an earlier stage of the adaptation process.

Table 3. Korean Population by Immigration Status and Period

	Vancouver (%)	Toronto (%)	Canada (%)
Total	28,845 (100%)	42,615 (100%)	100,660 (100%)
Canadian-born	3,430 (12%)	7,890 (18.5%)	17,205 (17.1%)
Total Immigrants	20,675 (72%)	31,440 (73.8%)	71,180 (70.7%)
Before 1991	5,970 (21%)	14,260 (33.5%)	28,595 (28.4%)
1991- 1995	4,855 (17%)	4,965 (11.6%)	13,030 (12.9%)
1996- 2001	9,945 (34%)	12,220 (28.7%)	29,560 (29.4%)
Non- Permanent R.	4,650 (16%)	3,295 (7.7%)	12,275 (12.2%)

Source: 2001 Census - 20% sample data

Compared with earlier immigrants who landed before 1991, newer immigrant cohorts are distinguished by their high human capital and substantial financial assets. The percentage of newcomers who possess a complete university degree is much higher than earlier cohorts (see Table 4). Another difference is found in family size. Under the family reunification program, many earlier immigrants were sponsored individually as spouses, parents, and children. Most recent arrivals who came through the business or skilled workers programs are composed of nuclear families, often including parents and one or two school-aged children (see Table 5). There are many transnational families among new immigrants as well as non-permanent residents, such as geese families, satellite children, and home-stay pseudo families, and these have occasionally been subjects of public debate (Waters 2002). I explore these issues further in the last section of this paper.

¹⁴ The proportion of Korean newcomers (51 percent) is even higher than the overall new immigrant population of Vancouver (44 percent) (Hiebert and Ley 2003).

**Table 4. Educational Attainment of Korean Landed Immigrants
(% with Bachelor Degree or Higher)**

	Montreal	Toronto	Vancouver
1980-1985	13.4%	12.9%	13.2%
1986-1990	18.9%	17.3%	20.7%
1991-1995	20.0%	22.5%	27.4%
1996-2001	24.6%	37.7%	35.5%

Source: LIDS (1981-2002)

Table 5. Average Family Size of Korean Landed Immigrants (1980-2001)

	Montreal	Toronto	Vancouver
1980-1985	1.95	1.77	1.70
1986-1990	3.09	2.11	2.80
1991-1995	3.57	2.43	3.15
1996-2001	3.22	2.87	3.01

Source: LIDS (1981-2002)

Socio-Economic Geographies of the Korean-Canadian Community

For some time, suburbs have been seen as a typical space of white, middle class families (Hiebert 1999b). In the past, urban geographers have tried to explain processes of ethnic spatial concentration and segregation in terms of an expected assimilation process (van Kempen & Ozuekren 1998). However, increasing suburbanization by recent immigrant households has challenged the dichotomous portrait of inner city versus suburbs, and the very nature of suburbanization itself. In Toronto, Lo and Wang (1997) found that wealthy Hong Kong immigrants are largely concentrated in affluent neighbourhoods of Richmond Hill and in the Markham area, both distant from the inner core of metropolitan Toronto. In the Vancouver CMA, other than the traditional immigrant reception area of Vancouver East, a number of suburbs have emerged as new immigrant settlement areas, especially Richmond, Surrey, Burnaby and the Tri-Cities (Coquitlam, Port Coquitlam, and Port Moody). In her

