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A Return of Christianity: The Christian Education of Korean-American Children in the Chicago Area by Parents, 1965-1995

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

A RETURN OF CHRISTIANITY: THE CHRISTIAN EDUCATION
OF KOREAN-AMERICAN CHILDREN IN THE CHICAGO AREA

BY PARENTS, 1965-1995

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND POLICY STUDIES

BY

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CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

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ABSTRACT

The U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 opened the door for a large number of Korean immigrants. Today, the number of the Korean-Americans in the U.S. is estimated to be one million. The recent Korean immigrants are known for their high level of education as are many other Asians. What set them apart, however, from their Asian counterparts is their religion: the majority of the Korean immigrants are Christians.

Although Christianity was first introduced to Korea much earlier, it was not until toward the end of the 19th century that Christian evangelism was allowed in the land known hitherto as the "Hermit Kingdom." The American Protestant missions seized the opportunity, and today 25 percent of the entire Korean population (South) profess to be Christians. The Korean Christian church bears the distinctive mark of the 19th century conservative American Protestant Christianity.

This research is an ethnographic study of some first-generation Korean immigrant parents in Chicagoland in regard to the Christian education of their American-born children. As Christian parents, they are wary of an American culture that is increasingly secularized. As Asian parents, they find that their Confucian outlook of life comes into conflict with

the Western egalitarian outlook of their children. As minority parents, they hope that their children will advance into the mainstream America.

American society is in transition and faces major challenges: Christian values are no longer taken for granted; excessive individualism breaks up families; as a nation, we are grappling with a multicultural and multireligious reality. First-generation Korean Christian immigrant parents are in a unique position to meet these challenges right in their homes as they rear their children as Christians. There is also a unique opportunity to make a meaningful contribution to the betterment of American society. This research is an attempt to preserve a "thick-description" of their life as parents through in-depth interviews.

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation describes the first-generation Korean Christian immigrant parents in the Christian education of their second-generation children, most of whom are born in America. It seeks to understand and interpret the dynamics of Christian education at home as well as in the church, education given by those whose unique circumstances of life have placed them at the junction of several conflicting traditions and ideas.

This dissertation is composed of two main parts. First is the historical overview of the trans-Pacific movement of Christianity. Chapter one deals with the westward movement of the American Protestantism to Korea from 1884 and onward. Chapter two deals with the eastward movement of Korean Christianity to America through the influx of Korean Christian immigrants since 1965. Second is the observation by means of in-depth interviews. Chapter three presents a sample interview to illustrate the general format and style used in the interviewing process. Chapters four through six are an analysis of the interview results based on the three main topics that bear upon the theme of the Christian education of the Korean Christian immigrant parents: their Confucian cultural make-up; their Christian religious conviction; and their status as members of an ethnic

minority group.

All the interviews were conducted by the researcher. Through various personal contacts and referrals in the Metropolitan Chicago area, first-generation Korean Christians who have teenage children were sought out. About a half of those contacted refused to be interviewed for one reason or another. A total of fourteen interviews were conducted with twenty individuals who came to the U.S. in the years ranging from 1957 the earliest, and 1994 the latest. Their average length of residence in the U.S. was 18.6 years at the time of the interviews. Although it was preferred that both father and mother be interviewed at the same time, out of the fourteen interviews, only six were done with couples, seven with mothers alone and one with a father. In no case were children present. One half of the interviews were conducted in the subjects' homes, and the rest were in the churches, restaurants and a work place. One interview was done over the phone at the subject's request. The longest interview took five hours, and the shortest an hour and a half. The average length of the interviews was 3 hours and 12 minutes. In all fourteen interviews, a tape recorder was used in addition to field notes with the expressed permission of the subjects. Most of the interviews were in Korean, although English was also used when the subjects had a good command of English. All fourteen tape-recorded interviews were then transcribed

before an analysis was made.

Since the researcher is a first-generation Korean Christian immigrant parent himself, he had the advantage of being able to relate to the subjects who shared similar concerns and hopes. A participant-observer in an ethnographic research, he saw this commonality as an invaluable asset. However, like any other observer, the researcher carried with him his own presuppositions which influenced his hypothesis construction. It became evident when analysis revealed that what was suspected strongly by the researcher was only partially validated by the research. Severe conflicts arising out of the Confucian outlook of life and morality were expected and found. The conflicts which these Koreans experienced as pre-modern Protestant Christians in a largely secularized American society were expected and found. The conflicts which they experienced as members of a new and small ethnic minority group were expected and found. But the sense of discrepancy between their Christian life in Korea and that in America was expected but not found.

The interviews and the analysis of them confirm the hypothesis that the home of the first-generation Korean Christian immigrant parents is the crucible in which many conflicting traditions and ideas converge.

CHAPTER 1

AMERICAN CHRISTIANITY TO KOREA

When the first American Christian missionary, Dr. Horace Newton Allen, arrived at the port of Inchon in Korea on September 20, 1884, Korea was known by only a few Americans as the Hermit Kingdom located somewhere near China and Japan, although the United States had entered into a formal treaty with Korea in 1882. The unfamiliarity was mutual. The United States was known to only a few court officials assisting the king in foreign relations as a less dangerous country among the predatory Western powers. Although it had been almost a century since Christianity was first introduced to Korea through the French Catholic missions stationed in China,¹ Christianity was never given a chance to take root in Korean soil. The court of the Yi dynasty (1392-1910), maintaining the longstanding policy of this Hermit Kingdom, did not allow any foreign influence

¹One of the annual Korean envoys to China in 1783 was Mr. Yi Sung-hun (1756-1801) who was converted while he was in Beijing and was given the name of Peter. Upon his return to Korea the next year, he began to preach. Thus, the year 1784 is generally regarded as the founding year of the Catholic Christianity in Korea although it can be argued that the first introduction of Catholicism can be traced as far back as 1592. See L. George Paik, The History of Protestant Missions in Korea: 1832-1910, 2nd ed. (Seoul, Korea: Yonsei University Press, 1971), 29, 32.

into the kingdom be it political or cultural.² Nobody would have predicted that the arrival of an American missionary would mark the beginning of the dramatic transformation of a nation. In the next 100 years, Korea was to emerge as the only country in East Asia where Christianity became the dominant religion. When we consider that Korea had sustained a rather consistent religious and cultural tradition over the four thousand years of her history,³ it is truly remarkable to witness the phenomenal growth of Christianity in modern Korea.

Confucianism as a political and educational system has all but disappeared in modern Korea. Only a fraction of Korean population maintains its religious affiliation with Confucianism,⁴ although its ritual system still survives. But Confucianism in Korea, i.e., the Neo-Confucianism of the Yi dynasty, continues to undergird the social structure, moral matrix, and cultural life of its people even today.

²China is an exception. Korea had maintained a suzerain relationship with China for most of her history.

³Before the introduction of Buddhism in the middle of the fourth century A.D., Shamanistic folk religions were practiced in ancient Korea. During the Kingdom of Shilla, in 527 A.D., Buddhism was declared the state religion of Korea and enjoyed, to a large extent, this official recognition until the change of dynasty from Koryo to Yi in 1392 A.D., when Confucianism replaced Buddhism as the state religion. It was only in 1871 during the King Kojong's reign that Confucianism was formally abolished as a state religion. James Huntley Grayson, Korea: A Religious History (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 172.

⁴The official count in 1989 is a little over 1%. Facts about Korea (Seoul, Korea: Korean Overseas Information Service, 1991), 136.

It is no exaggeration to say that Korean Christians are more Confucian than any of their counterparts in other nations of East Asia such as China and Japan.

One of the characteristics of Korean-Americans who have taken residence in the United States is that the majority of them are Christians. This chapter seeks to provide the historical overview of Confucianization of Korea during the Yi dynasty and of the Christian missionary endeavor of the American missionaries whose influence made a permanent mark in modern history of Korea when she was beginning to open her door to the foreign countries, namely, the Western powers as well as Japan.

1. Korea before 1884

Korea is a peninsula extending southward about 700 miles from the East Asian mainland. The peninsula separates the Yellow Sea from the Sea of Japan. Located at a juncture where the interests of major powers have converged, the Korean peninsula has long been subject to incursions from predatory neighbors, notably China, Mongolia, and Japan. For most of her four thousand year history, Korea has maintained her national and cultural identity. When the Western Imperial powers began to advance into East Asia in the 18th century, Korea did not appear to them as anything more than a suzerain state of China. She began to take on her own importance, however, when China, Russia and Japan,

as well as the Western nations such as France, Great Britain and the United States, recognized their political interest in the control of the peninsula toward the second half of the 19th century.

Yi Dynasty and Neo-Confucianism⁵

Prior to Japan's annexation of Korea in 1910, Korea had maintained for over five centuries the succession of kings from the Yi family, who formed the "Yi Dynasty," following the surname of the founder Yi Songgye (1335-1408).⁶ The transfer of political and economic power from Wang's family of the Koryo Dynasty (918-1392) to the new dynasty Yi was accompanied by gradual decline of Buddhism's influence and the rise of Neo-Confucianism. During the period of the Koryo Dynasty, Buddhism enjoyed the status of an institutionalized religion although Neo-Confucian thoughts

⁵The term "Neo-Confucianism" was originally coined by Derk Bodde, a translator of "History of Chinese Philosophy" written by a Chinese scholar Fung Yu-lan in 1934 as a rendering for a Chinese term "tao-hsueh". Fung identified "tao-hsueh" rather broadly as the revival of the Confucian thoughts in the period of Sung Dynasty (960-1279), especially of Southern Sung (1127-1279), developing down into the Ching period. (1644-1911). Specifically, "Neo-Confucianism" began with Chu Hsi (1130-1200) of China and found its way into Korea during the Koryo period by a Korean scholar An Hyang (1243-1306). See Wm. Theodore de Bary, The Rise of Neo-Confucianism in Korea, ed. Wm. Theodore de Bary and JaHyun Kim Haboush (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), Introduction.

⁶Yi Songgye names the new dynasty "Choson" after the most ancient Korean kingdom. For the detailed account of General Yi Songgye's overthrow of the Koryo Dynasty, see Ki-Baik Lee's A New History of Korea, trans. Edward W. Wagner with Edward J. Shultz (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 162-64.

and practices existed alongside.⁷ But the close relationship between Buddhism and the state and government patronage of the religion brought forth its secularization, decay, and eventual downfall, and consequently, the downfall of the dynasty. In addition to the external forces that had long threatened the sovereignty of the Koryo kingdom,⁸ the fall of the Koryo Dynasty was the culmination of a movement for internal governmental reform which began during the reign of King Kongmin (1351-1374)⁹ initiated by Neo-Confucian scholar-officials.¹⁰ The next two centuries saw

⁷In fact, Confucianism, founded by a Chinese philosopher Confucius (551-479 B.C.), entered Korea at various stages of its development. As early as in the fourth century A.D., a Confucian academy was said to have been established in the kingdom of Koguryo. Under the dominance of Buddhism throughout the subsequent kingdoms, the role of Confucianism was rather limited to the educational function of the government officials. See KOREA: ITS LAND, PEOPLE AND CULTURE OF ALL AGES (Seoul, Korea: Hakwon-Sa, Ltd., 1960), 323-26.

⁸The repeated invasion by Mongol and Japanese pirates took a heavy toll during the last two centuries of Koryo kingdom and threatened the stability of the royal court. See Andrew C. Nahm, Korea: Tradition and Transformation (New Jersey: Hollm International Corporation, 1988), 90-91.

⁹It was during the reign of King Kongmin that the long neglected Confucian Academy was reestablished. See Grayson, Korea: A Religious History, 135. See also Martina Deuchler, The Confucian Transformation of Korea: A Study of Society and Ideology (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 99.

¹⁰From the perspective of these Neo-Confucianists, Buddhism was to be blamed for the decay of Koryo society. They believed that the influence of Buddhism had eroded the primary control of society and caused the confusion of social status by allowing social mobility. "At the end of the thirteenth century, offended by a century of Mongol domination and angered by the corrupt influence of Buddhism at the court, many young scholars sensing the end of the Koryo state turned to Neo-Confucian philosophy of Chu Hsi of China." Grayson,

the gradual Confucianization of the Yi Kingdom vigorously promoted by the small but aggressive elite group of Neo-Confucian scholars¹¹ until Neo-Confucianism reached its golden age in Korea in the 16th and 17th century. In their attempt to rectify the social ills of the society, the Neo-Confucian scholar-officials in the early Yi dynasty interpreted the ancient Confucian texts,¹² especially Chu Hsi's commentaries on them, in the most literal sense and applied them in socio-political policies to an extent that

Korea: A Religious History, 129.

¹¹The Confucian officials in the early Yi dynasty saw it as their immediate task to eliminate the authority and influence of Buddhism. Especially Chong Tojon (1342-98), who successfully engineered Yi Songgye's rise to power, saw Buddhism's basic otherworldly view of the world and its lack of moral consensus and political commitment as the basic cause of Koryo's social evil, economic exploitation and political corruption. He devoted his last years to the ideological struggle against Buddhism. At the time of King Taejo (the founder of Yi Dynasty, Yi Songgye), the Buddhist temples lost the tax exemption status they had enjoyed during the Koryo period. His successor, King Taejong (1401-1418) adopted even bolder anti-Buddhist policy called "Chok-pul hung-Yu" which means "Expel Buddhism and Promote Confucianism." Confiscation of vast landholding of the Buddhist temples followed.

¹²These are the Book of Rites (the Li-chi), the Book of Etiquette and Ceremonies (the I-li) and the Rites of Chou (the Chou-li). The Korean Neo-Confucianists took the reign of the Chinese sage-kings of antiquity, such as Yao and Shun, and the founders of the Three Dynasties of Hsia, Shang, and Chou, and their institutions as models to follow to reorganize Korean society. They took seriously the words of Mencius (371-289 B.C.) who praised the founders of the Three Dynasties of Hsia, Shang, and Chou for bringing their world under control by the moral force of perfect virtue. Most conspicuous examples of their influence in the Yi dynasty Korean society were the concepts of patrilineal descent groups, ancestor worship, the differentiation of wives, and the mourning system, all of which were implemented quite literally.

the Sung China (960-1279) could not have thought possible. Korea of the Yi dynasty, therefore, stands alone as the only society in East Asia in which the major tenets of these ancient Chinese canons were strictly implemented.¹³ Notwithstanding the various trends and different emphases within Korean Neo-Confucian thoughts which had undergone significant historical development¹⁴, the common thread

¹³In China, although it was there that Confucianism as well as Neo-Confucianism originated, Neo-Confucianism never had the overall impact on Chinese society that it had on Korean society. In Japan, Confucianism did not penetrate into the society at large but remained as a concern of the ruling elite and scholar class. See Deuchler, The Confucian Transformation of Korea, 26, 128.

¹⁴The Neo-Confucian scholars in the early Yi dynasty centered their discussion on the metaphysical aspect of Neo-Confucianism, while, during the late period of Yi dynasty, the philosophical enquiry turned to such very pragmatic concerns as socio-political and economic matters of the state. The mid-sixteenth century Yi Korea saw the two trends of Neo-Confucian thoughts developing side by side. One school of thought is called "Churi-pa" (The School of Principle) and the other, "Chugi-pa" (The School of Material force). The foremost proponent of the School of Principle was Yi Hwang (pen-name Toegye, 1501-1570) who came to be known as the Chu Hsi of Korea. Yi I (pen-name Yulgok, 1536-1584) represented the School of Material force. Yi Hwang drew from Mencius' concept of the Four Beginnings (the virtues of humanity, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom that ensued respectively from the feelings of commiseration, shame and dislike, respect and reverence, and the feelings of right and wrong inherent in human nature). He argued that these Four Beginnings were actuated by Principle (*li*) and the Seven Feelings (desire, hate, love, fear, grief, anger, and joy) that were produced by Material force (*ki*), were its derivative. Yi I argued the opposite: the Four Beginnings were derivative of the Seven Feelings. Their debate on this issue in search of the Ultimate through a series of correspondence is often dubbed as "the Four-Seven debate" and it would define the character of the Korean Neo-Confucianism as it developed in the years to come. Ultimately it was the moral sphere of human nature and human relations, not the cosmological issue of the universe and nature, that became the focus of the Neo-Confucian

that connects the Neo-Confucians of the Yi dynasty can be identified as their concern for the reformation of society, both moral and political. Neo-Confucianism offered them an ideological basis of recreating the society through the articulation and implementation of its moral principles of order, status, and duties within the hierarchy of human relations.

At the heart of the Neo-Confucian moral principles lie the concepts of *hyo* (filial piety) and *ye* (propriety or

scholars of Yi Korea. For further reading on the Four-Seven Debate, see Michael C. Kalton with OakSook C. Kim... et al. The Four-Seven Debate: An Annotated Translation of the Most Famous Controversy in Korean Neo-Confucian Thought (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994), and Ha Tai Kim, "The Difference Between Toegye and Yulgok on the Doctrine of *Li* and *Ki*", Eui-Young Yu and Earl H. Phillips, eds., Traditional Thoughts and Practices in Korea (Los Angeles: Center for Korean-American and Korean Studies, California State University, Los Angeles, 1983), 7-22. Following the age-old Chinese approach to the philosophical enquiry of human activity, they saw as the most fundamental moral question the mind's appropriate subjective attitude toward one's situation. Thus came another key term of Neo-Confucianism "*kyung*" (mindfulness or reverential seriousness). The question of what attitude was appropriate to one's situation took significance in the Neo-Confucian mindset, because it is essentially the question of undistorted flow of life through uninterrupted channel of communication. To the Neo-Confucians, seriousness alerts us to significance, and that which we perceive to be of ultimate significance evokes reverence. Reverential seriousness (*kyung*), therefore, is required to ensure maximum flow of life in the vast network of existence in the world. The importance these Neo-Confucians placed on the interconnectedness and the appropriate attitude of mind offer an explanation of the extremely moral orientation of Confucianism. See Chai-Sik Chung, "Confucian Tradition and Values: Implications for Conflict in Modern Korea", Earl H. Phillips and Eui-Young Yu, eds., Religions in Korea: Beliefs and Cultural Values (Los Angeles: Center for Korean-American and Korean Studies, California State University, Los Angeles, 1982), 105-6.

proper ritual behavior). Neo-Confucians believed that the task of meaningful reform of the society demanded diligent cultivation of *hyo* and *ye* in the minds of the people. *Hyo* and *ye* maintain the three cardinal human relationships (*samgang*; the relationship between ruler and subject, father and son, and husband and wife) which in turn provide human society with a fundamental and unchangeable structure.¹⁵ These three relationships were reinforced by the five moral imperatives (*oryun*) that guided the five interpersonal relationships including the three mentioned above: righteousness (*ui*) between ruler and subject; proper rapport (*chin*) between father and son; proper separation of functions (*pyol*) between husband and wife; proper

¹⁵The Confucian view of the relationship between the individual and society is in sharp contrast with that of the Western world. Dr. Michael C. Kalton's lucid and concise rendering of this subject is found in a small booklet published by Toegyehak Study Institute of Korea for the visitors of the Seoul Olympics in 1988. See Michael C. Kalton, The Way of Korea (Seoul, Korea: International Toegyehak Society, 1988), Introduction. To the western minds, search for the ultimate reality begins with breaking the complex into smaller units until the atom (which literally means indivisible) is reached. It looks to them self-evident that "individuals are the ultimate unit of human existence and they are the building blocks of all more complex and hence derivative social groups." The Confucians take the opposite direction. They begin with the individual and move outward along lines of dependency until they conceive the entire universe as the ultimate unit in which all things are organically interdependent. It looks to them self-evident that "the individual is the derivative reality." True humanity can be achieved only with and through others. It is no surprise, therefore, to learn that Neo-Confucians of the Yi dynasty placed the highest value in the three cardinal relationships and saw them as the basic structure upon which to build the ideal society.

recognition of sequence of birth (*so*) between elder and younger brothers; and faithfulness (*sin*) between friends. The Neo-Confucians sought to foster the development of *hyo* and *ye* through the adaptation of the rites established by the Chinese sage-kings of antiquity. The four such rites are capping (putting a cap on the head of a bridegroom as an initiation into the men's world shortly before the day of wedding), wedding, mourning with proper burial of the dead, and ancestor worship.¹⁶ And it was especially in the recapturing of the essence of the rite of ancestor worship and its intensive legislation that the Neo-Confucian scholar-officials of the early Yi dynasty found the useful means by which they would fulfill their vision of a perfect society.

The rite of ancestor worship is a ritualization of the moral significance of filial piety (*hyo*). Filial piety is not limited to serving one's parents while they are alive, but extends even after they die. In ancestor worship the moral concept of filial piety and the ritual concept of propriety (*ye*) are fused into one, forming a union of the inner moral awareness and its outer expression. For the Confucians, propriety (or proper ritual behavior) is more than mere outer expression; it is the very means of enhancement of inner moral quality. As the first step of the social reform envisaged by this ideal of a perfect

¹⁶Deuchler, The Confucian Transformation of Korea, 110.

society, the Neo-Confucians of the early Yi dynasty focused upon the principle of agnation inherent in the rite of ancestor worship. In their view, streamlining the agnatic lineal descent group in conjunction with the rite of ancestor worship was the key element of reform to bring about much needed order and stability in the political process of the nation. In rebuilding the family structure as well as the structure of the government, they adopted the ideal of the Chou China which had established the strict governmental hierarchy of emperor, chief ministers, high officials, gentlemen-scholars, and commoners. The natural place to begin this type of reform was in the family. During the Koryo period, the lineal descent grouping of a family was based largely upon cognate principle with the flexible rules of succession within the large pool of kin, both male and female links in the family. This was to be changed. Scholar-officials of the early Yi dynasty initiated the basic structural change resulting in the elimination of matrilineal links in the descent group and narrowing it to a strictly patrilineal line. It was a bold and drastic attempt which was followed by a long and arduous political battle of nearly two centuries until the idea of primogeniture was firmly implanted in the social consciousness of the Korean people. Since, in the view of the Neo-Confucians, the public sphere of a man is the extension of his family life, the exclusive ritual status of

the first son of the first wife in the rite of ancestor worship was extended to his social status, granting him not only the rights of inheritance but also the opportunity to advance in his political career.¹⁷ This socio-political system of lineage, exemplified in the narrow principle of primogeniture, was firmly established by the 17th century in the Yi kingdom, thus giving Korean society a distinctively Neo-Confucian character. The rite of ancestor worship served as a major agent in shaping the Yi Korea into the rigidly patrilineal society¹⁸ to an extent that no other society, including China where Confucianism had originated, had experienced.¹⁹

¹⁷The obvious casualties of this change were women and the secondary sons who did not fit in this rigid ritual scheme. Women became mere links between two sharply distinguished groups: "inside" kin of paternal line and "outside" kin of maternal line. Separation of these two descent lines in the family effectively reduced the significance of woman's place in the family. Women's property and inheritance rights were also severely curtailed. Secondary sons, lacking full ritual membership in the family, were marginalized and restricted in the public realm as well.