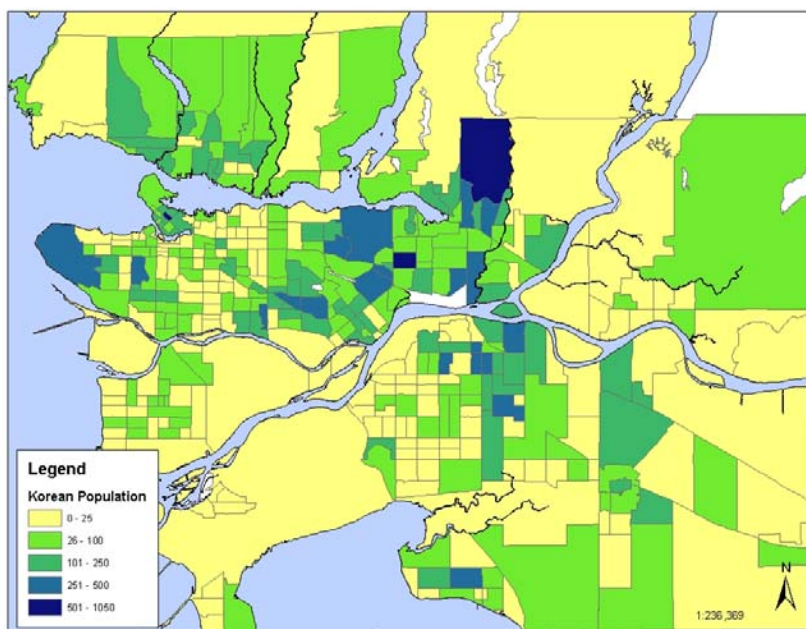
case study of Los Angeles, Li (1998) proposed the term, 'ethnoburb' to describe the unique characteristics of new immigrant settlement and commercial concentrations in suburban areas. In this section, I examine the process of Korean ethnoburb formation and the transformation of local geographies associated with it.

In Vancouver, the Korean population is largely dispersed, as shown in Figure 5. Several concentrations of the Korean population in the Vancouver CMA are found in suburban areas. Although some areas are exaggerated because of uneven census tract sizes, the highest concentrations are identified in Burnaby, Coquitlam, Port Coquitlam, and some pockets of Surrey. Some clusters found in the downtown and Vancouver's west side are also noteworthy because they are concentrated areas of international students and their families, often lone mothers. The residential dispersal of the Korean population in middle and distant suburbs is occurring, but at the same time, we see some concentration in the downtown area. In fact, the two areas are populated by distinct sub-groups. The general trend is apparent in the maps of location quotients (Fig. 6), which show the residential choice of the total Korean-origin population, and recent arrivals from Korea.¹⁵ The darkest red colour indicates a census tract that holds at least twice the average proportion of Koreans in the metropolitan area. In contrast, the darkest green colour indicates areas where Korean immigrants are less likely to be found. The two maps in Figure 7 justify the point that the suburbanization of the Korean-Canadian population has been an ongoing phenomenon, but has become more intensified by recent arrivals.¹⁶

¹⁵ In this map, recent immigrants are those who arrived after 1996.

¹⁶ Source: 2001 Census, Statistics Canada. The maps have been provided by Dan Hiebert and can be found in Oliver et al. 2003.

Figure 5. The Korean-Origin Population in the Vancouver CMA, 2001



Source: 2001 Census, Visible Minority Status (Korean) 20% sample, Statistics Canada

Table 6. Labour Force Activity of Koreans in Vancouver

	Participation Rate (15 yrs. and over)		Employment Rate (employment + self-employment)	
	Korean	Total V.M.	Korean	Total V.M.
Total	47.1%	66.2%	42.1%	61.4%
Male	52.3%	71.6%	47.2%	66.4%
Female	42.4%	61.1%	37.5%	56.7%

Source: 2001 Census - Statistics Canada

While many recent immigrant families from Korea are able to purchase suburban homes upon their arrival, their economic integration to Canadian labour market has been more complicated. Despite their high levels of education and language proficiency, the weak economic performance of recent immigrants in major Canadian cities has drawn much attention (Badets and Howatson-Leo 1999). A number of researchers have shown that the difficulties faced by new immigrants in the labour market are not only place-specific but also vary along the lines of ethnicity and gender (Hiebert 1999; Preston and Cox 1999). According to the 2001 census, Koreans in Vancouver seem to have many difficulties in the labour market (Table 6). Korean men and women show much lower participation and employment rates than those of the total visible minority population. Their weak economic performance is also evident in their employment income. In the tax year of 1995, Koreans in BC earned \$20,764 whereas the total visible minority population reported \$24,081 as their employment income. In 2000, the average incomes for both groups were slightly higher but the gap has remained.