¹⁸We must note that social stratification was not new with the introduction of Neo-Confucianism to Korea. The Korean society, from her tribal existence, had been highly stratified according to the extended-clan system of kinship. The Neo-Confucianism of the Yi dynasty greatly reinforced this pre-existing tendency.

¹⁹In China, intellectual pursuit was considered to cover a variety of branches of learning including Buddhism, Taoism and various interpretations of Confucianism such as the Wang Yang Ming school. But in Korea, the Neo-Confucian scholar-officials strictly controlled the learning opportunity, and, in addition to Buddhism and Taoism, various interpretations of Confucianism other than that of the Cheng-Chu school were condemned as heresies. The belief that there was only one right path and that other philosophical views could not co-

One of the most salient features of the Neo-Confucian society of the Yi dynasty is the rigidity of its social stratification. Unlike the Koryo dynasty which allowed a considerable amount of upward social mobility through marriage or demonstration of merits by individuals, the social status in Yi Korea was strictly based on birth. Especially, the elite Neo-Confucian scholar-officials who were instrumental in founding the Yi dynasty occupied the top layer (called *Yangban*) of the traditional Korean social system²⁰ next only to the royalty, and jealously safeguarded their genealogical continuity within the patrilineal kinship until the end of the dynasty. Using the Neo-Confucian principles of Three Cardinal Human Relationships (*samgang*) and Five Moral Imperatives (*oryun*) as their effective means, the *yangban* succeeded in keeping the commoners of the non-*yangban* classes in their places. Only those who belonged to this privileged class of *yangban* were given the opportunity to take the civil examination to enter the ranks of the high governmental offices.

Such a rigid social stratification had an effect in the

exist permeated almost all areas of intellectual and social life of Yi Korea. This belief could be viewed as an evidence of anti-syncretic tendency of Korean people.

²⁰Seven classes can be identified in the traditional Korean society: the royalty, the nobility (*yangban*), the country gentry (*hyangban*), the middle folk (*chungin*), the illegitimate sons of nobility (*soja*), the commoners (*sangmin*), and the humble folk (*chonmin*). Spencer J. Palmer, Korea and Christianity: the Problem of Identification with Tradition (Seoul, Korea: Hollym Corporation, 1967), 43.

development of certain patterns of language during Yi dynasty. Persons in the lower class must always use an honorific form when addressing persons in the higher class. Younger persons were also to use honorific form when addressing their elders or older brothers or sisters. On the other hand, those in the *yangban* class almost never used the honorific term to address those in the lower class or their wives, children and servants. They used what can be called the "blunt" form. Between the honorific and blunt form, there was a familiar form. While there are some variations of this pattern of usage in modern Korean language, the basic principle of these three hierarchical order in speech and writing still exists today.²¹

Decline of Yi Dynasty

The ambitious attempt to superimpose the Neo-Confucian ideal upon Korean society by the reform-minded Neo-Confucian scholar-officials, however, did not proceed without revealing its serious flaws which eventually brought about its own demise. As the concentration of power in the central government intensified, the malicious power struggle

²¹The second person singular pronoun "you" is to be avoided as much as possible. When it cannot be avoided, it is in the form of the utmost respect similar to "Your honor" in addressing a judge in the courts in American society today. The status of a person was considered more important than his or her age and dictated the choice of usage among three kinds of forms. For example, when addressing one's uncle who happened to be younger, one had to use honorific forms because of his higher status in the family line.

between the monarchs and the Neo-Confucian bureaucrats continued. Moreover, the members of different factions within the bureaucracy who subscribed to differing interpretations of Neo-Confucianism engaged in incessant factional disputes and personal rivalry over the control of the government, causing serious deterioration of political and economic conditions of the kingdom.²² Such political realities betrayed the ideal pattern of personal and institutional codes of conduct set forth by the Neo-Confucian scholar-officials themselves. As the central government fell into disarray, the corruption of local administration deepened and brought much suffering to the common people. Japan's invasion in 1592 and again in 1597 dealt a decisive blow to the Korean economy from which she would never recover. The Manchu Empire also invaded Korea and forced her into vassalage in the first half of the 17th century, adding to the economic hardship of the Korean people. In spite of the earnest reform movement under the reign of the two enlightened monarchs, Yongjo (1724-1776) and Chongjo (1776-1800), the royal court of Yi continued to be embroiled in bitter power struggle between rival factions. Discontent among Korean people reached the point of explosion, brought about several large scale popular

²²Whenever one faction succeeded in gaining control of the government, it used whatever means available to wipe out its opponents, resulting in bloody purges and counter purges of literati.

uprisings in the early 19th century, and plunged the nation into chaos.

Toward the end of the Yi dynasty, Korea confronted probably one of the most perilous times of her history. Japan's ambitious expansion policy after the Meiji reform, Russia's southward expansion looking for a foothold in East Asia to counter the Western powers, and the colonial interest of the Western imperial countries all merged in Korea to put pressure upon the Yi kingdom which was already on the verge of collapse. The last attempt to salvage this ill-fated kingdom by Prince Regent *Taewon-gun* (ruled 1864-1873) through a sweeping reform policy to strengthen the central government and fend off the foreign powers from the shores of Korea only sped the formal end of the Yi dynasty as well as of the dominance of Neo-Confucianism.²³ As Neo-Confucianism lapsed into disrepute, its empty doctrinalism and rigid formalism made it irrelevant to the practical life of the people. The traditional folk beliefs and practice of

²³The last King of Yi dynasty, Kojong (1852-1919), the 12 year old nephew of the late king came to the throne in 1864. Since he was still a minor, his father, Yi Ha-ung (1820-1898) took over the affairs of the state. He was to be known as the *Taewon-gun* (the Grand Prince Regent). In an effort to consolidate the power of the court, he attacked the Neo-Confucian scholar-officials and their private regional academies with their entrenched privileges. In 1864, he banned the further construction of the academies, and in 1868, issued the decree that they be taxed, and finally in 1871, closed all but 47 of the hundreds of academies in the country. Grayson, Korea: A Religious History, 171-72.

the Korean shamanism²⁴ which had long been suppressed by the Neo-Confucian officials began to gain popularity in the rural areas. The decline of the Neo-Confucian Yi dynasty prepared the Korean people to embrace the new ideas as well as the new religion of the West pressing its way into the Korean peninsula riding the tide of the Western imperialism.

Opening of Korea to the West

As the factional strife within the Neo-Confucian *yangban* class continued, draining much of the energy of the kingdom, some Neo-Confucian scholars who belonged to the school of practical learning (called *shirhak*) began to be attracted to the Western ideas with which they came in contact through the annual envoys to China. Books on astronomy, mathematics, medicine, geography, science and technology were imported and were eagerly studied by these scholars. Toward the end of the 18th century, as a part of Western learning, the books on Catholicism were also imported through one of the *shirhak* scholars named Yi Sung-

²⁴During the entire Yi dynasty, the number of the professional shamans was roughly 5,000. In 1930's, however, the number increased as high as 12,380. See Yi Sang-baek, "Shamanism and Aberrations," in KOREA: ITS LAND, PEOPLE AND CULTURES OF ALL AGES (Seoul, Korea: Hakwon-Sa, Ltd., 1960), 351-52. The wife of the last king of Yi dynasty, Kojong, was greatly devoted to the shamanistic rituals and brought the female shaman, called *mudang* into the palace and elevated her to the rank of Princess. See Clarence N. Weems ed. Hulbert's History of Korea (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1962), 2:248.

hun.²⁵ It came as no surprise that, during the middle of the 19th century, those who followed in the tradition of the *shirhak* advocated the opening of Korea to Western civilization through foreign trades. It was the treaty with the neighboring Japan under her military threat in 1876, however, that finally threw open the door of Korea to the outside world, after having had experienced what are often called "the foreign disturbances" (*yangyo*) in 1866 with France, and in 1871 with the U.S. In spite of the fierce objections by the Neo-Confucian literati, King Kojong took the irreversible course of the open policy which resulted in the treaties of commerce with the U.S., Great Britain, Germany, Italy, and Russia before the year 1884 was over.²⁶

2. Korea after 1884

The year 1884 remains as one of the memorable years in the Christian history of Korea. In September, a young American physician and Presbyterian missionary Dr. Horace Allen²⁷ came to Korea as a physician to the American

²⁵See footnote 1.

²⁶France, Austria, Belgium, Denmark and other nations followed the suit after 1884. Lee, A New History of Korea, 275.

²⁷On September 20, 1884, Allen arrived at Inchon, the major port city in the west coast of Korea, and two days later, came to the capital, Seoul. He was born at Delaware, Ohio, on April 23, 1858. He graduated from Ohio Wesleyan University in 1881 with the degree of Bachelor of Science and received medical training at Miami Medical College, Oxford, Ohio, graduating in 1883. In that year, he was appointed as

legation in Seoul. Only a few months after his arrival, on December 4, 1884, a bloody palace coup broke out in the capital.²⁸ The coup proved to be short-lived. But one of the wounded in the pandemonium was Prince Min Yong-ik, nephew of the queen, who had just returned from the United States after completing the exchange of ratification of the American-Korean treaty. Allen was called to care for the prince who was at the death throes with severed arteries and sword-cuts. A group of the Korean court physicians protested the treatment of their prince by a foreign physician, but the desperate situation called for an immediate action. Allen succeeded in bringing the Korean prince back to health after three months of intensive care,²⁹ and, as a consequence, won the full confidence of the court. Soon he was appointed to the post of court physician. In the early spring of 1885, Allen was granted a

a medical missionary by the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions and was sent to China, arriving at Shanghai on October 11, 1883. After having been disappointed by the poor prospect of medical work in China, he decided to go to Korea at the urge of his medical friends in Shanghai. Paik, The History, 85,86.

²⁸This event is known in Korean history as *Kapshin Chongbyon* (the Political Incident of the Year of Kapshin). The progressives, who pressed for the sweeping reform and complete national independence from China, staged a coup, after securing support from Japanese legation, in a desperate attempt to eliminate the conservative government officials. With the help of China, however, the conservatives quickly recovered their control over the government. Weems, Hulbert's History of Korea, 234-40.

²⁹Paik, The History of Protestant Missions in Korea, 102.

special permission from King Ko Jong to open the government hospital under his charge.³⁰ This particular set of circumstances allowed Allen to overcome the initial suspicion of the court officials and secure the favor of the king and thus strengthen his position at the Korean court. It was a development of no small significance that would pave the way for the favorable reception of the missionary work in the land once known for its antagonism toward Christian propagation.³¹

Protestant evangelistic work

The Protestant evangelistic work began in earnest in 1885 by the two pioneer missionaries, Rev. Horace Grant

³⁰Ibid., 106. The Government Hospital which was called "Kwang Hei Won," developed into a mission hospital, and, by 1895, the full financial responsibility was assumed by the Presbyterian Mission Board. Allen D. Clark, A History of the Church in Korea (Seoul, Korea: The Christian Literature Society of Korea, 1971), 121.

³¹Although Allen was instrumental in opening the door of the Christian missions in Korea, he was to be known in later years as an American diplomat rather than a missionary. However, in the minds of many students of the history of Christianity in Korea, such a favorable reception of Allen and the American Protestant Christianity by the royalty of the Kingdom of Korea, soon to be followed by its phenomenal growth, was providential, especially when juxtaposed with the Catholic Christianity which had met intense hostility of the Korean court a century earlier in a quite different set of circumstances. Clark, A History of the Church in Korea, 462.; Harold S. Hong, "Social, Political and Psychological Aspects of Church Growth," in Ro Bong Rin and Martin L. Nelson, Korean Church Growth Explosion (Seoul, Korea: Word of Life Press, 1983), 181.

Underwood³² of the Northern Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

and Rev. Henry Gerhard Appenzeller³³ of the Northern

³²Reverend Horace G. Underwood, D.D., LL.D. was born in London, England, on July 19, 1859. He came to the United States when he was thirteen and studied at Hasbrouck Institute in Jersey City, New Jersey. He graduated from New York University in 1881 with the A.B. degree and then entered the Theological Seminary of the Dutch Reformed Church in America located at New Brunswick, New Jersey, and graduated in the spring of 1884. Lillias H. Underwood, Underwood of Korea (Seoul, Korea: Yonsei University Press, 1983), 15,33.

³³The following description of Appenzeller's life is drawn mainly from Daniel M. Davies, The Life and Thought of Henry Gerhard Appenzeller (1858-1902): Missionary to Korea, (Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1988). Born into a deeply religious family as a fifth generation Pennsylvania Dutchman, Henry Gerhard Appenzeller grew up in the tradition of the German Reformed Church. During his formative years, he received the thorough religious training in the study of the Heidelberg Catechism. For its pietistic and non-controversial nature, the German Reformed Church in the United States adopted the Heidelberg Catechism as the central doctrine of the church in the seventeenth century and set the tone of the religious life of the Pennsylvanian congregations of the German Reformed Church who embraced pietism and revivalism. On October 1, 1876, at the age of eighteen, Appenzeller experienced rebirth while attending the revival meeting conducted by an evangelist in a Presbyterian church. It was a turning point in his life which he celebrated annually as his spiritual birthday and from which time his evangelical impulse grew increasingly strong. He studied at West Chester Normal School in 1876 and 1877 and, upon graduation, taught in a public school in Delaware County, Pennsylvania. His teaching experience continued during his years at Franklin and Marshall College. At the age of 21, in 1879, while a student at Franklin and Marshall College, Appenzeller was dissatisfied with an anti-pietistic and anti-revivalistic orientation of the school and decided to change his membership to the Methodist Church. (Franklin College was established in 1787 and Marshall College was established in 1830's. During the 1830's and 1840's, a revivalistic movement of Charles Grandison Finney, the Presbyterian revivalist, gained its popularity in the German Reformed Church. He employed the celebrated "New Measures," which included protracted meetings, the extensive use of "anxious seats," prayer for individuals by name, and the encouragement of women to talk in assemblies. John Nevin and Philip Schaff, the renown Mercersburg theologians, opposed the new measures and stigmatized the

movement within the German Reformed Church as "methodism". In 1850's these two colleges, located in Lancaster, were merged and functioned as a feeder for the German Reformed Seminary in Mercersburg, Pennsylvania. In 1871, the seminary moved from Mercersburg to the Franklin and Marshall campus. When Appenzeller entered Franklin and Marshall College in the fall of 1878, the founders of Mercersburg Theology, John Nevin and Philip Schaff, were no longer teaching, but three of his students, Thomas Apple, Emanuel Gerhard, and Frederic Gast formed the core of the faculty in both the seminary and college. They maintained the anti-pietistic and anti-revivalistic teachings of Nevin and Schaff.) He was attracted by the Methodist Episcopal Church's revivalistic and pietistic orientation as well as its dynamic program emphasizing education, temperance, the open Bible and other projects such as the Sunday School movement, the Freedmen's Aid society, the Historical Society, the Women's Foreign Missionary Society, and so on. He would be replicating the activities highlighted in this program during his work as a missionary in Korea for 17 years. In 1882, he entered Drew Theological Seminary of the Methodist Episcopal Church. While engaging in serious and rigorous scholarship dealing with the theological issues of the day, the faculty at Drew saw "their task not to produce thoroughgoing theologians but, rather, an educated ministry, able to preach powerfully and live piously...." No doubt, Appenzeller was the product of the training at Drew both in theology and practice, which emphasized the importance of conversion, necessity of leading the holy life, and evangelistic fervor over a thoroughgoing academic and theological pursuit. His commissioning and departure to Korea as a missionary in January 1885 also spared him from the theological difficulties that seriously challenged the Methodist Episcopal Church as well as all other Christian denominations in the United States during the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

The European, especially German, influence of theological thinking began to permeate into the seminaries of the United States in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Rationalism, philosophical skepticism, idealism, biblical criticism, and scientific positivism, especially biological evolution theory, challenged the authority of the Bible and the religious hierarchy. Emory Stevens Bucke, ed. The history of American Methodism vol. 2 (New York: Abingdon Press, 1964), 594-95; Arthur M. Schlesinger, Sr., "A Critical Period in American Religion, 1875-1900," in John M. Mulder and John F. Wilson, ed. Religion in American History (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1978), 302-4.

The theological stance of the pioneer missionaries such

Methodist Church. Upon arriving in Korea in April 1885, they took an extreme care not to offend the Korean court with direct evangelism. The law of the land still forbade direct evangelism on penalty of death. They began with the educational work.³⁴ The traditional educational system seemed to have been set up to exclude from advancement all but the elite *yangban* class. The educational work by the American missionaries made a deep impression in the minds of the commoners whose children were welcomed to enroll in the new schools.³⁵ These mission schools, as they were called

as Appenzeller contributed to the formation of a strong evangelical and conservative Christianity devoid of the more liberal theological argumentation that had seriously challenged and undermined the orthodox Christian faith in the United States as well as in Europe in the early twentieth century. Once in Korea, Appenzeller began the educational work which received favorable response from the king and which eventually paved the way for the direct evangelistic activity. Appenzeller was clear in his missionary philosophy that the various humanitarian efforts of medical, educational and technological services by missionaries were mere means to the end of preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ to Koreans.

³⁴Underwood's descendants are still active in Korea, in the church as well as in the university (Yonsei) which he founded. Appenzeller's children likewise helped build two of Korea's finest schools, Paejae Boys' High School and Ewha Women's University.

³⁵The first girls' school was founded by Mrs. Mary F. Scranton, the mother of Dr. William Scranton, who assisted Allen in the government hospital for about a year since his arrival at Seoul on May 3, 1885. Mrs. Scranton followed the next month. As soon as she arrived, she set out to purchase property and built a school for girls. At the time when girls were considered inferior in academics to boys and few parents were willing to invest on their daughters' education, this school offered a unique opportunity for Korean women to receive formal education. Mrs. Scranton's school gained confidence of the Korean people. In 1887, the Korean Queen herself named the school "Ewha Haktang" or Pear Blossom

later, were the only modern schools in Korea prior to World War I, and a large number of Korea's postwar leaders received some form of modern education there. Soon the government relaxed its regulation of the evangelistic works by the missionaries. By 1887, the anti-foreign religion laws became dead letters. Many other Christian mission pioneers joined these early workers before the turn of the century and fanned out across the country, opening little stations in all the provinces. Their primary concern was church-founding and the training of a native pastorate. But the medical as well as educational works by the missionaries were vital to the modernization of Korea.³⁶

The evangelistic work by the American missionaries at the turn of the century laid the ground for the establishment and phenomenal growth of the Korean Protestant churches in the years to come. The conservative and fundamentalist character of the Korean Protestant churches

Institute, which was to be Ewha High School and Ewha Women's University of today, the largest women's university in Asia. Paik, The History of Protestant Missions in Korea, 126-28.

³⁶In addition to the Presbyterian Mission Hospital in Seoul, the Methodist Mission took part in the great effort to the medical mission. A Methodist women's hospital began in Seoul. The surgical work by Western physicians, which was viewed with great fear, now gained admiration of Korean people. When the epidemic of cholera hit the capital city and its vicinity in 1895, the American medical missionaries were united under the leadership of Dr. O. R. Avison and offered a remarkable service to the Korean people. The medical work done by the American missionaries marks the beginning of modern medicine in Korea. Paik, The History of Protestant Missions in Korea, 240-41.

was also fashioned after the theological and cultural tendencies of the early missionaries themselves. One of the most outstanding features of evangelism by the American missionaries was the emphasis on Bible studies. The Bible began to be translated into Korean in 1880s, and the work of translation was vigorously pursued by the missionaries and their Korean helpers until its completion in 1910. While still being translated, the parts of the Korean Bible were widely circulated³⁷ and highly esteemed as the absolute truth of God. The great stress was given to the new converts' learning to read the Bible and owning their own copies. American missionaries utilized the guest rooms of the common Korean houses to conduct Bible study.³⁸ The Methodist Mission developed the circuit Bible class system through which many Korean converts were trained in the Bible. The following note from the Methodist Mission Minutes of 1903 gives us a flavor of this emphasis.

Our present excellent plan for operation consists in, first: circuit classes. Here, the pastor meets his workers, trains them, that they may train their separate groups. These workers, he examines, certificates and passes into the district classes. Here our workers are carried

³⁷The total circulation of the parts of the Korean Bible in 1896 was 2,997. In 10 years, the circulation increased to 127,269. Paik, The History of Protestant Missions in Korea, 347.

³⁸It was called the "Sa-Rang" room ministry. "Sa-Rang" room was a small living room attached to the main part of the Korean house used by the master of the house to receive guests. It became the American missionaries' point of contact with the Korean common people.

through the local preacher's course, and having graduated, are to be passed on to the theological classes, designed for men destined for the full ministry.³⁹

In their emphasis on Bible reading, the missionaries stumbled over the most powerful tool to be used for the evangelization of Korea: *Hangul*, the simple Korean language. Hangul was invented by King Sejong more than four centuries earlier to make available the language to the common people most of whom were illiterate. But Chinese continued to be the language of government, and the educated elites despised Hangul as a vulgar script. The missionaries revived the simple vernacular script in translating the Bible and other Christian literatures. We can hardly overlook the fact that the emphasis on the Bible study contributed to the increasing literacy of Koreans, especially children and women who had had no opportunity to learn to read previously.⁴⁰ The "Bible Women"⁴¹ were trained for the

³⁹Clark, A History of the Church in Korea, 130-31.

⁴⁰A similar result was brought about during the Reformation years when the Protestant reformers asserted that people should read the Bible in their own language. See Gerald L. Gutek, Cultural Foundation of Education: A Biographical Introduction (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1991), 87. As it was the German language for Luther during the Protestant Reformation, so was it the Korean language for the American missionaries during the pioneering years of the Protestant mission movement in Korea.

⁴¹Owing to the strict separation between sexes, the American missionaries solicited the help of the Korean women to reach the women population. These Korean women helpers were known as "Bible women," and worked actively in the church as evangelists, teachers and leaders behind the scenes.

evangelism for other Korean women, and their effective work contributed to the evangelism greatly.

The missionaries' heavy emphasis on Bible study led to the heightened sense of morality among the people. The moral standards were set high for the church membership. In addition to the practice of baptism after vigorous examination, the rules of sabbath observance, marriage standards and abstinence from the use of tobacco and alcoholic liquors were strictly enforced. Since then, non-smoking and non-drinking are almost synonymous to being a Christian in Korea.

Like any other human movements, the Korean Christianity of the first 25 years bears the stamp of its agents, the American missionaries. The following characterization of a typical American missionary in Korea can also be a fairly accurate description of Korean Christianity.

The typical missionary of the first quarter century after the opening of the country was a man of the Puritan type. He kept the Sabbath as our New England forefathers did a century ago. He looked upon dancing, smoking, and card playing as sins in which no true followers of Christ should indulge. In theology and Biblical criticism he was strongly conservative, and he held as a vital truth the premillenarian view of the second coming of Christ. The higher criticism and liberal theology were deemed dangerous heresies. In most of the evangelical churches of America and Great Britain, conservatives and liberals have learned to live and work together in peace; but in Korea the few men who hold "the modern view" have a rough road to travel, particularly in the

Presbyterian group of missions.⁴²

Japanese occupation

American Protestantism was gaining momentum at the turn of the century. Politically, however, Korea was caught in between rival powers: namely, between China and Japan, which resulted in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95, and between Russia and Japan, which resulted in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05. Japan emerged as a victor in both wars, and, in 1910, annexed Korea and declared her to be a Japanese colony. Korea thus became a victim of imperialism. Unlike other such victims elsewhere, however, Korea was conquered not by a Western power, but by neighboring Japan. Christian missions in other colonies in Asia were seen as a front of the imperialistic power of the West. The Christian mission in China was going through a similar experience. But in Korea, the Christian church was associated with nationalism against the oppressive foreign power. From the beginning, American missionaries made friends with the ill-fated Korean court. They were not suspected as government agents of an aggressive Western power, because, at that time, the U.S. had little interest in Korean affairs. The Korean Christians became the leaders organizing resistance against

⁴²Arthur J. Brown, The Mastery of the Far East (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1919), 540.

Japanese occupation.⁴³ When the Japanese authorities began a systematic campaign to impose the Japanese cult of Shinto upon all Koreans in the mid-1930s, the missionaries stood on the side of the Korean Christians who refused to submit on the ground that offering obeisance at Shinto shrines was committing the sin of idolatry. The Pacific War between the U.S. and Japan in 1942 forced almost all American missionaries to leave Korea. Although the church suffered a general decline in membership under the Japanese occupation, the marriage between Christianity and Korean nationalism provided a springboard from which the Christian movement bounced back to the explosive growth after the liberation from Japan in 1945.⁴⁴

The Korean church after liberation

With the surrender of Japan to the Allied Forces on August 15, 1945 came the liberation of Korea from Japanese rule. The church had much to celebrate. But when the American missionaries returned to Korea soon after the liberation, they found the Korean church deeply divided over

⁴³On March 1, 1919, a group of 33 prominent Korean leaders signed the declaration of independence. Of the 33 signers, 15 were Christians. Naturally, Japanese persecution of Christians followed. The suffering at the hands of the oppressor proved to be one of the greatest assets of Christian movement in Korea.

⁴⁴For a succinct account of the Japanese policy toward Korean Christianity, see Palmer, Korea and Christianity, 61-68.

the question of what to do with the Christians who had buckled under the Japanese pressure to attend the worship at Shinto shrines. The largest denomination, the Presbyterian church, split into two, and church historians consider this split as the first of the numerous divisions in the church up to the present.

The returning missionaries also learned that the Korean church leaders whom they had trained sought independence from their authority and laid claim to the church leadership as well as the administration of the mission-related institutions and properties, some of which Japan had once seized and then left behind. The transfer of the leadership of the growing church from the missionaries to the native Christian leaders was anything but smooth. Many Korean leaders resented the paternalistic attitude of the American missionaries. But the division of the country between the Communist North under the Soviet Union's influence and the Democratic South under the influence of the U.S., and the subsequent civil war from 1950 to 1953 forced the church to continue to rely heavily upon foreign aids.

The Korean Christians survived the bitter war along with others who suffered beyond measure. They stood up to the challenge of restoring their war-torn country. The devastation of the war led many Koreans to take refuge in the church. Many church buildings destroyed or damaged in the war were reconstructed, and many new church buildings

were built. In addition to keeping the evangelistic fervor alive, the church also engaged actively in the educational work, continuing the tradition of the early American missionaries. The relief organizations which ran hospitals and orphanages were predominantly Christian. The resulting numerical growth of the church was phenomenal until the term, "Church Growth," came to be known as a trademark of the Korean church.⁴⁵

The rapid urbanization and industrialization of Korea in the post-war decades brought profound social and cultural changes to Korea. The Korean Christians found themselves, once again, at the forefront of these challenges and grew increasingly vocal in the social as well as political issues of the nation. The native Korean Christian leadership sought independence from American missionaries when Korea became independent from Japan. But the Koreanization of the Christian church came slowly. It was not until recent years that the Korean Christian church began to develop truly indigenous Korean forms of theology and worship as well as church arts, music, architecture and so forth. The majority of the leaders of the Korean church have maintained the legacy of the early American missionaries who had sacrificed their lives to bring the gospel to their land. The

⁴⁵Christians made up about 3% of the Korean population in the 1950s. Within a decade, the ratio doubled to 6%. Then, by the 1980s, about one fourth of the entire population became Christians. Grayson, Korea: A Religious History, 204.; Facts about Korea, 136.

foundation the missionaries had laid was laid so well that the Korean church can be characterized as the American church preserved in the tradition of the late 19th century American conservative Protestantism. Now, many church observers note that the Korean church has reached her maturity.

Most of the first-generation Korean Christian immigrants to the U.S. lived their Christian life in Korea during the maturing years of the Korean church. To some of them, the Korean church's historical connection with the American Protestantism may not be as obvious. But to most of the others, their immigration to the U.S. meant to them coming to the land of the first missionaries who, a century ago, risked much to carry the gospel message across the Pacific Ocean to a land known to them as the "Hermit Kingdom."

CHAPTER 2

KOREAN CHRISTIANITY¹ TO AMERICA

As noted in the previous chapter, the first American Protestant missionary arrived in Korea in 1884. Prior to that, Christianity was unknown to the Koreans except for a small number of the Catholic remnants who survived the persecution by the Yi court. Once the door of evangelism was opened, however, Christianity spread rapidly through dedicated missionaries, most of whom were Americans. America began to be known as the "beautiful country," a

¹The relationship between culture and Christianity is an enduring question as was presented and expounded upon in Richard Niebuhr's seminal work, "Christ and Culture". Historically, Christianity has proven to possess a power that transforms a human culture with which it comes into contact. Also proven historically is the fact that Christianity itself is affected by the culture into which it is introduced to the extent that its cultural characteristics become distinct, separating it from the Christianity practiced in other cultures. The Christianity in Korea is now over a century old. It was American Christianity that made a headway into the Korean society as Korea was beginning to open her doors to the outside world. It has transformed the Korean culture significantly. It has also been affected by the Korean culture. The term, "Korean Christianity," is used here with an assumption that certain cultural characteristics can be identified as we observe the lives of the first-generation Korean immigrants, the majority of whom are Christians.

Efforts are being made to "Koreanize" Christianity by discarding the expressions of faith foreign to the traditional Korean culture and developing the theology and practice that reflect uniquely Korean situations. I made no attempt to discuss this effort in this essay.

"land of gold" from which missionaries came to help poor Koreans. In less than two decades, on January 13, 1903, the first group of Koreans arrived in Honolulu, Hawaii as immigrants. And it is among that group that we find the first Korean Christians who entered America. Since then, the flow of the Korean immigrants to the U.S. has fluctuated according to the political and socioeconomic situations on both shores of the Pacific Ocean, mostly dictated by the changes in the U.S. immigration policies. But it has always been the outstanding characteristic of the Korean immigrants that the majority are affiliated with the Christian church. No other of their Asian counterparts share that characteristic.²

The history of Korean immigration to the U.S. can be divided roughly into two periods: First, the early immigration from 1903 to 1965 when amendment of the immigration law made mass immigration possible for Asians; second, the recent immigration after 1965 to the present which accounts for the majority of the Korean-American population in the U.S. In this chapter, we will review the history of Korean immigration to the U.S. with special

²Based on figures from 1986, 260 Korean-American churches were affiliated with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), while only 19 Chinese-American churches belonged to the denomination. The number of the Japanese-American churches were even smaller at 16, and Filipino-American, at 4. Eui Hang Shin and Hyung Park, "An Analysis of Causes of Schisms in Ethnic Churches: The Case of Korean-American Churches," Sociological Analysis 49, no. 3 (1988): 234-248.

attention paid to the Christian immigrants and the Korean ethnic churches in which they congregated.

Korean immigration before 1965

The first group of Korean immigrants who arrived in Honolulu, Hawaii, numbered only 101 (55 men, 21 women, and 25 children.) Although there were historical precedence of the Korean exodus to neighboring countries such as Manchuria and Russia during the times of economic hardship in their homeland, the recent Korean emigration overseas was unprecedented in Korean history. Traditionally, Koreans were deeply bound to their homeland where their ancestors were buried. Veneration of ancestors was highly valued and required that Koreans, especially males, take care of the graves of the departed and perform proper rituals at a proper time. Then what motivated the 101 Koreans and many more others who followed to make a move? The extraordinary circumstances in which this Hermit Kingdom found herself toward the end of the 19th century offer an explanation for the move.

The political situation of Korea was chaotic. Korea was caught in the power struggle among China, Japan and Russia as well as among the Western powers which were competing to enter the Korean ports ahead of others for commerce. The Yi court was helpless, and the national

economy was on the brink of bankruptcy.³ Many farmers were caught in the vicious cycle of debt and dependency upon foreign merchants. There were food shortages everywhere. In addition to the political and economic difficulties, an impetus for the Korean immigration to the U.S. came from American missionaries. When the advertisement was published recruiting Korean workers to immigrate and find jobs at Hawaiian sugar plantations, the initial response was anything but enthusiastic. Some American missionaries decided to help. In particular, Reverend George H. Jones of the Methodist Mission in Inchon, a major port city near Seoul, gave a sermon encouraging his congregation members to take the opportunity to better their lives. It was not an accident that nearly half of the 101 immigrants on the first ship were the members of his church. Although there was a growing need for cheap labor in Hawaii and the primary purpose for receiving immigrants from Korea was economic in nature, the American missionaries seem to have had an altruistic motive in encouraging Koreans to immigrate to

³One historian describes the situation as follows: "After Korea opened its doors to foreign powers, the peninsula became a semi-colony of Japan and the West. The country was divided into zones of influence of the various foreign powers. The United States obtained mining concessions and communication and transportation franchises. Japanese merchants began to monopolize Korean import and export businesses. Russians were interested in timber concessions. The native handicraft industries and the primitive agricultural economy faced bankruptcy and the national treasury became empty." Bong Youn Choy, Koreans in America (Chicago: Nelson Hall, 1979), 73.

Hawaii.⁴

Between 1903 and 1905, 65 ships brought 7,226 Korean immigrants to Hawaii, of whom 40% were Christians.⁵ Then, in 1905, the flow of Korean immigration into Hawaii came to a sudden halt under Japan's strong pressure. After winning the Sino-Japanese war, Japan began to exert its influence in the affairs of the Korean court,⁶ preparing for the annexation of the Korean peninsula. Stopping to the Korean immigration to Hawaii was Japan's calculated move to ensure the maximum pool of Korean laborers for its own use. It was also suspected that Japan wanted to protect the Japanese workers from the Korean competition in Hawaii who dominated

⁴The following is the description of the role Rev. Jones has played in the immigration of Koreans to Hawaii appearing in the report of Rev. John W. Wadman, superintendent of the Hawaiian missions of the Methodist Episcopal church: "While encamped at the seaport of Chemulpo (Inchon), awaiting the transport to bear them away into a strange land, Rev. George Heber Jones, a Methodist Episcopal Missionary, became interested in their welfare, and held large tent meetings in order to inspire them with laudable ambitions and prepare them for the strange experiences so soon to overtake them. He also handed a few of the leaders among them letters of introduction to the Superintendent of Methodist Missions in Hawaii, and gave them in parting his heartfelt blessing." John W. Wadman, "Educational Work among Koreans," quoted in Hyung-Chan Kim, ed. The Korean Diaspora (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-Clio, Inc., 1977), 50.

⁵Eun Sik Yang, "Koreans in America, 1903-1945," in Koreans in Los Angeles: Prospects and Promises, ed. Euiyoung Yu, Earl H. Phillips, and Eun Sik Yang (Los Angeles: California State University, 1982), 5.

⁶On November 17, 1905, the Korea-Japan protectorate treaty was signed, and Japan was authorized to take control of the foreign affairs of Korea. Yojun Yun, "Early History of Korean Immigration to America," in Kim, The Korean Diaspora, 37.

the labor market.

Most of the Korean immigrants came to Hawaii to make money and return to Korea as soon as possible. But the reality was quite different, and saving money did not come as quickly as they had expected. They were treated in a manner similar to the Chinese and Japanese unskilled contract laborers were in the past. The work in the sugar plantation was extremely hard and long, but the wage was very low. After making the loan payment, the workers had little left. The Asian laborers were housed in a large camp on the plantation and were isolated from the outside world. Life in the plantation became intolerable to many. Within three years, about 1,000 decided to return to Korea. Others ventured to move to mainland United States. The number of the Korean immigrants in California grew to be about 1,000 by 1907, and 2,000 by 1910. Most of them got jobs as laborers in the rice fields and railroad construction.⁷ Japan annexed Korea in 1910. From 1910 to 1924, when the Korean immigration officially halted because of the Oriental Exclusion Act, the movement from Korea to Hawaii was mainly that of the Korean picture brides. During this period, a little over 1,000 young Korean women entered Hawaii. The

⁷Lee Houchins and Changsu Houchins, "The Korean Experience in America, 1903-24," in The Asian Americans, ed. N. Hundley, Jr. (Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio, Inc., 1976), 135.; Choy, Koreans in America, 167.; Bernice Bong Hee Kim, "The Koreans in Hawaii," Social Science 9, no. 4 (October 1934), in Hyung-chan Kim and Wayne Patterson, The Koreans in America: 1882-1974 (New York: Oceana Publications, Inc., 1974), 111.

managers of the sugar plantation hoped that, by marrying, the young Korean bachelor laborers would settle down and work more steadily.⁸ It was not until the 1950s after the Korean War that the flow of the Korean immigration resumed when Korean wives of American servicemen and war orphans were allowed into the U.S.A.

One of the aspects that set apart the Korean immigrant community in Hawaii from the Chinese and Japanese was the Christian church. The Christian church served as the social and cultural as well as religious center. Within the first decade of immigration, the number of Christians reached 2,800, constituting about a third of the entire Korean population in Hawaii. The number of Korean ethnic churches increased to 39. Such phenomenal growth of the Christian church among the early Korean immigrants in Hawaii is often attributed to the following three factors. First, they were an extremely heterogeneous group and lacked the clan and regional associations based on traditional ties.⁹ The church was the only institution with an organizational structure to perform social functions. Even non-Christian parents sent their children to church for some form of

⁸Kim and Patterson, The Koreans in America, 111.

⁹Regionally, every province of Korea was represented in that group. In terms of their occupation, the largest proportion was common laborers while less than one-seventh were farmers. There were ex-soldiers of the Korean army, household servants, policemen, wood cutters and miners. Ibid., 110.

education. Second, since they came to the land of the missionaries, Christianity gave them some sense of connection with white Americans. Usually, Christians received more sympathy than others from white Americans. Third, life in the plantation was too hard for many of them to bear, and they sought comfort and strength from the Christian faith.

By the mid-1920s, the churches were also established in the mainland U.S. in such cities as San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago and New York, where Korean immigrants migrated and other Korean nationals such as a small number of students and political exiles gathered. The Korean Christian church in the U.S. during the period of the Japanese occupation of Korea (1910-45) also served as a platform for the political movement for independence from Japan. The Korean Christians in the U.S. actively supported the independence movement in Korea by making financial contributions from their meager earnings. But the rapid numerical growth and the politicization of the church had an adverse effect on the quality of the spiritual care given to the members. There was also a severe lack of qualified pastors. Internal church politics separated the members into many factions, and fighting erupted often requiring the intervention by the court.

With Japan's surrender World War II ended, and Korea regained national independence on August 15, 1945. For

almost 40 years, the Korean ethnic church in the U.S. brought the Korean immigrants, students, and political exiles together for the common cause of national independence. Now that independence was achieved, the Korean ethnic church began to lose its appeal. The tragic Korean War (1950-53) brought many Koreans to the U.S., in particular, Korean wives of American servicemen and war orphans.¹⁰ But they did not become a part of the Korean immigrant community. The Korean wives carried the stigma among the Koreans that they were largely "business girls." The war orphans were absorbed into American society and became almost invisible.

From 1945 to 1965, the Korean immigrant church suffered considerable decline. The over-indulgence in the Korean independence movement by the first-generation Korean Christians left the needs and wants of their second-generation children unattended to. The main issue of the Korean Christian immigrants during the next two post-liberation decades was intergeneration conflict. The second-generation children knew about their parents' burning patriotism for Korea. But they did not share their parents' strong nostalgic feelings toward the home country. They

¹⁰The statistical data reveals that 6,423 Korean wives of American servicemen and 5,348 Korean war orphans came to the U.S. between 1951 and 1964. Won Moo Hurh and Kwang Chung Kim, Korean Immigrants in America: A Structural Analysis of Ethnic Confinement and Adhesive Adaptation (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1984), 210.

followed their parents to church services in the Korean ethnic church, but they felt out of place because of the language barrier. Above all, their priority was very different from their parents who demanded that they follow the Korean custom and keep their Korean identity. They were more interested in learning the American lifestyle and advancing in America society. The severe conflicts in values and cultural orientations between the two generations left many parents frustrated and disappointed, with many children rebellious and alienated. The Korean Christian church lacked both the will and the means to accommodate the growing number of second-generation Korean-Americans. The intergenerational conflicts could have dealt a fatal blow to the Korean ethnic church if it were not for the large influx of new Korean immigrants after 1965.

Korean immigration after 1965

On October 3, 1965, a new immigration bill was signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson and went into effect on December 1st of that year. This bill amended the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1924, abolishing the national origins quota over a three year period and opening the borders to the Orientals who had been deemed "undesirable" in the past.¹¹ The Asian share of total

¹¹The bill revised the McCarran-Walter Act of 1924 which enacted one of the most racially discriminatory policy in the immigration history of the U.S. The revision was a reflection

immigration to the U.S. increased from 7.6% (1961-65) to 27.4% (1969-73). For the first time in the U.S. immigration history, the Asians matched the Europeans (27.3% in 1969-73).¹² The increase of the immigrants from Korea was even more dramatic. In 1965, only 2,165 Koreans were admitted to the U.S. Since then, the number of Korean immigrants increased each year by leaps and bounds, and in 1975 alone over 28,000 Korean immigrants entered the U.S. The U.S. Census report on Resident Population by Race shows that, in 1980, 355,000 persons reported their race as Korean. The number increased to 799,000 in the 1990 Census.¹³ But the scholars of the Korean immigration and the Korean-American community estimate the actual Korean population in the U.S. to be over one million in the early 1990s.¹⁴

The early Korean immigrants in Hawaii were mostly uneducated laborers. The Korean wives of the American servicemen who came in the post-Korean War years were not well educated either. In contrast, the new Korean

of the growing social awareness in the late 1950s and 1960s of the minority rights to participate in the American life more fully.

¹²Hurh and Kim, Korean Immigrants, 53.

¹³U.S. Bureau of the Census, press release CB91-216, as of April 1, 1990.