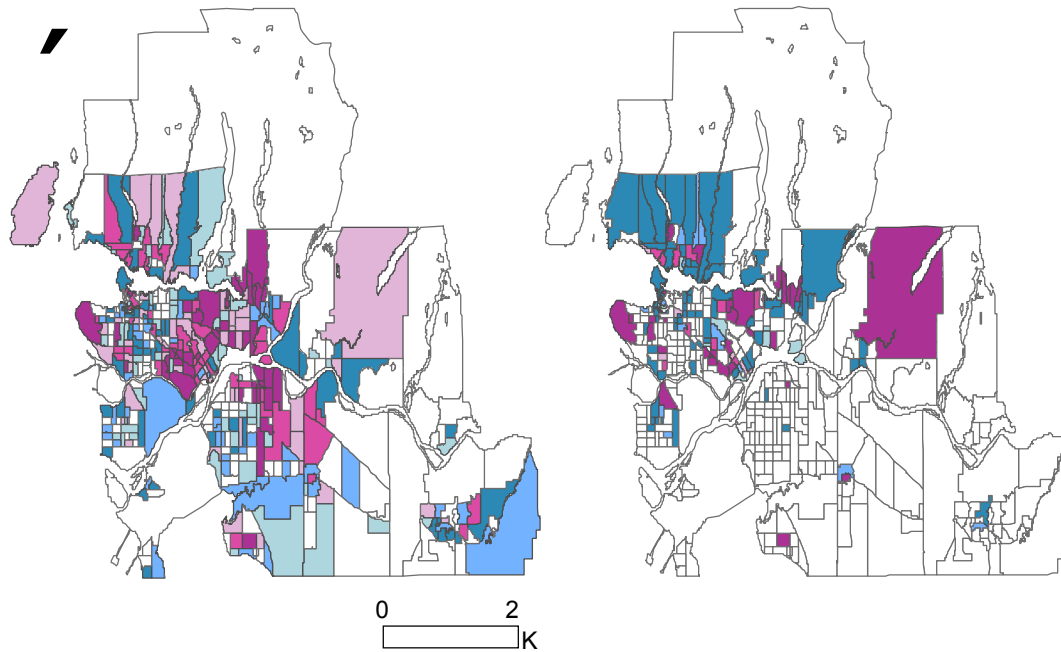
However, Koreans are prone to engage in self-employment. According to 1996 census data, 44 percent of working Korean men in the Vancouver CMA were self-employed, more than twice the ratio of the total visible minority male population (19.3 percent). For Korean women (29.7 percent), the tendency was even more significant: they were three times as likely to be self-employed as visible minority women in general (9.8 percent). The high rates of Korean self-employment in the Vancouver CMA are similar to those found in previous studies conducted in both the U.S. and Canada.¹⁷

¹⁷ See Light and Gold 2000, Min 1998, and Yoon 1995 for U.S. case studies and Kwak 2002, Ornstein 2000, and Razin and Langlois 1996 for Canadian case studies.