¹⁴The official report of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea has the Korean population in the United States at 1,024,997. The Sae Gae Times (a Korean newspaper published in America) Sept. 4, 1986, in Geunhee Yu, "Pastoral Care in Pluralistic America: A Korean-American Perspective" (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1988), 99.

immigrants after 1965 are the most highly educated group among Asian-Americans.¹⁵ The educational level of the new Korean immigrants is also higher than that of the Koreans residing in Korea.¹⁶ The Korean immigrants to the U.S. are a highly selective group in their home country in terms of education. The passport and visa processes and multiple standards set by the two countries effectively removed the poor and underprivileged people who would have been expected to be the candidates for emigration. Instead, the great majority of the new immigrants were from the urban middle class who were seeking better opportunities for education and higher income than what were available to them in Korea.¹⁷ This stands in sharp contrast to the early Korean

¹⁵The 1970 U.S. Census revealed that the proportion of the high school graduates among the Korean immigrants was 71%. The figure is higher than other Asian immigrants such as the Japanese (69%), Chinese (60%) and Filipino (57%) counterparts. In the same year, 55% of the entire U.S. population were high school graduates. The figures of the college graduates show even greater differences: Korean (36%), Japanese (15%), Chinese (21%), Filipino (21%) and the U.S. total (11%). Hurh and Kim, Korean Immigrants, 212.

¹⁶A study done in 1980 by Gardner, Robey and Smith, reveals that 93.6% of male Korean immigrants between the ages of 20 and 29 who immigrated to the U.S. in the period of 1975-80 were high school graduates. The percentage for females in the same age group was 70.6%. Comparable figures for Koreans residing in Korea in 1980 were 53.7% for males and 36.1% for females. Luciano Mangiafico, Contemporary American Immigrants: Patters of Filipino, Korean, and Chinese Settlement in the United States (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1988), 96.

¹⁷The American immigration law does not allow poor Koreans who tend to be less educated to come. But the immigrants who came first were given the permission to invite their family members relatives. The proportion of the Koreans who came

immigrants who came to the U.S. for survival. The new immigrants came to the U.S. for education and enhancement of their general well-being and that of their children's. The U.S. immigration scholar, Luciano Mangiafico, comments: "One has only to talk to teachers or professors, to understand the commitment and drive that this relatively new immigrant group has brought to the nation's classrooms."¹⁸

The influx of the large number of highly educated Koreans to the U.S. in late 1960s and 1970s coincides with the explosive church growth in Korea. In Korea, the membership of the Korean Protestant churches increased enormously, and "mammoth" size church buildings went up in the major urban areas, most of which were filled to capacity in each of the multiple Sunday morning services. In Korea, today, not only in the urban areas, but virtually in every village there is at least one church. It is not difficult, therefore, to predict that large number of Christians would be among the new Korean immigrants. This new wave of immigration of these Christians provided much needed resources and leadership to the Korean ethnic church. The church was virtually the only existing organization from

under the "occupational preferences" category of the immigration law began to drop after reaching its peak in 1972. In contrast, the proportion of the immigrants under the "family preference" category increased steadily. This resulted in the influx of less-educated and low-middle class Koreans to join their relatives in the U.S.

¹⁸Ibid., 95.

which the new immigrants could seek guidance and support. The number of the Korean ethnic churches grew in the major urban centers in the U.S. where these immigrants took residence.¹⁹ One report in 1986 estimated that, in that year, the number of Korean churches in the U.S. was 1,624, a 23-fold increase over that of 1970.²⁰ Although reliable statistical data are not available, around 2,000 Korean churches are believed to exist today. If we accept the current estimate of one million total population of Korean-Americans in the U.S., the population/church density is approximately one church per 500 Korean immigrants.²¹

The explosive growth of Korean Protestant churches in urban America since the early 1970s is an on-going process. It is too recent a development to make possible any definitive analysis and conclusive statements. But some characterization of the phenomenon is possible.

¹⁹The demographic studies on the Korean immigrants are very limited. But the existing research materials are consistent in its findings about the Korean immigrants' tendency to be more dispersed geographically. For example, see Eui-Young Yu, "Koreans in America: An Emerging Ethnic Minority," Amerasia Journal 4: 124-25.

²⁰Shin and Park, "An Analysis of Causes of Schisms," 236.

²¹Kim Ill-Soo writes that the propensity of Korean immigrants to start new churches is well expressed in a Korean anecdote: "When two Japanese meet, they set up a business firm; when two Chinese meet, they open a Chinese restaurant, and when two Koreans meet, they establish a church." Kim Ill-Soo, "Organizational Patterns of Korean-American Methodist Churches: Denominationalism and Personal Community," in Rethinking Methodist History, eds. Russell E. Richey and Kenneth E. Rowe (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1985), 228.

First, one has to ask why the new arrivals do not simply join existing ethnic churches, but establish new churches. Ill-Soo Kim, a Korean-American sociologist, offers one possible explanation. The 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act grants permanent residency to a qualified ethnic minister. A large number of Korean ministers and students of theology aspiring to become ministers came to the U.S. seeking to start their own churches as well as to further their education. Another advantage given to the ministers was exemption from time-consuming and often difficult professional retraining required in almost all other professions. As a result, many Korean ministers could engage in the profession almost immediately after the immigration while most others had to start from menial jobs in spite of their high educational status in Korea. One researcher found that 67% of the Korean ethnic churches in the Los Angeles area were established by "the ministers," while 28% were by "the congregation" and the rest by the parent denomination.²² Intense competition among the ministers is widely observed.²³

Another explanation for the proliferation of the new Korean churches puts the finger at denominationalism in

²²Marion Dearman, "Structure and Function of Religion in the Los Angeles Korean Community: Some Aspects," in Yu, Phillips, and Yang, Koreans in Los Angeles, 175.

²³Woongmin Kim, "History and Ministerial roles of Korean Churches in Los Angeles" (D.Min. diss., School of Theology at Claremont, CA, 1981), 92.

Korea. New immigrants arrive in the U.S. with their own preferences in terms of the denomination to which they belong. There exist literally hundreds of separate denominational and sub-denominational entities in Korea today.

Second, the hierarchical church organizational structure was transplanted from Korea and became the source of many conflicts between the ministers and the lay members as well as between the first and the second generation. In Korea, the church community is often viewed as an extended family. The patriarchal family system is the basis of the church organization. As power is concentrated in the male head of the family, the church "family" operates under the sole authority of a pastor who is typically a male. In the egalitarian and individualistic social milieu in America, the Korean immigrants begin to experience cultural conflicts within their family as well as within their church. The first-generation ministers who do not adjust well in the new environment become an easy target of criticism and rebellion. The first-generation immigrants' desire to preserve the old customs and cultures through the church community and their American-born second-generation children's desire to quickly become a part of the mainstream American culture run headlong into each other, and the ensuing intergeneration conflicts are often very painful for both sides to bear. There is an urgent cry in the Korean-

American church community for contextualization of the Korean church to fit the American situation so that the church can accommodate the growing number of the second-generation members.²⁴

Third, the church community is often consumed by the power struggle among the members who come to the church in need of bolstering their psychological well-being to compensate for their marginal status as minorities. Like many other immigrants who lose the relatively high social status then possessed in their homeland upon immigration, many Korean immigrants find themselves powerless, underemployed and marginalized in the new land. There is a desperate need for them to be empowered, recognized and appreciated. For the Korean Christians, the church is the answer. The positions of church lay leadership have become more the means of personal gratification than the church stewardship which requires sacrifice and humility. The wide-spread schism in the Korean Christian community is the direct result of the fierce struggle among the lay leadership candidates. On the one hand, the power struggle and the resulting schism drain the energy of the church community. On the other hand, it serves as one of the channels through which the expansion of Korean Christianity

²⁴Young Lee Hertig, "The Role of Power in the Korean Immigrant Family and Church," (Ph.D. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, School of World Mission, 1991), 314.

was achieved.²⁵

Fourth, the Korean ethnic church maintains the evangelistic fervor following in the tradition of the first American missionaries whose missionary zeal ignited the fire to start one of the most notable religious movements in modern times. In spite of many problems and weaknesses of the Korean ethnic church, the Korean Christians are generally committed to evangelism. It reflects the expansion of the Korean church. Also, Koreans are freer and more able than ever to travel to and work in other parts of the world. There is a growing awareness among the Korean Christians, especially among the maturing second-generation, to reach beyond the narrow Korean ethnic confines to other ethnic groups, especially to other Asian counterparts. Also as many Korean 1.5²⁶ and second generation ministers are produced in the nations' leading seminaries, some choose to go beyond the Korean ethnic community to minister to other ethnic congregations.

Another type of contact with the non-Korean population is through the association with the many American mainline denominational churches, especially in inner cities, whose membership saw steady decline in recent decades. Many

²⁵Shin and Park, An Analysis of Causes of Schisms, 247.

²⁶1.5 generation refers to those who were born in Korea but immigrated to the States during their childhood with their parents. Typically, they complete elementary and high school education in the States.

Korean congregations revitalized the church community through their enthusiastic participation.²⁷

Fifth, the Korean ethnic church provides a spiritual as well as a social haven for the immigrants whose life in a foreign land is extremely stressful. One research finding in the late 1970s indicates that the church affiliation rate of the Korean immigrants increased about 20% after immigration.²⁸ When placed in the context of the increasingly secularized American society, the Korean ethnic church is endowed with the golden opportunity to meet the spiritual and social need of the members, and, by doing so, contribute to the welfare of the American society in general. The vitality of the Korean church led to an assertion by a sociologist who is an authority on the Korean immigration: "...in light of the fact that American

²⁷One publicized example is the First United Methodist Church of Flushing, Queens, reported in the New York Times, 30 July 1986, I:10. "The English-speaking congregation is small, barely 30 members in all, and lacks the wherewithal to maintain the ample church building. But the Korean congregation had 450 members, so many that it is spread out over two Sunday services and fields a choir of 40 singers. They have been the salvation of First Methodist. Immigrants may see America as a land of opportunity, but for hundreds of churches like First Methodist, the immigrants themselves have been an opportunity."

²⁸65.7% of the survey respondents reported that they were currently affiliated with the Protestant churches. But only 45.6% reported that they were affiliated with the Protestant churches in Korea. Won Moo Hurh, Hei Chu Kim, and Kwang Chung Kim, Assimilation Patterns of Immigrants in the United States: A Case Study of Korean Immigrants in the Chicago Area, (Washington D.C.: University Press of America, Inc., 1979), 24.

missionaries introduced Koreans to the Protestantism of late 19th century America, Korean immigrants are in a unique position of re-transplanting their version of American Protestantism to so-called 'post-industrial' American society."²⁹

This paper is about this "return" of Christianity. It is an attempt to take a glimpse at a movement in progress through the eyes of the first-generation Korean Christian immigrant parents who, as the primary educators of their children, find themselves in the cross section of the several major streams of conflicting traditions and ideas. It is in their Christian education of children that Eastern Confucianism meets Western egalitarianism; conservative Christianity runs into modern secularism; and an ethnic minority converges with a White majority. Through in-depth interviews, an effort was made to hear what the people themselves had to say. After a sample interview in Chapter 3, each of the three areas of conflict is discussed in the following order: Confucianism versus egalitarianism in Chapter 4; Christianity versus secularism in Chapter 5; and finally, minority versus majority in Chapter 6.

²⁹Kim, Organizational Patterns, 228.

CHAPTER 3

A SAMPLE INTERVIEW

[The following interview is provided to illustrate the general format and style used in the interviewing process. In order to maintain confidentiality, the names of persons and places that appear in this interview as well as some descriptive aspects of the interviewees have been altered by the researcher.]

On March 10, 1995, I visited Mr. and Mrs. Choi at their house located at 1000 South America St., Chicago, Illinois. When I called them over the phone to request an interview, Mr. and Mrs. Choi gladly invited me over even though we had never met before. I arrived at their house at 8:30 p.m. and left at 1:30 a.m. the next morning.

They have two daughters, Becky and Sarah. Mr. Choi came to the United States as a student in 1957. He majored in history in an American university. He also studied in an American seminary, but did not complete the program. He returned to the university and received the master's degree in history. He did not have any particular professional career thus far, although he had various odd jobs to support

the family. For example, in 1967 and 1968, he worked as a bus driver in Chicago. We spoke both in English and Korean.

Mr. Choi: I did a lot of different kinds of work.

Mrs. Choi: He is of a special kind. I call him a permanent student.

Mr. Choi: At that time, there was no Korean bus driver.

Other Koreans were surprised that I drove a bus. To them, it just did not make sense that a Korean intellectual worked as a bus driver. Well, life is life.

Interviewer: Did you major in any subject other than history?

Mr. Choi: History is my discipline and theology is my main area of interest. But I did not go through formal theological education. Nowadays, I am very much interested in depth psychology and spirituality. I often meet with Catholic priests. There is much to learn for us Protestants from them especially since the changes that occurred in the Catholic Church from the time of the Vatican II.

Mrs. Choi: I graduated from a university in Korea, majoring in piano performance. After graduation I taught music in a high school. I came to the United States in 1964. After coming to the U.S., I worked in many places, such as factories. I had a vague expectation that my life in America would be like what I saw in the movies. But the reality was quite different. On the one hand, I was discouraged and sorrowful, but, on the other hand, I was

motivated to learn a lot. We married in 1965. Since then, I worked all these years to support my husband for his studies. When my husband studied in the out-of-state university, I had to stay in Chicago and work, because jobs were not readily available in the college town where my husband studied, especially for those who held F-2 visas and were not allowed to work. Even in Chicago, I had to get jobs at places that did not ask for a work-permit, and naturally I got very low paying jobs. After about a year of separation, I was able to join my husband and, for the first time, enjoyed the real American life. I had a really good time. While I was there, I took a typing class and got a marketable skill. My husband worked during summer months as a dock laborer in a trucking company. I studied organ but did not make anything out of it. Then my first child came, and life as a mother began. Anyway, I always had to work. We came back to Chicago as soon as my husband got the master's degree and have lived here ever since.

Interviewer: Mr. Choi, were you born in a Christian family?

Mr. Choi: Yes. Both of us are the children of pastors. My grandfather was an elder in the church. Both of our parents are the graduates from the same seminary in Korea.

Interviewer: Mrs. Choi, was it important that you marry a Christian man when you began thinking about marriage?

Mrs. Choi: When we got married, my husband (the actual term she used referring to her husband was "Daddy of Sarah",

Sarah being their second daughter, which is commonly used by Korean wife as a substitute for "my husband", especially when he is present.) was a seminary student and I was a daughter of a pastor and served the early Korean ethnic church as a pianist. So it was only natural that I marry a Christian. I don't know whether it was my conviction or just my habitual thinking, but I knew that marrying a Christian would bring the most comfortable life.

Interviewer: Why did you come to the U.S.?

Mr. Choi: It was to study.

Mrs. Choi: For me, it was to study and marry. (laugh)

Interviewer: Do you see any difference between your Christian life in Korea and that in U.S.?

Mr. Choi: During much of my adult life In Korea I was a soldier. I had to fight in the Korean War. So there was no room for me to think my faith through. But I had a Christian upbringing. My life in Korea and my life in the U.S. are too different from each other to be considered on a same plane. So it is not easy to make a comparison. I did not have any particular turning point in my Christian faith. I think it was a very slow and gradual process of growing. Only recently, I went through a quite radical change in my Christian faith. But when I was in Korea, I was an exemplary Christian from a superficial perspective.

Interviewer: Did you seek out a Korean church when you came to the U.S.?

Mr. Choi: No. When I was in college, there was no Korean church there. I was active in a student Christian fellowship in school organized by the several Protestant denominations. In Chicago, I mostly attended an American church. At that time, there was only one small Korean church in Chicago; it was the Methodist church, with 20 or 30 members. In the summer, the membership grew from 30 to 40 and then was reduced back to 10 or 20 in the fall, because students went back to their schools. After that, a Presbyterian church broke out from this Methodist church. I did not want to associate with the Korean ethnic churches because I disliked their tendency for factionalism. But my wife was asked to play the piano for the Presbyterian church, and I went with her once in a while. To see them split was really disgusting. So I did not participate. When I came back from attending the college for several years, each of the Korean pastors who came here to study theology as students began their own separate ministries as pastors. They all asked my wife to come and play the piano for their services. So it was hard to know which church to go to, because each of them felt hurt if she did not go to his church.

Mrs. Choi: I was also invited to a church of a different denomination and played the piano for them when my first daughter was three or four years old.

Mr. Choi: In 1978, there was one tiny Korean church in

Chicago. Actually I did attend that church for about 7 or 8 years. That church joined with one other church and became a little larger one. Then the problem of factionalism started there again. So I stopped going to the Korean church altogether. I now attend an American Protestant church. I think my family is the only Korean family in that church. My first daughter attended the Korean church when she was growing up. But my second daughter has attended the American church from her fifth grade. She grew up in that church.

Mrs. Choi: My first daughter is not that aggressive. She is very "Korean." Because her father was the leader of the student group in the Korean church, she was always told to be quiet in the church. She still complains that she missed the golden time in the church because of her father. My second daughter fully enjoys the church life. Once a year, there is one youth Sunday in which students lead the worship service. Because the church helps young people to connect their worship to their daily life, they are very interested. I wish our Korean churches can learn from it.

Mr. Choi: (Trying to interrupt his wife) You do not need to talk about the Korean church.

Mrs. Choi: My first daughter, Becky, was only a visitor at the American church we attended when she came home for vacations. She was already away in college. She does not attend any church now, but she believes she is a Christian.

I am not sure whether Sarah will attend a church when she goes away to college. I hear there is one small Korean church in that college town. My first daughter does not like to make distinctions between being a Korean and being an American. There was an essay contest sponsored by the Korean newspaper company, and she won and received a scholarship of \$1,000 or \$1,500. At that time, the newspaper reporter asked her in an interview, "How do you cope with the difficulties you face as a Korean student?" She answered, "I don't feel any difficulty." She rather asked, "Why do you separate Koreans from Americans?" She deliberately avoids making any distinction between Koreans and Americans. My second daughter is enjoying the American church life fully, but recently she also began to catch on to the Korean language through her Korean friend at school.

Interviewer: Does she speak Korean at home?

Mr. Choi: I do not speak Korean at home. When she was growing up, we purposely avoided speaking Korean. When my first daughter was three years old, we put her in a day care center. Once, she wanted to go to the washroom, but did not know how to say it in English. In those day, we tried to speak only in Korean at home. She ended up wetting her pants, and all her friends laughed at her all day. You know how important a child's self-esteem is. Language comes next in importance, not before. It is personality that comes first. Be a human being first; then be a Korean, American,

Chinese, Japanese or whatever. My desire was that she be a wholesome person. Since then, we have spoken only in English at home. You know that parents' educational level affects children's interest. Since I read books a lot at home and my wife plays the piano, my children naturally became interested in books and music. In her understanding of herself, Sarah does not dislike Korea or despise the Korean heritage; she accepts it.

Interviewer: You mean, as a Korean?

Mr. Choi: No. Not as a complete Korean. She is not a complete Korean. She cannot be. This is what she said: "Just because my parents are Koreans, I cannot be forced to be a Korean. It is impossible. I was born here; I was brought up here; my language is American; my friends are Americans; all my studies are done in English. You cannot deny it. At the same time, however, I am not completely an American. I have parents who are Koreans with the Korean heritage. And I am proud of that tradition."

Interviewer: How much tradition does she have?

Mr. Choi: It is interesting. The tradition I am talking about is more of a mental tradition. She said, "What I feel is important. The way I speak is only secondary. What I feel and what I can identify with is more important." I agree with her. And in fact, that is what I want. There was an attempt in the Korean church to teach the children the Korean language. They had an ambitious goal. In one

aspect it is very good. But in another aspect, it is a fantasy on the part of the parents. We teach them the Korean alphabet so that they can read Korean books, but they do not know the meaning. Of course, they can have a simple conversation in Korean. But when they listen to the Korean pastor's sermon, they do not understand what he is saying. We teach only the simple mechanics of speaking Korean. But we cannot teach the spirit. It is much better if I read a book to my daughter in Korean about the Korean history. I talk about my life and work in Korea, so that I can teach the Korean language in conjunction with the Korean spirit. Just because they speak a little Korean we cannot say that they are Koreans. In Korea, a child speaks Korean at home, at school as well as among friends all the time. They grow up steeped in the Korean language environment. But here, kids spend only a couple of hours on Saturdays in Korean schools, and when they come home from school, parents say a few words in Korean such as "Did you eat?" "Where have you been?" Then the parents feel that they have done their job in giving their children the necessities of cultural education. That's a delusion. It is good to teach Korean like that, but they must know its limit. Secondly, they must instill in them the spirit. That's much more practical and helpful in developing their personality. That is my opinion.

Interviewer: What deliberate effort did you make in order to

instill the Korean spirit in Becky?

Mr. Choi: In the family education, there is no certain formal way. It is a concerted effort. It is a gradual process of integration by way of living with her father and mother which naturally becomes a part of her personality. What I tell her, what her mother tells her, what we tell her about her grandparents, this is a part of the family education. If I ever did anything deliberate, it was reading to her Korean children's stories and folk novels occasionally.

Interviewer: Did she understand what you read to her?

Mr. Choi: Yes. She had been to Korea one year after her college graduation. We sent her saying, "This is your root. Go back and see how it is." She learned Korean in a university in Korea, worked in a Korean newspaper company, and taught Korean children English. When I went to Seoul to bring her back, she knew the whereabouts of Seoul much better than I did. Even before that, she knew that part of her heritage was Korean.

Interviewer: How about Sarah?

Mr. Choi: She is the same. The only difference is that she attends the American church. In her make-up, shall I say a personality make-up, she is a Korean. When we have dinner, I tell them about my Korean family.

Mrs. Choi: That is what I am most proud of. Every dinner time, my husband tells them his life-story in detail. He

remembers well and tells them very well, and they really enjoy it. They do not reject Korea. When Sarah was asked to write about her hero, she wrote about her father.

Mr. Choi: Well, thinking of a father as a hero is very common among Korean kids. Anyway, she wants to know more about her own roots. Have you heard of "the third generation theory"? I forgot the name of the author. He is from Sweden and he is an economist.³⁰ The first immigrants are usually those who did not make it in their home country. The second generation grow up seeing their parents not being able to speak English well, work in low-paying jobs, and as a result, feel too shameful to bring their friends home. They want to keep their parents behind them. They feel ashamed of their family history and heritage and try to keep themselves away from it. But the third generation grow up seeing their parents with no English problem and doing well in the society. To them, their grandparents look very different, and they become curious about their grandparents. They try to find more about their roots. They are the ones who write about their families and publish books on them. So it takes three generations before they become integrated into a society. And in doing so, they are more conscious of their heritage. In my family's case, I think my children are doing the work of the third generation. Their interests go beyond mere curiosity. They want to know more. My first

³⁰He must be speaking of Gunnar Myrdal.

daughter asked me last Christmas, "What kind of child do you want me to be? What do you want to give us?" She asked me that question all of a sudden, but, since I had been thinking about that subject, I was able to tell her what I had in mind. I was very proud of her for asking that question. I told her, "First of all, I want you to be a person and be happy in your life and find a meaning in what you do. Success is such a subjective matter, and there is no one who can say whether you succeeded or not so long as you view that you are having a fulfilled life. That is all I want. Secondly, it happens that our family tradition is all serving others in society or what we call the "ministry." There is no one way, but many different ways to serve others. So please think about this as you graduate and go out into the world." These two things are all that I told her.

Interviewer: You did not mention anything about her being a Korean.

Mr. Choi: No, because, in that respect, I know her. When she went to Korea, she felt greatly disillusioned by the people in the City of Seoul for their hypocrisy and for their lack of social niceties. She had several friends who came to see her from Japan. They went around many places in Korea, and she liked the Korean peasants. They are very simple and pure. These things I cannot control. Those are her own experiences. Again this is an indication that she

tries to look at the inside of a person rather than the outside.

Mrs. Choi: I think she was offended by the treatment of her as a woman in Seoul. She came back and said, "I don't want to have a Korean boyfriend." They treated her very roughly there.

Mr. Choi: In Seoul, there is a sightseeing attraction reserved only for the foreign visitors; I think it is one of the old palaces. She thought she was an American. Since her American friends came over from Japan, they went together as a group. She realized that they treated her blond-hair American friends very differently from her because her facial feature was Korean. They looked servile to her. This might not be a unique case for the Koreans, but it revealed the deeply rooted Korean mentality of reverence for the stronger. I could not tell her this.

Interviewer: Didn't Becky have any boyfriend?

Mr. Choi: No. She is very quiet and of a very oriental type. And she is brilliant. That's the style I like. She remains quiet, but once she takes up a responsibility, she is thorough. While she was in college, I think she had several friends who were boys. I think those who grew up here cannot have the compatibility with those who grew up in Korea. Their way of thinking is different. Once I enter my home, I am still an Asian father. To a large degree I still exercise my authority. I am an authoritarian and my

daughters do not like it. Of course I am not always an authoritarian. But sometimes, I have to be one for the sake of preserving a sense of unit, group or community. I am sorry because I know they do not like it, but I have to make a decision. Here in the Korean-American community, younger ones answer the older ones with the honorific term of "Ye, ye, ye." My children follow the custom in such an environment, but it is not a natural part of them. They speak freely; instead of saying, "Yes," they say "Ya." They call their pastors on a first-name basis.

Interviewer: Is Becky not thinking about marrying?

Mrs. Choi: She has an American boyfriend. He has an oriental background. Actually she is engaged.

Interviewer: Are both of you happy about that?

Mrs. Choi: Yes. He attended a university in Korea. He speaks Korean better than Becky. He is well versed in Korean history as well. We are very comfortable with him. He finished his study in a university here in the States and went back to Korea for some research again. They plan to marry soon. He follows the oriental ways well and likes Korean food.

Mr. Choi: He grew up in Asia. His father was a missionary, and he was born in Asia and finished high school there. He came to the States for college education. Becky met him while he was studying in Korea. She could overcome difficulties she had while living in Korea because he was

there. They had a good time.

Interviewer: Didn't she have a boyfriend while she was in college?

Mrs. Choi: Yes, she did. She had some Korean boyfriends.

Mr. Choi: It was a casual relationship, not a serious courtship. I did not allow it. I know that my not allowing it would not determine her action, but at least she needed to know what her parents' wish was. Undergraduate years are too early for any serious relationship. Therefore, enjoy friendship. That is fine, but there is a limit.

Interviewer: Did Becky accept your wish well?

Mr. Choi: Of course.

Mrs. Choi: In the college dormitory, man's and woman's rooms were right next to each other. When we visited the dorm in Becky's freshman year, men and women used separate toilets at least. But when we went back at her graduation, even toilets were used together. I was shocked.

Interviewer: Mr. Choi, were you shocked too?

Mr. Choi: Yes. When I was in college, I couldn't go beyond the lounge of the girl's dorm. If I wanted to meet a girl, I had to ask for the house mother's permission and then she called the girl to the lounge. In those days, girl students were not allowed in the library if they did not wear skirts. If they wore pants, they were not allowed in the library. That was my days. Even among the Americans, there is that much of the generational differences.

Interviewer: Did you not worry when you came back to Chicago after seeing Becky's dormitory situation?

Mrs. Choi: Well, because everything was so open like that, they did not seem to feel any difference between boys and girls. Some girls wore only bras and panties and ran to the bathroom. I was embarrassed, but not they.

Mr. Choi: Well, not everybody acts that way. Only a few do.

Mrs. Choi: I don't think Becky can do that.

Mr. Choi: That is one. Another thing is that I must trust her. If that trust relationship is not formed until the child graduates from high school, there is not much you can do about it. But you have to give them a warning, not that you do not trust them. When I told her, "How could they do that?" She said, "Daddy, there is nothing to it. What is so special about it?" I answered, "O.K." Of course, I cannot simply take my hands off from the matter. But the underlying element is trust.

Interviewer: You had that trust.

Mr. Choi: Yes.

Interviewer: Same with you, Mrs. Choi?

Mrs. Choi: Yes.

Interviewer: How about for Sarah?

Mr. Choi: Erikson spoke about the parental love as unlike any other love in his book titled Art of Love. The parental love is to prepare for separation. That was a big help for me. She is not my possession. She does not belong to me.

She is not a part of me. She is a completely another person with her own mind. The conflict exists between the parental guidance and the amount of freedom you have to give. To what extent do you have to guide her? If she is younger, the area of guidance is large, and it gets smaller and smaller as she grows older. There always is a conflict and children test the boundary. If you give one, they want two. If you give two, they want three. There is a constant conflict in any family. In addition, we Asians are so used to the hierarchical structure in our ethos and in almost any other field. Now when children come, they are to be seen, but not to be heard. It works within almost unconsciously. The important question is how much freedom I should give. At first they want to stay out until 10:00 p.m. Then they want until 11:00 p.m. Wait a minute! Then they say they will be back by 12:00 a.m. Wait a minute! I am receding, but there always is a tension. In dealing with children, this is the difficulty. In addition, this is a girl. Again the Asian consciousness comes into the picture. Girls have to have a special area of protection. Am I protecting them or are they capable of protecting themselves? Again this becomes a tension. When they are young, it is easy. But once they reach junior high and adolescence, they become active in the community and want to go out and have parties. Suddenly there is a certain amount of freedom they can have. The question is how much independence can they have? How

much of control, in other words, how much of parental guidance, do they need? This question recurs constantly. If you repress too much, you are regimenting their conduct and their thinking, and then, they lose their creativity. Creativity should be enhanced, supported and nurtured; yet you have to have a balance. It is so damn difficult! So in deciding the college, I could not say anything one way or the other. I think I know better. Becky's college counselor in her high school told her that her father knew about college much more than she did. Outside of their home, they hear such comments. But in their home, they say "No" to their father, saying, "My father is old-fashioned." So I suggested to Becky that we make a college trip together. We made a trip to many colleges in the Northeastern States. During that trip, I felt like dying. She did not reveal what was in her mind. She kept saying, "I don't like this school." "I don't like that school." The negative things came to the foreground, and she did not say what she liked about the schools. I kept wondering what school she liked. Then she asked me, "What school did you like?" I said to myself, "That's it! I have been waiting for this moment." So I gave her my opinion. I knew that she did not like the Ivy League universities. She liked small colleges. I told her I liked one college in Boston. And I asked, "What do you think?" She said, "I have not decided yet." She finally chose one school. It was not the

school I told her I liked. After she had spent two years in that college, she had to declare her major. I asked, "What major do you want to choose?" She answered, "I don't know." I said, "But you have to declare your major." She retorted, "I know it." I felt like dying. Finally she chose her major. But she did not tell me until the midterm of her junior year. When she finally informed me, I just said, "Fine." From her high school days, I have been telling her that nowadays a college education is almost essential. In order to receive any professional training she has to go to a graduate school. College is for her own liberal education. I don't know whether such words influenced her decision or not. Anyway, I said, "Fine. Good." Now she has graduated. Her major did not give her any of the so-called marketable skills. So what can she do after finishing a liberal arts education? Should she work in a restaurant as a waitress? She said, "I don't mind." She did not know what to do. Because there wasn't a job opening she liked here, she wanted to go out to Korea. I said, "O.K. Your father came to this country alone. Perhaps you should go to Korea alone and find your way around. She said, "O.K." That's how she went to Korea for one year, and it was a good experience as a human being. After returning to the U.S., she decided to go for a master's degree. She did not consult me before her decision. Anyway, I said, "Fine. It is a specialized field. You are now a graduate

student, and you should know better than me. I am a complete outsider." This is how she charted her course independently. Now as parents, we were anxious and uneasy, but again, we should not suppress their creativity and individuality as well as their independence. Yet you cannot take your hands off either. You have to provide support and guidance. It is necessary. Where do you draw the line? The line moves constantly.

Interviewer: Did you have similar problems in her high school days in terms of having to move the line constantly?

Mr. Choi: O, that is what we used to call a SOP in the army, which means a standard operating procedure. We had a SOP. When they were out and couldn't come home as previously agreed upon, they should call home. Your family must know where you are.

Interviewer: Did they ever stay in someone else's house overnight?

Mr. Choi: No. They cannot decide alone. They have to get permission. On weekends, like today, Sarah did not come home from school but went to the church directly. She got our permission to go to the church and then go out with friends after the church. Sarah has many friends. Once, some boys came, and she wanted to go out with them. I asked, "Did you get permission in advance?" She answered, "No." I said, "Sorry, you cannot." I knew she was very unhappy, but there had to be a certain line drawn. I told

her, "We have been operating in this way. You know how it is." So she just talked with them outside the house, and they left. In the case of my first daughter, she seems docile although she is very strong in her inner person. When she was in third grade, she did something, and I disciplined her with whips on her legs. It must have been very painful, but she clenched her teeth and did not say a word. I liked that spirit. (All laugh.)

Interviewer: Mrs. Choi, when was the last time that they were whipped on their calves by her dad?

Mrs. Choi: For Sarah, it was in her sophomore year in high school. Once she told a lie and got punished.

Mr. Choi: No, I don't think so. I purposely avoided it. Actually, such punishment was according to our previous agreements: If you do this, the consequence will be that. These kinds of things are exactly the points of conflict between vertical relationships and horizontal relationships. If they were just mere acquaintances, it would be easy to maintain the horizontal relationship. But they are my children, and I have the responsibility to guide them and that is a very difficult thing to do. But that does not mean that I simply trust them in everything, either. Again, there must be an adjustment. It becomes more difficult because we are Asian. It is even more difficult because they are girls. At least I am aware as a father that they are not mine. They have their own personalities; they have

their own views; and they are entitled to their own views. I'd rather have them be independent than be dependent. But when we face the problem directly, we cannot avoid the conflict.

Interviewer: When you look back, are you satisfied about your performance as a father?

Mr. Choi: I do not know whether I did well or not. But I did my best in nurturing them, I mean, nurturing as a mental factor. There are many ways to do so, but the first thing is to be with them. We have been available to them whenever they needed us, not just physically, but more as counselors. In fact, we did not even go to a movie alone when they were home. We had to be with them although it was not possible sometimes. When they come home from school, who is at home?

Mrs. Choi: One of the reasons that my husband worked as a bus driver, was that he could control his work schedule so that he could be home when the children came back from school. Actually, my husband raised my children. Since he studied in the U.S., he knew the system and could give them good advice. I cannot do that. I remind my children that it was their father's help that enabled them to come this far. When Becky was graduating from high school, the teachers in her high school said that her father should receive much credit. And they know it. Since their father was firm and did not give them as much freedom as other parents did, they ran to me to complain. So I am having a

very hard time. In my opinion, I am not wise enough to counsel them. I don't know how to handle it. I have a hard time in between them and my husband. I used to say that I wished Sarah may go away to college quickly. Even between my husband and I, I think there is a generation gap. We are six years apart. But his life as a youth was different from mine. I grew up under my father, mother, brothers and sisters in a normal family, but my husband pioneered his life all by himself. So there is a big gap in maturity even though we are only six years apart in age. I tell my husband that he is raising three daughters. As a mother and a wife I do not do that well. Sarah often takes advantage of my weaknesses. She complains to me a lot about her father and says exasperatingly, "What's wrong with him?"

Mr. Choi: On the other hand, she tells me that her teacher is a good friend of mine. Once there was a college fair, and Sarah and I met her college counselor there. The counselor told Sarah to listen to me well. So she felt ambivalent: on the one hand, I am her father; so she rebelled. But on the other hand, the teachers liked me so much that she felt strange. Our unique element was that in my formative years I did not have parental guidance. As a result, my difficulties were countless. So I wanted to be available to my children. They must not be deprived of their parental guidance at any cost. This is the rule of my family's education. I am available and accessible to them,

and in many ways, it is my mission until they graduate from college that I be with them and give them whatever support I can give. Above the general educational theory, my unique family circumstances form still another unique condition in the family. To answer your question how I feel now: I do not know whether I can say I did my work as a parent perfectly, but at least I can say that I was there with them. We wrestled together all along. It was not easy. Sometimes my Korean feeling of authority boils in me. But at least the credit I give to myself is that I was aware of what I was feeling. I asked, "Which way should I take?" Sometimes I could not take the way I knew I should, but at least I was aware of it. Once on a certain occasion, when a group of people were present, I spoke about how I tried to help my daughter Sarah, and later one young man came up to me and told me not to shield Sarah too much. So I asked, "What did I do?" He said, "Please allow her to be herself. I was also a good student and valedictorian of my high school graduating class and went to a prestigious university. But after that, my world crumbled." He said he lost all incentive. He could not generate motivation. So he had been wandering for the next two or three years, and gradually he began to discover himself. I thanked him, but I also told him that I had my own anguish and I had my share of struggle. What he told me is one thing I have to weigh. The damn thing is that it never stays the same. If the

equation is always the same I have a clear answer. But the line is constantly moving and as it moves I have to adjust again and again. I don't know how other Korean-American families approach this matter. I am not sure whether they really have an understanding of what the education of their second-generation children is all about. It makes a difference whether one has the principle of the education of children or not. In my opinion, the Korean educational system has been destructive to Korean society. After I came to the U.S., I took the first test in my class. I didn't do badly. I received the test paper back with a grade on it and put it upside down. The girl student next to me exclaimed, "I got a D," and showed it to me with no sense of shame. I said to myself "She must be crazy. What is there to be so proud of?" Would this be possible in Korea? First of all, there is fierce competition. Second, the entrance exams. I have to be a little better than others. I must not show my weaknesses to others. I must cover it. It begins from an early age; from grammar school to middle school, from middle school to high school, and from high school to college. And if one does not have a child who succeeded in entering a college, even if he is a good friend of someone whose child has entered a college, there is a hard feeling toward that person. Children grow up wearing masks. They cannot live just as they themselves are. They have to save face. It becomes an educational issue when

parents try to save the face of the family through their children's academic performances. They must care for their children's welfare before they try to save the reputation of their family. They say to children, "How can I walk around with my head up?"

Mrs. Choi: They say, "You shamed our family."

Mr. Choi: They must save their children before they save their face. But in Korea, this does not work. Even after coming to the U.S., they ask, "What school did your child enter? What school? What school?" They only take care that their children go to schools with high academic prestige. They do not really pay attention to their children's educational needs. Because Koreans grow up in this kind of cultural milieu, they ask their children to secure the reputation of their parents and family. Instead of taking care that their children grow as they need to, somehow they want their children to bring glory and reputation to the family. Their value placement was on saving their face, not on their children. I am aware of it. When Becky and I were taking the college tour, she did not want to go near the Ivy League universities. We were driving from Philadelphia to Boston, and Princeton and Yale were on the way. I told her, "It takes only about 20 minutes. We will just stop by and take a look at the campuses. Let's go." She answered, "No way, Daddy, I don't want it." So I had to follow her wish. We arrived in

Boston and Harvard was right there. I suggested that we go and take a look. She did not want to do it. Now, where did my suggestion of taking a look at Harvard come from? I want to say that it did not come from my desire for my reputation, but somehow, when I examined myself, it was lurking within me. I am glad that I did not go. I am glad that I let her choose. But that element surfaced unconsciously. I was fully aware of this, and it was still so difficult for me. How much more so for many Korean-American parents who do not have a clue?

Mrs. Choi: To be honest, I confessed to my daughters that I wished that they would go to highly prestigious colleges and be successful because I wanted to realize my dream through them and be happy. They answered, "I know, I know." As it was depicted in the movie, "Joy Luck Club" I wanted my daughters to be the first in everything. When my first daughter calls me over the phone from her school, I tell her that I want to fulfill my dream through her and attain my happiness. Frankly I ask "What did you do? What did you do?" so that I could be happy. My daughters became my good friends. Now they try to take care of me more than I took care of them, and I began to want to depend on them.

Mr. Choi: No, a daughter (Mrs. Choi) must depend on her father (Mr. Choi). (laugh) One thing I think we need in our Korean-American community is some type of a forum to talk about children's education.

Mrs. Choi: Like a seminar.

Mr. Choi: Well, the term seminar has been misused so much that it lost its meaning. Rather some group discussions among 10 or 15 individuals. It becomes an opportunity to share one's agony and suffering.

Mrs. Choi: I began to take the 2-year course in the lay Christian activity group. My husband finished the course ahead of me. There is a lecture and then a group discussion of 7 people in a group. We share many things that concern us. Well, I am not sure whether it will be possible among the Korean-Americans who know each other well. I am not sure whether I can talk about my struggle with my husband so freely. I quite often argue with my husband over the matters of our children. I openly talk about my struggle in the group and ask who was right, my husband or me. I learned a lot there. It helps me a lot to see myself in their problems. It is an American group. My husband is thinking about facilitating such groups in the Korean-American community, but it is very hard.

Mr. Choi: There is no active attempt on my part. I am very very cautious. This is self-disclosure, and it is very risky. As I said earlier, there is traditional masking, and some are not even conscious of it, but all are defensive about themselves. I can tell the difference between those who stayed long in the U.S. and those who just came from Korea. Those who stayed long in the U.S. are rather naive

in a good sense while those who just came from Korea who had been active there do not reveal themselves to others. Church gatherings are the same. They gather and speak about general things well, but when it comes to something particular in their own lives they rarely speak out. First there has to be trust. What has been spoken stays here, and it does not go out of this room. There is no such training among Koreans. Therefore, there is a great risk. They can destroy the whole structure of the immigrant church. I am very careful in that respect.

Mrs. Choi: As you know, my husband does not have a degree to show off, such as a Ph.D. From our early days, I tell others that my husband is a permanent student. Many of my friends are respected because of their husbands' degrees. But I do not have that. (laugh)

Mr. Choi: How pathetic! (laugh)

Mrs. Choi: I have many classmates whose husbands succeeded in the society as doctors, engineers and professors, and they brag about their husbands. But I feel proud of what my husband has. Among my friends, those who know my husband respect him greatly and enjoy talking with him. In the Korean-American community, it is difficult, but I am very proud of him.

Mr. Choi: Honey, it has nothing to do with this interview. He is interested in the children's education. In the Korean-American community, most of the pastors are prisoners

in their own cells. Sometimes I question whether they can have any meaningful ministry.

Mrs. Choi: Many Korean pastors who knew my husband in the early days avoided him. I play the piano, so they welcome me, but they do not welcome my husband. I think they feel threatened.

Interviewer: Why did you not go into ministry?

Mr. Choi: There were many factors. Nowadays I reconfirm my opinion that the ministry as we know and seminary training are two different things. Seminary training often leads you out of the spiritual life. I don't think seminary training is too big a help, although not to all [who attend seminary]. If one can use it as a tool, it is fine. But I am tired of the professional facade of the seminary graduates. There were many other factors, but this is basically it.

Interviewer: What do you think about the Christian life of Becky and Sarah?

Mr. Choi: In the case of Becky, she does not go to church regularly and that does not bother me at all. She is a very spiritual person. I have no question about it. My wife is uneasy about her not attending any church. But when the time comes she will. There is no reason to believe that one must be a church-goer to be a Christian. She is a very devout and spiritual person. That, I think, she got from me. In Sarah's case, she is more active. She is a leader

in her youth group. She and her youth pastor make a really good team. I always tell her not to think of herself a Christian just because she goes to a church and she is engaged in many Christian activities. "It has to come from your heart. It is a question of the heart, not of a habit, not of reasoning." I respect her because she has her own conviction. I am not sure whether this is bragging or not, but since confidentiality was given, I will say. She plays clarinet well. I think it helped her a lot in applying for college admissions. It is my understanding that she was supposed to play one solo piece at the graduation ceremony. She said, "I had many chances for public exposure through my clarinet solo and there will be many in the future too. But there are many who had such a chance only once, and I think I will give the opportunity to them." I said, "But it is not for you to decide. It is for the band director to decide." She said, "Ya, but if I say, 'Let the other girl do it,' then that's all I can do." I like that. That is indication of her spiritual maturity. I did not say this to her. I just said, "That's good. I admire your strength." This is what really matters, more important than any other activity in the church: the real value of heart, the charity, giving others the opportunity. Of course I have no idea what she would say next time, even though she said that this time. In the process of the formation of personality, there may appear many different things, but in due time, I

hope this will be permanently placed in her value structure.