Figure 6. Korean Immigrant Landings in the Vancouver CMA

Arriving

Arriving



Korea



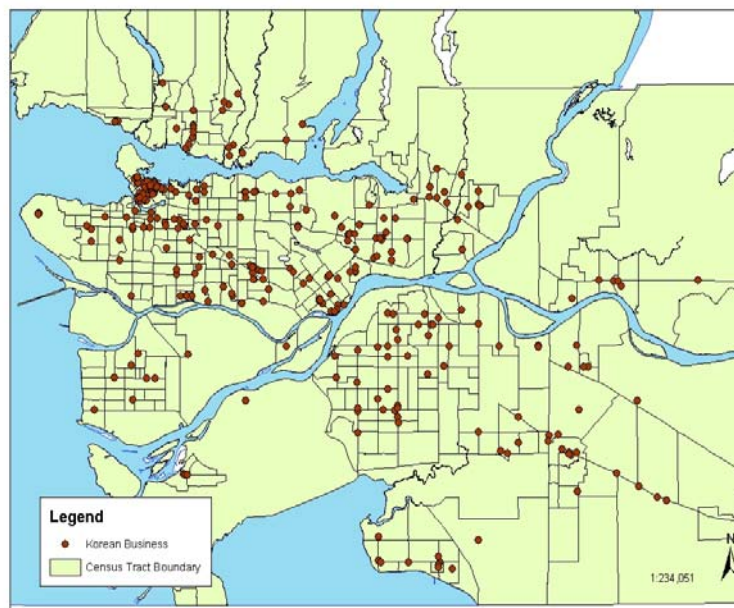
As many of the previous studies have demonstrated, Korean businesses are highly concentrated in the retailing and restaurant sectors. Mr. C2, the general manager of the Korean Businessmen's association of BC corroborates this generalization:

The five typical business types for Korean immigrants are grocery, smoke shop, coffee and sandwich shop, coin laundry and dry cleaning. After 1987 and 1988, new business immigrants began to invest in bigger businesses such as gas stations, motels and ESL schools. With so many new immigrants, the price for these businesses seems to reach the highest limit. With high rent and tax, the profit is so small. Our main members are grocery owners. I haven't seen any growth in their businesses for the last three years. (Mr. C2. immigrated in 1986)

Their economic achievement is decidedly mixed. A few are well off but Korean businesses in general are known not to be particularly lucrative. However, at the same time, they are less likely to fail completely. In an assessment report of the business immigration program, Ley (2002) examines the business performance of immigrant entrepreneurs in Vancouver. Among entrepreneurs from three Asian countries, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Korea, he finds that the more successful businesses were more likely to be operated by Koreans. Ley reasons that the moderate success of Korean entrepreneurs is largely due to their higher education and mainstream marketing strategy. The mainstream marketing may be linked with spatially dispersion that reflects an assimilationist locational strategy. In producing Figure 7, I geocoded five types of Korean businesses that mainly target mainstream consumers. It shows significantly scattered business locations across the whole Greater Vancouver Area. Except for those business concentrations in "glamorous" shopping districts such as Vancouver's downtown, the Metrotown centre in Burnaby, and New Westminster's downtown, Korean grocers, florists, laundry shops and fish markets are literally located everywhere, even in the remote areas of Greater Vancouver.

During an interview, a provincial government official commented that Korean entrepreneurs should move towards more innovative and productive business operations (rather than running typical retailing businesses) in the near future. However, many other informants were skeptical about the idea and noted many practical difficulties faced by new comers. According to a Korean realtor interviewed for this study, mainstream businesses are still a safer choice for Korean entrepreneurs despite less satisfactory income levels. Newcomers can obtain useful information and benefit from already well established business networks within the community. The Korean Businessmen's Co-op Association of BC is a good example that is built upon these business networks, with more than 1,500 Korean entrepreneurs listed as members. On the other hand, innovative ventures are often risky as well as costly in terms of time and energy for newcomers.

**Figure 7. Korean Businesses targeting Mainstream Markets (2003)¹⁸
(Grocery, Florist, Laundry and Fish Market Shops)**



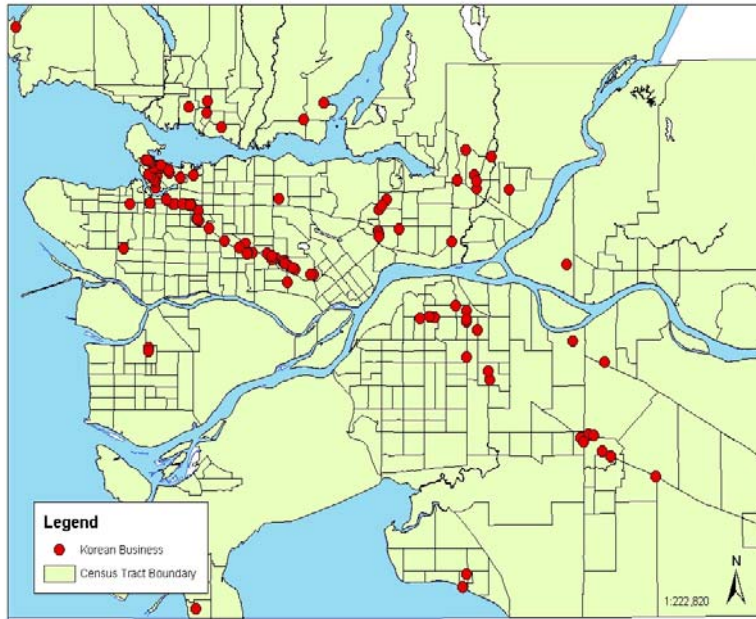
Responding to the rapid growth of the community, Korean businesses which primarily depend on co-ethnic customers have shown positive growth in terms of their quality and quantity over the last decade. Although there is a prevalent belief—among many academics, planners, journalists, etc.—that clustered ethnic businesses are a problem,¹⁹ the recent development of Korean commercial districts in Greater Vancouver seems a natural phenomenon that reflects residential concentrations of new customers. A large influx of new immigrants and international students creates a new customer base for these businesses. As shown in Fig. 8, ethnic market-oriented Korean businesses are largely concentrated in areas near large Korean populations. Such clusters are seen along North Road between Burnaby and Coquitlam, Robson Street in Vancouver’s downtown, and the municipal town centre areas of Coquitlam, Surrey and Langley. It is important to note that the oldest Korean ethnic business cluster along the Kingsway corridor reflects determination on the part of entrepreneurs to gain access to customers who travel by car, more than the residential location of Korean-Canadians. Emerging Korean business clusters have often revitalized economically stagnant areas and have

¹⁸ Source: the BC Korean Business Directory, 2003. To show a broad spatial pattern of mainstream Korean business, I only selected those businesses in the aforementioned five categories. A total of 466 business addresses were sorted and geo-coded.

¹⁹ There have been several scholarly projects that hold negative views on ethnic enclave economies. Light and Gold (2000) summarize these works in the context of U.S. cities. In Canada, there were several cases of public debates against the Chinese business district developments. See Wang (1999) for the controversial case in Toronto and Edgington et al. (2003) for the case of Richmond, BC.

transformed the visual ‘look’ of selected local geographies. For example, the areas of Robson Street and North Road have become culturally specific districts that serve not only immigrant populations but also attract a large number of tourists and international students.

**Figure 8. Ethnic Market-Oriented Korean Businesses (2003)²⁰
(Korean Restaurants, Korean Groceries and Beauty Parlours)**



Unlike businesses that cater mainstream market, these enclave firms are often transnational. They transfer goods, money and cultural products between Korea and Canada in order to cater to the community. Other business owners in new sectors of export education and tourism also confirmed that transnational social networks are a critical source of their business operations. Their cross border entrepreneurial activities play an important role overseas in promoting Vancouver as a desirable city for study and travel. Thus, emerging Korean ethnoburbs and the downtown business clusters can be viewed as outposts that link regional economic activities to the global economy. As Shukla (2001) argues, those ethnic commercial districts with residential populations have increasingly become sites where transnationality, an ability to economically, physically and imaginatively cross borders, is materialized.

²⁰ Source: the BC Korean Business Directory, 2003. A total of 163 addresses in the three business categories were sorted and geo-coded.

Discussion: A Community in Transition

This paper is an exploratory project that aims to draw a current portrait of the Korean-Canadian community in Vancouver. With the recent influx of new immigrants and temporary residents, the community has not only grown in size but has also become more socio-economically diversified. More immigrants have arrived with higher qualifications and significant financial assets. Unprecedented flows of temporary visa holders from Korea make it difficult to understand the Korean-Canadian community by examining solely the group of immigrants and their Canadian-born descendants.