Interviewer: Do you have any formal and regular practice of family devotion hour at home?

Mr. Choi: No. We have a dinner table talk.

Mrs. Choi: We do not have the typical Korean Christian life exercise even though my husband was once an elder in the Korean church. We do not stress prayer so much as they do. In tithing also, we do not calculate as they do with dollar amount. The offering of my precious time is also a part of tithing. I cannot confidently show my style to other Korean Christians.

Interviewer: Are you active in the American church now?

Mr. Choi: No, not now. For a while I was. The reason I am still there is because I was "burned" in the Korean church. I want to come back to the Korean church. Once my second daughter goes to college, we will be left free. So now I am gradually withdrawing from the American church. I did not have much interaction with the Korean-American community. All I had was my high school alumni meetings. Since I cut the relationship with the Korean church, I do not have any. I want to return to the Korean community, but I don't have any church to go to. I have to look for one small church.

Telephone from Sarah interrupted our interview.

She had gone to her friend's house and was calling to tell her parents where she was and where she

needed to be picked up. Mrs. Choi first answered the phone, and then, gave the receiver to Mr. Choi to get the directions from Sarah. I wondered why Mrs. Choi did not get the directions from her daughter herself. Mr. Choi got the directions and told his wife how to get there.

Mr. Choi: Last Christmas, my first daughter gave me a book as a Christmas present. It was written by a second-generation Chinese about his family, especially about his father. With the book was a blank tape and a note which said, "Tell me your story." I thought that was very good. They are hungry for it when they are ready. I used to tell stories about making Korean toys, and playing various Korean games of my childhood. When Sarah was in the fifth grade, she suddenly told me, "I decided that it would be you." I asked, "What? Did you decide it would be me? What do you mean?" She answered, "The interview." For the history fair at school, students were to interview people. I asked, "Why did you decide that it would be me?" She said, "It's because you have lots of interesting stories." So she began by asking my full name, birth place, schools I attended and so forth. She asked, "What grammar school did you attend?" I answered, "Which grammar school?" She asked, "The one you attended." I answered, "I attended many grammar schools." "How come? Did you flunk?" This is how we began. I said,

"I attended six grammar schools." I told her the places I moved around. She could not understand how it was possible that I attended six grammar schools. Recently she wrote an essay for her class, and it was about me. She never told me that she was writing an essay about me. I don't know why she did not tell me. I felt left out. I could have helped her. I offered my help in writing an essay, because I wanted her to hand in a good essay. But she declined my offer, saying, "No, I don't want it. Besides, your English is awkward." After she finished writing, I asked, "Can I read it?" She said, "No." Anyway, she gave me a copy later on to read it. It was her version of the story I told her about my life in Korea. What I told her over our dinner table became her family story. I thought it was well written. I told her, "There are some factual errors." She said, "That's O.K. They don't check those." I felt like dying when she had her own way. (laugh) I told her, "Look. You can derive the meaning and interpretation in any way you want to. But history has to be factually correct and accurate." This is how we struggled. I poke her once, and then leave her alone. Poke her again, and then leave her alone again, and so forth. As I look back at my child-rearing experiences, the theme of the line-drawing on how far they could go and how much they could do repeated itself. Once... this is a very serious one... Sarah came home crying. I called her and she came and sat with me. It

turned out that she told me a lie about her whereabouts. She told us that she would be in one place, but she was somewhere else. I asked her where she was. She said, "I was with a boyfriend." I knew she had a boyfriend. I asked her, "What did you do?" She said, "We talked." I asked, "What talk did you have that you had to keep your whereabouts secret from us?" She only kept crying. Finally she said, "He had told someone that he would break up with me unless I had sex with him." My blood shot up. I told her, "I don't want to see him again. I don't want to hear about him again." But things don't stop there. I know that young people in her generation do not think much about having sex. I asked her, "So what did you do?" She answered, "That's the reason we had a fight." Anyway, she kept crying. So later I told her, "I respect your strength. You stood your position no matter who said what. But I was disappointed to know that that was the kind of guy you were going out with. I thought that you had better eyes than that." That night she called her youth pastor and talked over the phone for about two hours before she went to bed. Now, fortunately, she did not keep it to herself but brought it up to me. If she kept this matter to herself and tried to deal with it in her own way, what could have happened? Of course, bringing this matter to me would not be pleasant, and she would have to be scolded for it, but she did anyway. She also sought her pastor's counseling. I am grateful that

she was able to handle this matter in the way she did. On one hand, I feel proud of her. But on the other hand, I feel so anxious because she seems so fragile. This was the difficult part. Nothing like this happened to my first daughter when she was in high school. Now Sarah broke up with her boyfriend, and they are just friends. She has many friends who are boys. I told her, "The world changed so much. When I was growing up, if a girl, especially a girl like you, went out with a boy, they called her a tramp. Girls just didn't do that. No nice girl did that. Secondly, if you have so many boyfriends, you are the worst kind of tramp." When I came to the U.S., I thought that I had attained a certain level of ethical integrity. But in fact, I might have been like a frog who had been confined in a small well all his life. I lived in a dorm, and if a girl did not get phone calls from a boy on the weekends, she was considered to be pathetic. If a girl received many phone calls, she was considered to be popular. Based on my ethical standard, if a girl received phone calls from so many boys, she would belong to the class of prostitutes. In the Korean society, a certain thing was right, while in the American society, something contrary to it was right. I lost the absoluteness of ethics. It was my first cultural shock. The relativistic view of ethics did have an appeal. I learned that in human life, there can be black and white but there is a big gray area. This was about 30 or 40 years

ago. Nowadays they make fun of my hair gradually turning white and I tell them, "That is all because of you." Then they say, "What did we do?" I like to play jokes with my daughters, and they enjoy it. But when they bring their friends home, they say, "Daddy, please go away." In one sense, we are getting closer. In another sense, there is a growing distance. Sometimes cold and other times hot. Sometimes, they caress me dearly saying, "Daddy!" In this permissive environment of our society, I know that my family is not a typical Asian family where I am the only authority and dictate every detail of their lives. I don't want to be that way. I don't want to be a permissive father either. In America, they let you do anything. I asked my children, "Do you think that is right? Do you think children need parental guidance?" They said, "I suppose so." I tell them, "I am in between. Sometimes I don't know where I am. I am struggling. I make mistakes. When I make mistakes you have to forgive me." Sometimes, I get mad, and my emotions flare up. But this kind of conversation is important. Now, this is my existential struggle for upbringing my children. I don't know how others do it. I don't say this is the only way or best way, but under the given conditions and the uniqueness of circumstances, I feel that I am doing my best, although it is not enough sometimes. I hope that the Korean-American families who are interested and concerned about their children's education and upbringing may have an

opportunity to come together and talk about their struggles. I think it will be a great help.

Interviewer: What is your general observation of American families?

Mr. Choi: I have known many American families with their tragic details of physical and sexual abuses as well as their frustrations. First of all, compared with Asian families, I think there is an unduly large number of dysfunctional families in the American society. Secondly, the premium they place on the value of independence has a detrimental effect in their family cohesiveness. When you stress independence, you let your children do whatever they want. There are times when you have to relax the leash, but not completely and let them run away from it. Surprisingly American parents do not have much influence on their children. I feel that permissiveness, dysfunctional family situations, and parents not having much control or influence on their children all come from their stress on independence when children are not ready. On the other hand, however, I have seen families in which everything is on the table and everything is decided by consensus. A father asks his children's opinion, and each family member has a vote. Once the decision is made everyone follows. I have seen several families like that. Sometimes I feel so uneasy when I see them. I feel so precarious. It is not solid and looks as if it is going to break into pieces. But children are

happy, parents are happy and easy-going. Last of all, many surprisingly lack motivation for social mobility. They don't care whether they become ministers or governors. It is more so with younger children now. At least the people I associate with are different. But younger ones don't care. They say, "I am baby-sitting." I ask, "You have graduated from college two or three years ago and now your job is baby-sitting?" I think that is an indication of their lack of motivation. There is no goal set for them. Perhaps, they don't have any incentive to do so. Everything is taken care of for them. They are comfortable in their lives. Financial matters are taken care of by somebody else. There is no value structure in the family. Of course there is a danger in generalization. But I don't like the way families function in America, at least from what I have seen.

Interviewer: You said that you feel very precarious to see a family with each member having a vote in family matters. What do you mean?

Mr. Choi: It is very precarious. I feel so uneasy when I see that, but they seem to be very happy and somehow it works. For example, my advisor in college was a Harvard Ph.D. But his son was a high school basketball coach, and he was very satisfied with it because that was what his son decided to do. Of course that was not the end of his son's career, but that was what he was doing at that time. They value learning through experience, but sometimes you don't

have to go through that detour. There is a story about a master who said to his disciples, "It is so important to learn through experience." One of the young disciples who was using drugs responded, "Ya, I have to learn that drugs are bad by having an experience." The master replied, "It is like you having a screw and a nail, and you nailed the hard wood and it split. Then you say to yourself, 'I should have used a screw.' But the wood had already been split." Yes, learning through experience is real learning. Real education takes place through experience. But sometimes they can spare mistakes. At least in a family, from the view point of parents, parents can spare their children from unnecessary pains.

Interviewer: Do you have any sensitivity about your as well as your children's being the members of a minority group?

Mr. Choi: I have experienced disadvantages as a minority. When I was a student, after having lived for two years in the dormitory, I decided to get an apartment because it was cheaper. So I went to hunt for a room to rent. When they saw me, they said, "O, we just have rented the room and I forgot to take the sign down." After I finished college, I wanted to continue on to the doctoral study, but because my daughter was born I could not. I wanted to teach, but I did not have a teacher's certificate. With a master's degree in history, you could not get a job. If I had connections, I could have had a decent job, but I did not have any

connections. Therefore I had to stay in a lower echelon of the labor market. I think it is one of the main difficulties of the minorities. It did not bother me too much, because just getting a job for the sake of it was not my purpose. As for my children, once in their childhood, the older one came home from school and sang a song which goes, "Chinese, Japanese is" It was a pejorative song sung by black kids. It did not bother them. When my second daughter was younger, I sent her to a day care center in which there were some black kids. My daughter used a black accent. Her mother was worried. I told her, "Just ignore it." We pretended not to hear. Later, such accents disappeared. My children are free with blacks as well as whites. I once went to a black church in the south side of Chicago. They asked Sarah to play clarinet so we went there a couple of times. It was a completely black church located near the Robert Taylor Housing Project. She was comfortable. She was not afraid at all. When the suburban kids in her church hear that she lives in Chicago, they are surprised saying, "How can you live in such a city? Aren't you scared?" My daughter felt disgusted at their ignorance. She goes to an inner-city high school, and she feels free with blacks and Hispanics. She has one girl friend who is black. She stayed over in our house a few times. My daughter is very comfortable with her. She does not seem to have any minority, especially racial minority,

consciousness. Maybe she is not saying it, but I did not detect anything in that regard.

Interviewer: Don't you think such consciousness would have been heightened if your family had lived in an enclave of the Korean-American community?

Mr. Choi: It is quite possible, because the Korean-Americans in general are set apart from others, particularly from black people. Once in a certain meeting, one black person went on and on about the abuses against black people. I felt he went too far. So I took him to the test, "Race is not necessarily a criterion in treating others. When we say racism, it usually means the abuse of power by those who have power. It does not have to be white against black. Among blacks there is racism. Those who have power among blacks can abuse those blacks who don't. That is racism. Please don't bring up white or black too much. I have a very deep wound in me as well. While I was struggling to survive by selling small chocolate bars and packs of cigarettes and chewing gums in Korea, American soldiers, especially blacks, passed by me and suddenly kicked my carrying box away for fun. Even before you people were called 'blacks', we had already had a term for you in Korea: 'Charcoal.' It was way before you called yourselves blacks. Now, some of your people, not all, did that to us. Therefore, we call you racists? No. I don't call you that. Certainly I do not condone and accept what some people do to

blacks. It should not be done. But if you say too much about it, it backfires. There are many kinds of people in each race. There are many good Korean merchants and a few bad ones. Just because a few do so, you cannot condemn them all. Let's have a right perspective about that." I am glad that my children are not afraid of blacks. Once my daughter told me that she was going to the south side of Chicago, around 50th street, alone. I offered her a ride, but she refused. She went alone. I felt uneasy, but at the same time, I felt proud of her. Sometimes, I force them to take a risk. I have a story about that. When my first daughter was in the second grade, we moved into this house. There was a grammar school about six blocks away, and it was a little far for walking. So for the first week, I took her by car. Then I walked her to school and back home. After a while, I told her, "I cannot always walk you to school and back home. Tomorrow, I will walk you up to one block away from school. Let us do it for two or three days. And if you are comfortable with it, I will then walk you up to two and then three blocks before the school." So we agreed. The next day, I walked her up to one block before the school and said goodbye. After walking a little bit, she looked back. She wanted to make sure that I was there. I told her, "I am here." I understood her. She wanted to go by herself, but she also had to look back to make sure I was there. There is an intersection just before the school.

The cross-guard began to say something to my daughter and pointed fingers at her fiercely. Since I was a block away, I could not make out what she was saying. I stood there looking at her helplessly. I realized the truth that when she goes her own way all by herself, sometimes we parents are helpless. No matter how much we want to help, we cannot. She is out of my protection. To me, it was a profound spiritual experience. I told God, "I entrust her to you." When she came back home that day, I asked her what happened with the cross-guard. She said, "Nothing." (laugh) Only I agonized for nothing.

Sarah entered into the house with her mother at this point. She greeted me. Her father gently reminded her to take off her hat when greeting. She went upstairs.

Interviewer: Do you plan to go back to Korea?

Mr. Choi: Yes, to my hometown. The two of us dream about living there.

Mrs. Choi: I dream about playing an old style reed organ, which is not even an organ. People ask whether we would like to go to Florida or California when we retire. But I answer, "We will go to Korea." I don't know whether our dream will come true during our lifetime.

Interviewer: I hope I can come back to talk with you once

more after I am done with my dissertation.

Mrs. Choi: I noticed that people of the younger generation appreciate my husband much more than people of his own generation.

Mr. Choi: That's inevitable, because many Korean-Americans are more conservative than the Koreans in Korea. I have a beautiful example. When I first came to the U.S., tennis was not that popular in this country. Then when I became a junior in college, everybody began to play tennis. After a while, the tennis boom went over to Korea. Then, the tennis boom reached the Korean-Americans here in the U.S from Korea. They lived here, but they did not learn tennis in the course of interacting with Americans. They lived in an ethnic enclave and received the major influence from Korea. The Koreans in Korea are more advanced than they are. They lament the fact that the way of life here, especially the church life here, is not what they were used to in Korea. Of course, there are many exceptions, but many still insist on maintaining their way of life in Korea ten or twenty years ago. Playing golf is the same. They are so closed that they are not capable of receiving anything from their neighbors. The only opening, I would say, a pipe conduit or an umbilical cord, is with Korea. As a result, they are culturally, educationally and intellectually so isolated that their growth is stymied. I admit that my attitude is not good when I become contemptuous toward them. But why

don't you interact with your neighbors when you live here and take advantage of the good opportunity to learn as well as to give?

Interviewer: Why do you think it is the case?

Mr. Choi: I think, first of all, it is their inferiority complex, not allowing themselves to be themselves. The language barrier is another important factor. It is a defense mechanism. I suppose immigrants from many other countries are the same, but it is especially true with the Asian immigrants because of their defensive masking habits. It had been imbedded in their social structure, and it had been their way of life. So when they come here, the contrast is even more so. Initially, they can hardly speak a few words, and Americans taunt them saying, "Isn't that right, Uh?" Since they don't like to be humiliated, they choose the more comfortable way by sticking to other Koreans in California as well as in New York. Those who have some education are willing to take a risk of losing face. I say this not out of my ridiculing my own people but out of concern. It is stifling. I don't see any virtue at all in being so closed and so shut-in.

Interviewer: Then what compels you to go back to the Korean community?

Mr. Choi: That's the reason. Especially among young people. I have an easier time to discuss these things with the younger generation than my own. We can have open and on-

going discussions. Even if there is no clear-cut answers we are comfortable. But my peer generation is so inflexible. They say, "Life is a triangle and period. This is THE way and if you deviate from it you are nothing." Neo-Confucianism is thoroughly implemented not in spirit but in external formality. That is true with Korean Christianity. Therefore there is no life. Now, if I say this without care, or to anyone indiscriminately, then my statement will be misunderstood and distorted as if I am just criticizing. Yes, I am, but it is constructive criticism. I have to be careful. I don't know, but since I have reached that stage of life above sixty, I am hoping that I have an elder status in which my word is weighty. But nowadays being sixty is nothing. He is still a youngster.

Interviewer: I have enjoyed talking with you very much.

Sorry to keep you up so late. Thank you.

CHAPTER 4

FIRST-GENERATION KOREAN IMMIGRANT PARENTS AS CONFUCIANS

There is an apparent dearth of research materials on Korean immigrants in the United States owing to their relatively short history of immigration. Nevertheless, the existing research in the last two decades invariably finds children's education at or near the top of the list of the motives of immigration of the Koreans to the U.S.¹ This finding is no surprise when we consider the high value and respect Koreans have historically placed on learning. The first-generation Korean immigrant parents in the United States, not unlike their counterparts in their homeland, invest their time, energy and financial resources in providing maximum educational opportunities for their children. They are willing to take the risks and make the personal sacrifices that accompany immigration for the sake of their children's education. At least on the surface, Korean second-generation children appear to be performing exceedingly well academically, and their high levels of educational achievement have contributed, in part, to the designation of Korean-Americans as "a model minority,"

¹The Korean immigration after 1965. Mangiafico, Contemporary American Immigrants, 95-96.

however ill-conceived that notion might be.² But everything comes with a price. There is reason to believe that, when the energy of the first-generation Korean immigrant parents is concentrated on securing their children's academic success, the conflicts between them and their children will become even more intense than the universal human experience of generational conflicts between parents and children in all families.³

The self-imposed pressure by the Korean immigrant parents for their children's educational success constitutes a backdrop for this chapter. In it the cultural clash which takes place between first-generation Korean parents and their second-generation children in Korean-American families will be discussed. For the past several decades during which the field of immigration studies has expanded, social scientists have produced an enormous amount of materials that deal with the concerns and problems associated with the immigrants' lives in the United States and their social policy implications. These social scientists have generally observed that the greater the differences between the cultural traditions and social

²I am using the term "education" in its narrow sense of schooling.

³Robert E.L. Rovers et. al. "Intergenerational Solidarity in Families: Untangling the Ties That Bind" in Susan K. Pfeifer, Marvin B. Sussman, eds. Families: Intergenerational and Generational Connections The Haworth Press: New York, 1991. 11-46.

customs of the countries of immigrants' origin and those of the United States, the greater is the alienation and marginalization felt by the immigrants, owing to the abrupt change and discontinuity of cultural milieu. Non-European immigrants tend to experience more cultural shock than their European counterparts. This is still true of the Korean immigrants whose cultural foundation is deeply rooted in age-old Confucian traditions despite the Western style modernization of Korea which has transformed her political and economic structure since the end of the Korean War in 1953. Confucianism is no longer as dominant as a religion in Korea as during the 500 years of the Yi dynasty (1392-1910). Currently, only a little over 1% of Koreans adhere to it as a religion.⁴ But Confucian values and mores are still very much a part of the Korean way of life. Most of the first-generation Korean immigrant parents spent their formative childhood years and early adulthood in Korea before they immigrated to the United States. Their views and morals as well as their customs and rituals have been shaped by the Confucian tradition.

The Confucian tradition stems from the basic conceptual framework of reality that is in sharp contrast with the Western tradition. Dr. Michael C. Kalton, a recognized scholar of Korean Confucianism, has succinctly summarized the contrast in the following words:

⁴Facts about Korea, 136.

The Greeks taught the West to analyze by breaking into smaller units: when you get to the atom, literally the "indivisible," you are in some sense at the ultimate, most real level, that of the building block of reality. The emergence of western individualism has been a complex historical process, but nothing in it contradicted the apparently self-evident fact that individuals are the ultimate unit of human existence, the building blocks of all more complex and hence derivative social groups.

Confucianism moved in the opposite direction and came to an opposite conclusion. Instead of beginning with a complex unit and analyzing to simple elements, they began with the individual and moved outward along lines of dependency: I depend upon my parents for my existence and nurture, my family, friends, and teachers for mental and spiritual formation, and all of these depend upon society and its order for their sustenance. This kind of analysis conceptualizes in terms of organically interdependent units, the ultimate unit so conceived being the universe itself. In this framework it seems self-evident that the individual is the derivative reality.⁵

A discussion of the full implications of these two differing conceptual frameworks is beyond the scope of this research. But the contrast between the two opposite views of reality is clearly manifested in the ways peoples of the two traditions conceive the relationship between an individual and the community to which he belongs. For the people of the West, the meaning and value of relationships of varying degrees of intimacy are derived from the meaning and value of an individual himself, since an individual is viewed as the ultimate unit of reality. Therefore, an individual takes on supreme importance over his or her community. On the contrary, the Confucian tradition grounds

⁵Kalton, The Way of Korea, 5.

the meaning and value of an individual in the matrix of community interrelationships. The very identity of an individual is conceived in terms of his network of relationships, and it is from one's relationships with others in a community that an individual derives his meaning. Therefore, community takes on supreme importance over an individual.

Confucius envisioned a harmonious and morally upright society on the basis of five sets of hierarchically arranged relationships: between ruler-subject, father-son, husband-wife, elder-younger, and friend-friend. Of these five, three are concerned with relationships within a family. The family becomes the most basic and determining unit of community, and the family provides the core of value in everyday life. As early as the 15th century, Korea became the laboratory for the Confucian moral and social vision when Korean Neo-Confucianists of the Yi dynasty eagerly adopted the Confucian ideal to remedy the social ills that plagued the kingdom. For the next five hundred years, the Confucian value of family relationships provided the moral and cultural foundation of Korean society. For first-generation Korean immigrant parents, therefore, the hierarchical relationships within the family provide not only the meaning of their lives and the sense of organic unity, but also the circumstance in which the primary socialization and value orientation of their children should

take place.

The second-generation Korean children, on the other hand, do not always share their parents' conviction about the family: neither its supreme value which gives meaning to its individual members, nor the hierarchical order that exists within it. In fact, as they begin the process of acculturation into American society beyond the narrow confines of their own family or a Korean ethnic enclave, typically through the mass media and schooling, they tend to embrace the egalitarian principles of individualism prevalent in the American culture. They learn to view themselves as individuals who possess the ultimate significance. They are individuals in their own rights before they are their father's sons or their mother's daughters.

The hierarchical nature of the Confucian cultural mandates come into conflict with the egalitarian nature of the American cultural mandates, resulting in the clash between first-generation immigrant parents and their second-generation children in the Korean-American family. Through in-depth interviews with the first-generation Korean immigrant parents, the clash between the two cultures was investigated. The focus was made on the areas in which the two cultural values and norms are suspected to come into conflict between parents and children in everyday family life, as well as in matters that require participation of

all family members as a unit. We have to note here that the interviewees were all parents. None of the children were interviewed. Therefore, the views expressed are one-sided views of the conflicts. A further study of the views of the second-generation children is needed. The interview questions were developed in such a way that they could draw out the interviewees' own perception of the conflicts and their own methods of resolution. Care was given not to frame the questions too specifically in order to minimize the influence of the researcher's presuppositions and to maximize the solicitation of the interviewees' own perceptions in their own words. But as a qualitative research, a certain degree of influence is admitted although unintended.

As was suspected, the results reveal that the two most prominent areas of conflict were concerned with the two most cherished values of Confucianism, namely, filial piety and propriety. Another prominent area of concern in the Confucian value system is the centrality of the family as a unit and the views of the extended family system. They are discussed around the issues of family unity and children's future marriages. Discipline of children in various forms is a norm in the Korean social milieu. The question of corporal punishment is raised to test the extent to which the Korean immigrant parents are willing to go against the norms, though not necessarily the actions, of the American

social milieu. The interview results also reveal a higher degree of acculturation than was expected. It may be due to the fact that the interviewees' average length of residence in the U.S. is 18.6 years at the time of the interviews. Therefore, the results are limited to those whose immigration experience is relatively long and may not apply to those whose immigration experience is relatively short.

1. Obedience

A most highly prized virtue in Korea is obedience. When we consider the hierarchical nature of the familial relationships that exists in Korea, it is not unexpected. Obedience to parents is the first moral quality inculcated in the children in Korea.

Mrs. Agnes Kim came to the U.S. in 1974 and has two teenage children born in the U.S. To her, obedience is the virtue that should characterize the relationship between parents and children. It is not a slavish and mindless submission; it is a voluntary submission in response to the care and love given by parents. Obedience is only a natural part of the mutual relationship that develops between loving parents and their children. Even when children grow up and become adults themselves, obedience to parents remains as one of the most salient features that characterize the relationship between them. Mrs. Agnes Kim said with pride:

In my lifetime, I disobeyed my mother just two times: one was when I was choosing my major in

college; my mother wanted me to major in English in the four year university, but I wanted to major in nursing in the two year college. Another was when I did not wait one year after my engagement before I got married, which my mother wanted me to do. I never said "No" to my mother other than those two occasions.⁶

Another interviewee, Mrs. Helen Sohn, is pursuing a doctoral degree. Many times she wanted to stop studying owing to heavy pressure from full-time work and child-rearing, but did not. Her eyes began to gather tears when she said:

I disobeyed my father only once in my lifetime when I insisted on marrying my ex-husband in spite of his objection. Then I ended up divorcing my husband. I did to my father something I shouldn't have done. I am studying for the doctoral degree for my father's sake, that somehow I can bring some comfort to him after having hurt him so deeply through my disobedience.⁷

First-generation Korean immigrant parents cherish the memories of their bond of love with their parents through their acts of obedience in response to their parents' loving care and expectations for them. But the second-generation Korean-American children do not have the same high priority in the virtue of obedience. Mrs. Grace Paik, who reared three teenage boys, said in resignation:

My second son protested why we (the parents) did not allow him to do what he wanted. We responded by saying that he had to obey his father. We struggled much with this type of verbal exchanges. I think we expect too much from our children when we wish that they behave in the same way as we did

⁶Interview #1, p.3.

⁷Interview #8, p.2.

by obeying our parents in Korea. Here in America, it does not seem to work. Here, individuality is very important.⁸

Mrs. Irene Oh sent her son to the U.S. when he was 15 years old for a better education. She herself came to the U.S. after two years and found her son changed.

In Korea, he was an exemplary child at home as well as in school. He was obedient and good-mannered. But he is not like that any more. He does not have proper respect for adults. When I ask him how his day was, he talks back, saying, "Why do you ask?" He thinks that he is interfered with. He was not like that in Korea. I don't think he would have been like that if he had lived in Korea.⁹

Obedience is an important quality in the Confucian moral system of the Koreans. Mrs. Agnes Kim and Mrs. Helen Sohn did not feel deprived of their individual rights when they obeyed their parents throughout their childhood and even during their adulthood with rare exceptions. But for the second-generation Korean-Americans, obedience is readily suspected as something that takes away their individual rights and privileges. As Mrs. Irene Oh put it, they feel unduly "interfered with" when asked about how their days were, because the question was asked by someone with authority. These conflicts are experienced almost daily in Korean-American families between parents and children. Mr. Bernard Lee, who has two sons in high school, puts them in the larger context of the universal experience between

⁸Interview #7, p.3.

⁹Interview #9, p.7.

parents and children regardless of the cultural variations:

Once in a while, when they do not want to listen to me, they complain that we are different from American parents. Then I take them to meet one of my American coworkers at work. They come to understand a little better that these problems are universal between parents and children, not simply because their parents are Asian.¹⁰

The importance the first-generation Korean immigrant parents place on obedience by children reflects the Koreans' general attitude of veneration for the elder, which is taken for granted in the hierarchical Confucian culture. And first-generation Korean immigrant parents seem to believe that propriety that governs the relationship between the elder and the younger is the first important step in the process of their children's socialization.

2. Propriety

Propriety is a loose translation of the Korean word, "Ye" (Li in Chinese), which can also be translated as "good manners," "ceremony" or "ritual" depending on the context, in the absence of an exact translation into the English language.¹¹ The moral significance attached to the concept of propriety is distinctively Confucian. Although propriety regulates the external manners appropriate to

¹⁰Interview #2, p.22.

¹¹For the discussion of translatability of moral concepts cross-culturally, see Alasdair MacIntyre's Whose Justice? Which Rationality? (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988).

interrelationships, especially between elder and younger, it does not concern itself with ritual for its own sake. Propriety is the manifestation of inner attitude and, in a deeper sense, the actualization of the inner moral quality of sincere reverence or respect. According to Confucius, there is no authentic ritual without the true inner feeling which gives life to the ritual; at the same time, there is no authentic morality without a ritual which gives it necessary discipline.¹² This synthesis of internal feelings and external manners is grounded in the communal or interrelational moral vision of Confucianism. Improper manners or lack of propriety appropriate for hierarchically organized relationships is interpreted as moral deficiency or lack of proper inner attitude. Naturally, first-generation Korean immigrant parents seek to develop the proper inner attitude in their children through the external discipline of manners. For their second-generation children, however, this approach seems not natural, but artificial. For them, the most important principle in relating to others is an individual's internal feelings, however those feelings are expressed externally. They are wary of the external rules of appropriate manner imposed upon them by others who are in the position of authority. What their parents term proper or not-proper in respect to

¹²For example, *The Analects*, 3:12 in The Analects of Confucius, trans. Arthur Waley (New York: Random House, 1938), 97.

certain manners appears arbitrary. On the other hand, first-generation Korean immigrant parents tend to view their children's apparent disregard of the external manners appropriate for the hierarchical order as the evidence of moral weakness.

Mrs. Lucy Yang came to the U.S. in 1975 and reared three sons who are now all teenagers. She tried to teach her sons proper manners toward older persons as well as toward their peers. She said with some amount of pain in her voice:

When their uncle came to visit us from Korea, they did not even get up from their seats to greet him. They just said, "Hi", and that was all. When I forced them to say the greeting more properly in Korean, "Anyunhaseyo," which means, "How are you, sir?" they tried to avoid it because they felt uncomfortable. . . . I was very much embarrassed.¹³

Similar observations were made by recent immigrant parents about the second-generation Korean-American children's lack of propriety. Mr. and Mrs. Donald Chung came to the U.S. in 1989 with their two sons, both of whom were high school students at the time of immigration, and are now college students in Chicago. They consider their sons as 1.5 generation Korean-Americans. Mrs. Doris Chung compares her sons with the second-generation Korean-American children who were born and grew up in the U.S.:

Whenever their father returns home from work, my sons always rise from their seats and greet him.

¹³Interview #13, p.23.

If they are in their rooms upstairs, they come down to greet him. . . . Second-generations kids are different. I see them in the church, and they do not even get up from the couch in the tv lounge when the adults enter the room. My sons would at least rise from their seats. My sons feel closer to the Korean adults like ourselves than their peers here.¹⁴

Some of the interviewees have made a conscious effort to adjust themselves to the American cultural milieu by putting less emphasis on the hierarchical concept of propriety and more on mutual respect between themselves and their children as individuals. But making adjustments between these two conflicting cultural orientations in a family is no small task and involves much tension. Some were critical toward other Korean-American families for their lack of understanding of, and willingness to adjust to American culture, while others were critical toward other Korean-American families for giving themselves uncritically to the American culture. As will be shown later, in one family, this conflict existed between husband and wife.

Mr. Edward Choi describes his inner conflict as a Korean parent:

Once I enter my home, I am still an Asian father. To a large degree I still exercise my authority. I am an authoritarian, and my daughters do not like it. Of course I am not always an authoritarian. But sometimes, I have to be one for the sake of preserving the sense of a unit, group or community. I am sorry because I know they do not like it, but I have to make a decision. Here in the Korean-American community, the younger ones answer the older ones with the

¹⁴Interview #4, p.5.

honorific term of "Ye, ye, ye." (In Korean, "Ye" means "Yes, Sir.") My children follow the custom of propriety in the Korean environment, but it is not a natural part of them. They speak rather freely (in a non-Korean environment); instead of saying, "Yes," they say "Ya." They call their pastors on a first-name basis.¹⁵

Mr. Bernard Lee came to the U.S. in 1970. He has two teenage boys. His wife takes pride in the fact that her father-in-law was an exemplary filial son to his mother and so is her husband. Mr. Lee himself is also of the opinion that in spite of his high regard for the concept of filial piety, he has made an adjustment to the American individualistic culture by maintaining a close friendship with his sons. He is critical toward other Korean-American parents for their reluctance to make such adjustments. At the same time, however, he tries to maintain his right as a father to dictate the manners of his sons.

Most Koreans grew up without learning the skills necessary to converse with others. They do not know how to listen to others. Even if the second-generation children are our own kids, we must learn to talk with them. If we keep distance from our children, even if they may seem okay for a while, when they face a problem it explodes. For example, many Korean-American teenagers have strange haircuts, wear earrings and so forth. I tell my sons, "Don't worry. Do whatever you wish and I will do exactly as you do. If you pierce one hole in your ears, I will make two holes in mine." So far, I do not sense that they are attracted to such strange behaviors. I try to open up with my children. But I maintain the father's authority when it comes to the things that need to be done.¹⁶

¹⁵Interview #11, p.12.

¹⁶Interview #2, p.23,24.

While Mr. Bernard Lee was critical toward the Korean-American parents for their lack of willingness to adjust to the new culture of America, another parent was critical of their slavish adaptation to popular American culture. Mr. Martin Koh came to the U.S. in 1974 and has two sons in high school. He observes that many American families do maintain the tradition of good manners and teach their children accordingly. On the other hand, the Korean-American families adopt too quickly the concept of individual freedom for their children and abandon the Confucian tradition of propriety between parents and children. Although his wife, Mrs. Margaret Koh, thinks that her husband is sometimes too strict with the boys, Mr. Koh maintains that propriety needs to be taught through proper training when children are still young.

I keep telling them that it is proper for them to greet their parents face to face when the parents enter the house. In order to teach them the proper manner, when I entered the house, I used to announce my arrival with a loud voice so that they could respond. I kept announcing my arrival repeatedly until they came to the door. Now they know what to do. It was a kind of training. Such things cannot be taught without some training. It begins with some sense of training, and then it gradually becomes a natural part of their life. There is no other way.¹⁷

Mrs. Lucy Yang also trained her sons to recognize older persons properly on the phone, when older persons answer the phone.

¹⁷Interview #14, p.18.

When they call their friends on the phone, if one of the parents answers, they must first greet him or her and, then, introduce who they are. Only after that, should they ask to speak to their friends. I also taught them to greet their friends' parents first when they visit their friends' houses. But I don't know how much they follow my instructions outside the home.¹⁸

Cultural conflict also exists between husband and wife.

When Mrs. Agnes Kim was told by the interviewer that some American children are fond of calling their parents by their first names, she exclaimed in disbelief:

They must really be people in the lowest class. (The actual Korean word she used was 'Sang Nom Dul,' which means a group of people, typically males, from the lowest social stratum in Korea.) I thought a daughter-in-law calling her mother-in-law her by first name was bad enough and felt sorry for the mother-in-law. If a mother rears three sons and none of their wives call her "mother" what is her lot?¹⁹

Her husband, Mr. Abraham Kim, took an opportunity to respond to his wife's comment about Americans' lack of propriety:

This is the point I was making. The most serious problem of Korean-Americans is that they live in extreme isolation. As a result, they cannot see the true picture of Americans. I think Korean-Americans must mix with Americans more. The Korean churches must be able to open their doors to Americans and involve ourselves deeply with Americans. I know many among my church members who have immigrated to the States recently in their middle ages, and I find myself very different from them even though I am one of the same Korean-Americans. They know Americans superficially. I have lived in the States more than 20 years. If I had lived within the enclave

¹⁸Interview #13, p.24.

¹⁹Interview #1, p.16.

of the Korean-Americans for all these years, which I could have done, I would have been just like the new immigrants. We must live with the Americans in order to understand them.²⁰

It is clear from these comments that propriety is a concern high on the agenda of the first-generation Korean immigrant parents as they rear their children in this country. Why is this so? Mrs. Lucy Yang put it well: "We Koreans think that outward appearance or behavior of a person is the expression of what he truly is inwardly."²¹ It is uniquely through the interactions within a family that the moral foundation of children is laid, and propriety is the virtue indispensable for the enterprise of educating them. To first-generation Korean immigrant parents, a family is not a mere collection of separate individuals with blood ties, but an entity from which each individual member draws his or her significance.

3. Family unity

One of the common perceptions of the first-generation Korean immigrant parents interviewed is that American individualism has gone too far and has done more harm than good for children's well-being. It undermines the family unity which they value highly. Its influence needs to be countered in some way in order to ensure the adequate moral

²⁰Interview #1, p.16.

²¹Interview #13, p.14.

formation of their children. Both consciously and unconsciously, these parents make an adjustment to the individualistic culture in which their children are immersed in their effort to keep the family together. Mr. and Mrs. Donald Chung immigrated 6 years ago. They are very critical toward what they have perceived as a typical American way of life in which family relationships give way to an individual's self-indulgence. They maintain a strong sense of family unity as they used to do in Korea more naturally. Referring to the practice of the ancestral ceremonies in Korea, Mr. and Mrs. Chung pride themselves for having never failed to participate in the ceremonies along with their children. Mr. Chung made the point emphatically:

I think it was very good way of forming the unity of the family. The concept of 'we' was formed among four members of my family. We must not live only by the concept of 'I'. 'We' is more important than 'I'....I think we must foster the 'we' idea in them (children), so that if we live, we live together, and if we die, we die together. It is important to find ourselves in this 'we.'²²

Mrs. Doris Chung reports that, even after the family immigrated to the U.S., they have participated in the family gatherings on the days of the ancestral ceremonies by making long-distance phone calls after having calculated the time difference between the U.S. and Korea. They expressed their cultural shock when Mrs. Chung's brother-in-law, who is an American, did not seem to care about the other members of

²²Interview #4, p.24.

the family in the two similar incidents. Mrs. Chung says:

My sister's husband is an American whose name is Mark. In a buffet restaurant, because he got the food first, he began to eat even before his wife came to the table with her food. That is the American way, but I don't think it is good.²³

Mr. Chung brings up another incident:

I don't think there is any moral education here. Once, we went to a picnic together with that family, and I saw Jim eating only with his son while all others were around. He did not care what we were doing at that time. If I were him, I would have at least asked others if they would like to join....I know there are many things to learn here, but I think individualism is too much here. At least in Korea, people relate to each other and learn to be mutually dependent. But here, even the existing connections they are eager to break and scatter all over. So everyone stands alone.²⁴

Mrs. Lucy Yang came to the U.S. twenty years ago. She remembers the day when she admonished her two teenage sons regarding their future marriages:

But I told them, "When you marry, you have to keep in mind that American girls grow up in an extreme individualism and know little about making sacrifices. They have no idea about enduring some difficulties for the sake of their family and children. . . . Koreans have the basic foundation of self-sacrifice for the sake of their family as you can see in your dad and mom. . . ." I think what I said made much sense to my sons. I think many American families break up because of their individualistic way of life.²⁵

Like other parents interviewed, Mrs. Yang finds in one of her sons the individualistic attitude she does not like

²³Interview #4, p.27.

²⁴Interview #4, P.26.

²⁵Interview #13, p.19.

and hopes that he will change one day. She continues:

When my second son had a strange haircut, I fought with him. At that time, my third son took his brother's side. But American children do not get themselves involved. My first son did not get involved in my struggle with his younger brother over the haircut. . . . He just observed without saying anything. You know, here in America, even if someone next to you gets shot, you don't get yourself involved. I think my first son is just like that.²⁶

Most of the Korean immigrant parents interviewed lamented over the individualistic tendency of the American culture and the resulting lack of family unity. Mr. Edward Choi observed the opposite tendency among the Korean parents who sacrifice individuality of children for the sake of their desire to maintain the family reputation. Mr. Choi becomes indignant when he says:

It becomes an educational issue when parents try to save the face of the family through children's academic performances. They must care for their children's welfare before they try to save the reputation of their family. They say to the children, "How can I walk around with my head up?"

Mrs. Choi adds: "They say, 'You shamed our family.'"

Mr. Choi continues:

They must save their children before they save their face. But in Korea, this does not work. Even after coming to the U.S., they ask, "What school did your child enter? What school? What school?" They only take care that their children go to the schools with high academic prestige. They do not really pay attention to their children's educational needs. Because Koreans grow up in this kind of cultural milieu, they ask their children to secure the reputation of their parents and family. Instead of taking care that

²⁶Interview #13, p.20.

their children grow as they need to, somehow they want their children to bring glory and reputation to the family. Their value placement is on saving their faces, not on their children.²⁷

As far as the interviews conducted for the present research, however, there was no clear indication that the Korean immigrant parents interviewed valued the reputation of the family at the expense of their children's individuality. Most of them made a conscious effort to give more weight to the individuality of their children over the expectations of the family as a unit. A case in point is Mrs. Florence Yu. Concerning her aspiration for her two children in terms of their careers, she confesses:

This is one of the changes that happened to me. In the past, I wanted them to have careers that pay well and receive recognition from the people. . . . Well, I tried to control my children in the past, but it did not work. For example, I wanted my son to be a lawyer. But he has a clear idea about these things. He made it clear that he did not want to be a lawyer. Many of the Korean-American parents have their children play musical instruments, and I had my children too. But after about a year's piano practice, my son said that just looking at the keys in the piano gave him a headache. I responded by saying that all others were playing piano, so why not. Then he said that we were wasting our money and then he completely stopped. I learned that by pushing I could not change his mind. I gave up the idea of controlling them.²⁸

Mr. Bernard Lee came to the U.S. in 1970 and has worked in an American manufacturing company in a managerial position for the last 10 years. He believes that things

²⁷Interview #11, p.24-25.

²⁸Interview #6, p.21-22.

must be negotiated between parents and children in the family life as well as in the business world. Noting that Korean immigrant parents generally lack negotiational skills, he emphasizes the need for both sides to be willing to learn from each other. He says that he has made his bottom line clear to his two teenage sons regarding their future careers. He wants them to be prepared to support themselves by first graduating from college, no matter what major they choose for themselves. But his opinion is that the technical field is more favorable for them. Mr. Lee speaks of his negotiational philosophy of a family life:

If they really want to major in English, it is fine. But I believe that as a parent I have a right to make my input. I tell them, "Hey, I have a 50% right to make an influence on you." As long as they are under my roof, I have a right. If they do not want to listen, then they must be on their own.²⁹

Korean immigrant parents try to cope in various differing ways with the American individualism they perceive to be undermining family unity, the all important concept of Confucianism.