The impacts of the non-permanent resident population have are notable in many ways. For example, international education and tourism industries that target students and visitors from Korea have become important business sectors for Korean-Canadian entrepreneurs. The nature of these industries reflects and reinforces transnational linkages of the Korean-origin population in Vancouver. In addition, an increasing number of temporary migrants have become permanent residents in Canada. According to a CIC official whom I met in the government workshop, this is a welcome trend for Canada. I have also seen significant interest from non-permanent residents in this process. Above all, they have become an important part of the community by revitalizing and transforming socio-economic spaces. Thus, the overall well-being of the community needs to be assessed using the broader scale of the transnational context and considering the significant presence of the non-permanent resident population from Korea. In this section, I focus on the transitional characteristics of the Korean-Canadian community and suggest a possible direction for future research.

When asked questions about overall characteristics of the community, all my informants characterized the recent influx of new immigrants and visitors to the community as a major transition. Most informants raised two concurrent issues. First, many expressed frustration over the less satisfactory labour market performances of new comers and rising competition among co-ethnic businesses. Although many employment and business workshops have been offered by public and private organizations, the general outcomes for Korean-origin job seekers seem grim. Many skilled workers from Korea are under-employed. Some have been successful in pioneering a niche economy but many have suffered from the fierce competition that arose at later stage. Others were driven to settle as astronaut families by maintaining two households, living, en effect, between Korea and Canada.

This frustration was often expressed in relation to the second issue, a question of solidarity and power within the community. In the literature on ethnic economies, ethnic solidarity and cooperation among co-ethnics has been considered a major advantage for economic integration. The assumption of ethnic solidarity has often gone beyond the economic realm. A high level of institutionalization among different ethnic groups has also been considered as evidence of co-ethnic unity and power. In the process, ethnic groups have too often been mistaken as homogenous social entities. This superficial assumption of ethnic solidarity, however, requires a careful re-evaluation. With the great diversity among community members in Vancouver, those whom I interviewed often commented on existing fragmentation within the community. Subtle tensions between different sub-groups have never been discussed seriously in public, but often surfaced as major issues among community members.

There is lack of communication between old and new immigrants. No trust. Maybe misunderstanding. I think this is a problem of our community. (Mr. E1, immigrated in 2000)

[There is] a need to be build bridges across the gaps that currently divide the community, for example between first and second generation Koreans and between those who have been in Canada for many years and those who are recent arrivals. (*Building Community*, Spiegelman 2000: 32)

Among the diverse members, seeking common interests beyond immediate economic issues has been difficult. In a community where two thirds of the population are new arrivals, existing community organizations have been too weak to respond effectively to the complex and varied needs that have arisen. Limited resources and lack of support from community members were pointed out as primary reasons for insufficient and inadequate settlement service provision. The roles of Korean churches in Vancouver, however, have been important in this respect. As in other North American cities, Korean churches have provided for everyday needs as well as emotional comfort for new members. Although the degree of Christian influence seems not to be as great in as in the case of Toronto, the proportion of Christian Korean-Canadians in Vancouver is still significant. According to the 2001 Census, the overall proportion of the Korean Christian population (for both Catholic and Protestant denominations) in Vancouver was nearly 50 percent.

Another important source of information and assistance for recent arrivals in Vancouver seems to be social networks maintained between Korea and Canada. Although the importance of social networks has been well emphasized in previous studies of migration, the scale of utilization seems even greater for recent migrants (Hiebert and Ley 2003). When more qualified new immigrants experience serious underemployment after migration (as is the case for Korean-Canadians in

Vancouver), they often reach out to economic opportunities across borders. Beyond these economic circles, transnationalism challenges an old theoretical view of the process of immigration and integration. This also seems empirically evident for the Korean-Canadian community.

For some earlier arrivals who believe in the virtue of assimilation to mainstream society, prominent transnational practices among new immigrants and temporary migrants are seen as opportunistic. Mr. C1 shares his view on the growing number of geese families in Vancouver:

You see, earlier immigrants were more likely to assimilate to Canadian society. We did our best to settle in Canada. But, recent immigrants are different. They seem to be more opportunistic. I heard that there are so many geese families in Vancouver. Some estimate that there are about 250 lone mothers from Korea with school-aged children just around my neighbourhood [Vancouver's west side]. There are many reasons behind such as Vancouver's poor economy and irrational education fever in Korea. Nonetheless, I still think this is very problematic [for the community]. (Mr. C1, immigrated in 1966)

There are sources of tension, then, between long-established Koreans in Greater Vancouver and newcomers, and also between foreign-born parents and Canadian-born children. But, these demographic fractures (which are common among most immigrant populations) reflect important socio-economic differences between immigrant cohorts. Compared to the past, Korea's position in the world economy today provides a different basis for international migrants leaving Korea. In fact, unlike their earlier counterparts, recent Korean immigrants sometimes bring substantial financial assets with them under the liberated foreign currency law. With minimal levels of restriction under the new property possession law for foreigners, Korea also allows emigrants to retain property there and/or to invest in Korea even after migration. The Canadian context is also significant. At the receiving end, newer immigrants face different labour market conditions as well changes in the nature of social acceptance. Canadian immigration policies have also become more flexible toward transnational activities of permanent residents.²¹

It seems that some of the subtle tensions between immigrant cohorts are also related to the problem of insufficient service provision for a large number of newcomers and non-permanent residents. Three Korean social worker informants agreed there have been overwhelming demands associated with Korean-Canadians in Vancouver. Furthermore, basic services such as assistance with public documents, job search programs, and ESL programs, are often limited to the permanent resident population. As many Koreans have sought other sources of assistance from personal social

²¹ For example, CIC adopted more relaxed permanent residency obligations for immigrants in 2002 (www.cic.gc.ca). In every five year period, immigrants need to accumulate only two years of physical presence in Canada rather than six months in each year.

networks and religious groups, many key services have become privatized for profit making. These industries have been some of the fastest growing business sectors for Korean entrepreneurs (*The Korea Daily* 2004). The relationships between consumers (often being recent immigrants or non-permanent residents) and the owners of firms providing services (often being immigrants or earlier arrivals) are likely to cause tensions involving profit making vs. ethnic trust.

The objective of compiling a community profile makes this report more descriptive than analytical. However, there is an important analytical point that is worthy repeating here. Too often, policy makers and academics alike consider an immigrant (or an ethnic) community as just those who hold permanent residency rights. This derives from the assumption that they will remain in Canada and contribute in various ways to the mainstream society. The case of the Korean-Canadian community in Vancouver shows, however, that the group is decidedly heterogeneous in socio-economic terms, and that temporary residents are integral to this population. As Katharyne Mitchell (1998) notes in her study of the Chinese community in Vancouver, the inner dynamics of the community reflect differences of the social and economic period in which old and new immigrants left home and arrived in Canada.²²

As the significance of transnationalism has increased, the Korean-origin community has gone through a major transition. What seems clear at this point is that the classic model of immigration and adaptation cannot explain detailed processes of social and economic integration of new Korean-Canadians. Community-level research should be conducted under a broader framework of global political economy and its impacts at the local scale. At the same time, the agency of immigrants should not be neglected. Future research on Korean-Canadian communities in different parts of Canada should begin with studies of the general settlement experiences, such as housing trajectories, employment experiences, religious and political practices, and entrepreneurial activities, always keeping gender and class factors in mind. Furthermore, comparative research between Korean-origin and other ethnic communities, in different regions, will be critical to understand the varied trajectories of settlement and integration that are emerging in Canadian cities.

²² In the case of Chinese community, however, there were significant differences in class orientation and political and cultural allegiances between old and new immigrants. (Mitchell 1998)

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