4. Marriage

In contrast to the American single nucleus family with its emphasis upon self-sufficiency and individuality, the Korean family, like other Asian families, emphasizes the generational continuity in both directions: ancestors of the

²⁹Interview #2, p.20.

past and descendants in the future. Marriage is much more than an act of two individuals. It is a family-wide event of great significance that provides the link and continuity of the family line. At the time of the interviews, none of the second-generation children of the interviewees were married yet. Among thirty children in total, most are still in their teens, their average age being 16.4, and only four are in their early twenties. As much as the Confucian value of the family unity is cherished by the first-generation Korean immigrant parents, however, it is natural to expect that their deliberation about their children's future marriages becomes more focused and intense as their children grow to young adulthood. It may be that marriage of their children is such an important issue that it reveals the internal dynamics of the cultural conflicts they experience daily as first-generation Korean immigrants. The immigration history of the majority of Korean-Americans is relatively short, and the definitive statistical data on the various aspects of the marriage practices of the 1.5 and second-generation Korean-Americans are still lacking. This research seeks to take the pulse of the first-generation Korean immigrant parents as they anticipate their children's marriage. Understandably, their primary concern is exogamy which presents itself as a real possibility and over which they are fully aware they have only a limited control. How important is it that their children marry Koreans? What are

the reasons for anxiety as they consider their children marrying non-Koreans? How about marrying non-Whites, such as other Asians and African-Americans? What are the strategies they employ, if any, to prepare their children so that they follow their parents' wishes?

It was clear from the interviews that all those interviewed expressed their strong preference that their children marry Koreans. Their responses varied in the degrees of their willingness to tolerate having non-Korean children-in-law. One interviewee, Mrs. Jane Park, spoke of her husband's clear stance against their two children's marrying any non-Koreans. She seemed to be going along with her husband. Mrs. Park came to the U.S. in 1990 with her two children both of whom are now in college. Her husband, Mr. John Park, joined them soon, but after four years in the U.S., he decided to return to Korea and resume his position in his previous work place. He wishes that his children will come back to Korea after their college education and contribute to the betterment of Korean society. His two children, however, are not sure about it. He is very kind and generous to them, but, when it comes to their marriages, he draws a clear racial line. He is very concerned about their marriages, especially that of his daughter. He declared to his children that he would never allow them to marry Americans. Clearly, Mr. Park feels a crisis when he faces the real possibility that their children may marry

non-Koreans, and the family unity and generational continuity is, in some way, disrupted. Mrs. Park believes that her children are receptive and not rebellious against their father thus far.

However, the Parks' case turned out to be an exception among the interviewees. Others are not as strongly against inter-racial marriage as the Parks are. When asked whether he wished to have American daughters-in-law, Mr. Bernard Lee, who has two teenage sons, answered: "No, I do not, but I do not take a strong stand against it either. It is not my life but theirs."³⁰

Mrs. Betty Lee jumped in:

I do not insist that they have to marry Koreans. My older son asked me if I wished he would marry a Korean. I answered, "Korean woman is good, but that is not most important. The most important thing is that you love her and she loves you." I also emphasize the family orientation of the prospective woman. Even if she were a Korean, he has to pay attention to her family background, and also her disposition must match with his. Then my son told me that having the same religion is more important to him. I was very glad to hear that. I think that, if I draw a clear boundary about their future wives, they would rebel. I think the most important thing is still their mutual love. Their happiness is what matters. I also think that the parents of both parties must be able to communicate with each other. I deliberately avoid emphasizing the racial issue.³¹

Mr. and Mrs. Lee are careful not overemphasize the racial issue in fear of possible backlash from their sons.

³⁰Interview #2, p.28.

³¹Interview #2, p.30.

But others are more open to rationally discuss the question of race with their children. Mr. Abraham Kim worries about the high divorce rate among the mixed-race couples. He has two teenage children, one boy and one girl.

My biggest worry is the problem of divorce. I have many Korean friends here, and many of them married non-Koreans, and over 80% of them divorced. My reason is not necessarily racial prejudice. Their basic concept of marriage is too light. They divorce easily and become very unhappy. I want to prevent it. . . . Based on my experience with the mixed couples among my relatives, if they marry Americans, they will adapt an American way of life. I only hope that they do not become a part of divorce rate statistics. . . . I think I want to guide them to marry Koreans. I will not disrupt their plan if their desire is to marry non-Koreans. But I want to present them the statistical data that show that there are possibilities of problems in cross-cultural marriages.³²

Mrs. Kim added that continual conversation before their time of marriage was important. She told her children that the first person to consult with when anyone calls them for a date was her.

To Mrs. Caroline Kang, marriage is not only an individual matter, but a family matter as well. Her children are very conscious of racial discrimination and do not like her making race an important issue. Mrs. Kang has a son in college and a daughter in high school.

I used to express my wish that he marries a Korean. Until he was a sophomore in high school, he used to dislike my wish. He told me not to make such distinctions, and what was important was the person's individuality. I answered, "Well,

³²Interview #1, p.12,13.

that is right. I do not think all Koreans are good or all Americans are bad. But in my opinion, you are a Korean, and if you marry a Korean you and all others in the family will be more comfortable." Then, after he entered college, he said, "I would rather marry a Korean woman, because marriage is not only a matter between two persons, but also a matter between two families. So if I marry an American woman simply because I like her, you will be unhappy. For my family to live in harmony, it would be better to marry a Korean."³³

Mrs. Kang continues about her daughter:

I also had a chance to talk with my daughter, and she dislikes my idea of making distinctions between Korean and American. If I make some racial remarks, my children really do not like it. They say, "You speak of others like that, but you must know white Americans speak like that about us. You are a minority too, so you must not speak in that way." I stood rebuked and after that I am very careful. I think they are extremely sensitive, because they themselves experience such discrimination covertly or overtly.³⁴

Mr. Christopher Kang also observed his children's attitude toward racial matters:

I think children are much wider and deeper than us in their thoughts about such issues. I think it is because of the kind of education they receive. To us, race is important. But they are very fair about racial issues.³⁵

Race is indeed a difficult issue for first-generation Korean immigrant parents who grew up in a solidly homogeneous society in Korea. Especially when the issue of race hits home in such personal matters as marriage and

³³Interview #3, P.18.

³⁴Interview #3, p.19.

³⁵Interview #3, p.19.

family, they seem to be simply unable to deal with it as rationally as they would with other important issues of life. When asked if they would ever consider their children marrying Afro-Americans, the answer was a resounding "No." Mrs. Grace Paik's answer is typical: "Well, I don't think I can take that. At least not yet. I don't think my husband can either."³⁶

Mr. Abraham Kim wants to prevent his two children from marrying Americans for fear of divorce as quoted earlier. Race is only a secondary matter. But when it comes to marrying Afro-Americans, the racial issue comes to the forefront. He admits that he will have a problem if his children marry blacks. Mrs. Agnes Kim offers the reason: "Their children and descendants will have too many difficulties in this society."³⁷

While all admitted that having Afro-Americans in the family was more than what they could take, there was an ambivalence in their attitude toward having family ties with non-Korean Asians. Mrs. Edith Kwon has two pre-teen daughters. She said:

Marrying an Afro-American will be the last thing that will happen. If there is a choice between White American and Chinese American, I think Chinese-American will be less difficult because they have same skin color and similar way of

³⁶Interview #7, p.7.

³⁷Interview #1, p.13.

thinking.³⁸

Mrs. Caroline Kang has a different view about her son marrying other Asians.

Well, I think it (marrying an Afro-American) will be very difficult for us. I know some families whose children married in that way. They tried to get their children out of it, but the children did not listen. Children here do not listen to others. I will be honest. I told him, "If you want to marry an oriental, marry a Korean. I do not want you to marry a Filipino, a Chinese or an Indian. If you would marry a non-Oriental, marry a white American."³⁹

While Mrs. Edith Kwon's concern about her children's cultural match with other Asians is perfectly understandable, Mrs. Kang's preference of white Americans over non-Korean Asians might not be unusual considering the majority status white Americans enjoy. It is here that the dilemma which the second-generation Korean-Americans face, namely, their cultural identity, comes into a sharp focus. On the one hand, they are Koreans, and their parents consider them to be so. On the other hand, they are Americans and their parents also consider them to be so. How Korean-Americans relate themselves to other Asian ethnic groups needs to be explored more; it promises to be a fruitful research to understand the nature of biculturality.

The bicultural status of second-generation Korean-Americans, however, is not shared with so-called 1.5

³⁸Interview #5, p.19.

³⁹Interview #3, p.19.

generation Korean-Americans. All those interviewed agree that there is a wider cultural gap between the 1.5 and the 2nd generations than between the 2nd generation Korean-Americans and Americans. It is evident from their unanimous opinion that the second-generation Korean-American children should not marry the 1.5 Korean-Americans. Mr. and Mrs. Donald Chung identify their two sons in college as the 1.5 generation Korean-Americans. Mrs. Doris Chung:

One of the main purposes of sending them to Korea last summer was to find some future partners. They said that they did not like Korean-American who grew up here. I think they feel that girls who grew up here would be too independent, and girls from Korea would be more obedient.⁴⁰

Mrs. Florence Yu has two teenage children, who are second-generation Korean-Americans. When asked about her view of dating among young people, she responded by saying:

I tell my children that when they date, if possible, choose as dates Korean-Americans who were born here, second-generation, not 1.5 generation Korean-Americans or first generation Korean-Americans. The reason that there is too much of a gap between these generations. My daughter said, "I will try."⁴¹

Mrs. Grace Paik echoes a similar sentiment:

My expectation is that they marry other second generation Korean-Americans, although many more will marry White Americans eventually. I think it is the expectation of most first-generation Korean-Americans. . . . I think it is good to marry those who grew up in a similar environment. To marry a Korean who grew up in Korea will be

⁴⁰Interview #4, p.14.

⁴¹Interview #6, p.25.

difficult.⁴²

Although none of the interviewees' children have yet married, the question of the marriages of their second-generation children looms large in the minds of the first-generation Korean-American immigrant parents.

5. Corporal punishment

According to all accounts, the majority of the Korean immigrants to the U.S. are Christians within the Protestant tradition. In keeping with the fundamentalist and evangelical beliefs about the value of discipline, their attitude toward discipline of their children, in particular, corporal punishment, is not difficult to predict. The old adage, "Spare the rod and spoil the child," dictates child discipline practices in Korea. In addition, the emphasis of discipline in the Confucian tradition in Korea undergirds their assumptions and beliefs about corporal punishment as something necessary and positive. The current educational enterprise of the United States, however, runs against the basic concept of discipline, especially any form of physical punishment, and the Korean immigrant parents find themselves in an awkward situation as their children enter the American educational system. As a society, the United States shows a much greater sensitivity and awareness of child abuse than does Korea. Further, second-generation Korean-American

⁴²Interview #7, p.7.

children are much more exposed to the issue of child abuse and may readily interpret the physical discipline administered by their parents as a form of child abuse. How do the first-generation Korean immigrant parents seek to discipline their children, specifically by means of corporal punishment, in such an environment? Mr. Abraham Kim was self-critical as he expressed his desire to improve his relationship with his son, who was 15 years old at the time of the interview. Mr. Kim confessed that in rare occasions, when he became emotionally upset, he could not control himself:

I beat my son when he was young, and I believe that he still remembers it. The last time (of inflicting corporal punishment) was two years ago when he got involved in the fight with his mother.⁴³

His wife, Mrs. Agnes Kim, acknowledges that her husband's style of problem resolution is conversational. But when he reaches a certain breaking point, he becomes uncontrollable as he himself readily admits. In the minds of Mr. and Mrs. Kim, the administration of corporal punishment is associated with such an emotional outbreak and is not desirable.

For Mrs. Lucy Yang, whose three teenage boys are all in high school, corporal punishment was not practically possible when her first son reached 13 years old. She remembers the occasion through which she stopped the practice of corporal punishment.

⁴³Interview #1, P.27.

Well, my oldest son had a problem with me. He grew up like a mommy boy. But strangely, as soon as he became twelve years old, he became very rebellious. We had a hard time during his teens. At first, we clashed, and I punished him by striking his palms with a stick. But when he was thirteen, I stopped corporeal punishment once and for all. For something he did, I decided to punish him and asked him to stretch out his hands with his palms up, but he didn't. So I grabbed him with my one hand and was going to strike him with a stick with my other hand. But he was already thirteen years old and stronger than me. So he overpowered me by grabbing the stick and would not let go of it. At that time, I realized that it should not be that way, and I stopped the practice completely. We clashed seriously about two times in which he screamed at me. The other two boys grew up seeing my struggle with their older brother, so they behaved well. I did not have much of a problem with the younger two boys.⁴⁴

Mr. Martin Koh also has two sons in high school. He also stopped corporal punishment when his two sons reached a certain age.

When they were little kids, I used to punish them physically when they did something wrong. I was very firm with them, and the corporal punishment was harsh. But when I felt that they began to have some sense about themselves, I completely stopped punishing them physically. I think it was about the time when they became junior high students.⁴⁵

Mr. and Mrs. Bernard Lee also see corporal punishment as age-dependent. Mrs. Betty Lee observes that her two teenage sons were resentful at first toward the corporal punishment administered by their father. But as they grew older, they began to change, and now there is seldom a need

⁴⁴Interview #13, p.13.

⁴⁵Interview #14, p.12.

for corporal punishment any more. Mrs. Lee:

Both my husband and I know that children who grew up in this country have many words with which they attack their parents. For example, both my husband and I have a tendency to rear them in a Korean way, and then they try to threaten us. When they receive corporeal punishment they say that we abuse them I try to explain to them that the punishment is the expression of love Because they have already grown up, we seldom find it necessary to impose corporeal punishment anymore. When they did receive such punishment, they knew what they did wrong and why they received it. They know that their father's punishment is painful and serious. At first, they held a grudge against their father. But it gradually disappeared because they began to accept that they were in the wrong.⁴⁶

Mr. Edward Choi recognizes the difficulty in determining how much freedom should be allowed to children and when to intervene. To him, corporal punishment was an option he used when it was necessary in guiding his two daughters to have the true sense of independence. He recalls the time when he disciplined his first daughter:

When she was in a third grade, she did something, and I disciplined her with whips on her legs. It must have been very painful, but she clenched her teeth and did not say a word. I liked that spirit.⁴⁷

He disciplined his younger daughter when she was a sophomore in high school in a similar manner for telling him a lie.

Mr. Choi explains:

Actually, such punishment was according to our previous agreements: If you do this, the consequence will be that they are my

⁴⁶Interview #2, p.21,23.

⁴⁷Interview #11, p.20.

children, and I have the responsibility to guide them and that is a very difficult thing to do. But that does not mean that I simply trust them in everything, either. Again, there must be an adjustment. It becomes more difficult because we are Asian. It is even more difficult because they are girls. At least I am aware as a father that they are not mine. They have their own personalities; they have their own views; and they are entitled to their own views. I'd rather have them be independent than be dependent. But when we face the problem directly, we cannot avoid the conflict.⁴⁸

As evidenced in the interviews with some of the first-generation Korean immigrant parents, corporal punishment is a common practice in the Korean-American families as a means of discipline and is age-dependent. Those who advocate alternatives to corporal punishment warned of the long term negative consequences of pain and suffering inflicted upon children in the name of discipline.⁴⁹ First-generation Korean immigrant parents seem to have consciously reduced the degree of severity as they try to adjust to the cultural atmosphere in which corporal punishment is viewed as a form of abuse. Still, the old adage, "Spare the rod and spoil the child," is the rule, not an exception, in the Korean-American families.

First-generation Korean immigrant parents approach life from a Confucian perspective with the hierarchical moral

⁴⁸Interview #11, p.19,20.

⁴⁹Philip Greven, Spare the Child (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1990), 215-222.

structure. Family unity undergirded by such concepts as "obedience" and "propriety" remain as essential in their family life, especially in their parenting. The generational continuity of family is also an important part of family unity, and the future marriage of their second-generation children has an added significance for that reason. Corporal punishment is a common practice in the Korean schools and homes. The vehement opposition leveled against the practice in the U.S. forces the Korean immigrant parents to make adjustments to the cultural habits they had taken for granted. It represents the many clashes between the hierarchical cultural framework of Confucianism and the egalitarian framework of the American culture they experience in the family between themselves and their second-generation children. In recent years, American society has heard the urgent calls for multicultural dialogue and understanding. The first-generation Korean-American families are the new laboratories in which two very different cultures reside in the closest proximity.

CHAPTER 5

FIRST-GENERATION KOREAN IMMIGRANT PARENTS AS CHRISTIANS

When American missionaries of the Presbyterian and Methodist missions of the U.S. arrived in Korea toward the end of the nineteenth century, Christianity was not entirely new to Korea. In earlier centuries prior to this, sporadic attempts were made by the Catholic missions in China to reach Korea with the gospel message. Severe incidents of persecution followed, and the door of missions was closed shut. The moral, political and economic bankruptcy of the Yi dynasty toward the end of the nineteenth century, however, offered unprecedented opportunity for the Protestant missionaries. They were received favorably by the royal court as well as by the commoners of the Hermit Kingdom who were willing to try something new from the West. For the next 100 years, American Protestantism took root in Korea and transformed Korean society significantly, a society once dominated by Neo-Confucianism for the previous five centuries.

Many of the first-generation Korean immigrant parents are Confucians in cultural orientation and Christians in religious conviction. When they immigrated to the U.S., most of them vaguely expected that they were coming to the

Christian nation from which their Christian faith and tradition had originated. But the United States has gone through a profound transformation herself in the last century. The cultural foundation of Christianity has been seriously shaken, and many Americans feel unsettled as they drift in the unchartered waters of secularism. First-generation Korean immigrant parents find themselves in the minority in their Christian convictions as well as in their ethnicity, caught in the sweeping waves of the secularization of the American culture.

In addition, life in modern society is stressful. The Korean immigrants, like many other immigrants to the United States historically, converge in the metropolitan areas where the fast pace of life tends to raise the stress level very high. The majority of the Korean immigrants to the U.S. are from the urban communities in Korea, and the metropolitan way of life in the new country is not entirely new to them. But when the conflicts and tensions that arise from their marginal status as immigrants are added, daily life can be extremely stressful for them. From the early years of the history of Korean immigration to the U.S., the ethnic Korean churches have been a haven for the Korean immigrants. Many of the first generation Korean immigrants have been Christians before they came to the U.S., and church was the natural place for them to gather for worship and fellowship, their faith invigorated by the new

challenges. Many non-Christian Korean immigrants also came to the church primarily for social reasons. But the hardships and loneliness they experience in the new country were added incentives to take religion more seriously, and a number of them came to embrace Christianity.

The majority of the first-generation immigrant parents interviewed were already Christians when they came to the U.S. Of the twenty interviewees, five have become Christians after the immigration. The following is a brief sketch of the feelings of those interviewed about their Christian life in the U.S.

Mr. Donald Chung, who came to the U.S. in 1989, testified to his new found faith as follows, and his is a typical one.

I became a Christian after I immigrated to the States. In Korea, I did not have a religion. When I was young, I remember my mother going to the Buddhist temple. I did not feel the need of religion. If my life was difficult, I might have sought religion more, but my life in general was smooth. But when I came to the States, there was no one around me. And I needed the company of Koreans and learn about American life. It was in the Christian church that they gathered. . . . Through my church attending, I came to learn what it means to believe, and I also was appointed to the position of deaconship in my church.¹

His wife, Mrs. Doris Chung grew up in a Christian home in Korea. But her Christian life was rather nominal, until she came to the U.S. She cited her physical illness as the occasion for her spiritual growth, but the difficulties

¹Interview #4, p.1.

associated with life as an immigrant prodded her on, and she was appreciative. "In Korea, I was just a church-goer. But here, I experienced some illness, and I became a little more mature spiritually. When I look back, I feel that it was God who led us here."²

Mrs. Grace Paik became a Christian while attending the Christian mission school in Korea, but she admits that her faith was very superficial. She did not know clearly what she was believing. Her husband, Mr. George Paik, walked a similar path. But their Christian life changed after they came to the U.S. Mrs. Paik:

Back then, our faith was very superficial. We did not have a conviction of our being born again. It was after we came to Chicago that we began to have a Christian conviction. . . . When we came here, most of the Korean-Americans attended churches, so it was easy for us to attend church. Both of us have become more devoted to our faith.³

One of the main difficulties the Paiks faced was rearing their three sons who are now all teenagers. On various occasions, they had no other place to turn but God. Mrs. Paik says with enthusiasm:

While rearing them, there were numerous occasions of frustration, and I had to come to God with my frustration. There was no other way. I am convinced that my faithful Christian life is most important.⁴

Life as immigrants in the U.S. with challenges from

²Interview #4, p.21.

³Interview #7, p.1-2.

⁴Interview #7, p.12.

adverse circumstances contribute to the spiritual growth of many Korean Christians. On the other hand, some first-generation Korean immigrants who had maintained their Christian faith fairly well in Korea, find their faith ebbing under the heavy pressure of immigrant life in the U.S. Mrs. Lucy Yang's life is such a case. She characterizes her family in Korea in which she grew up as "an extremely conservative Presbyterian family." The Sunday observance was strict. No grocery shopping was allowed on Sundays. The entire family gave their first priority to church business until their neighbors asked them whether they were being paid by the church. Of course, they were not. On the contrary, tithing was practiced in everything, including some gifts they received. Mrs. Yang herself thought about becoming a minister or a missionary. But once she came to the U.S., life was quite different. Mrs. Yang spoke about her Christian life in the U.S. with some sense of remorse:

I lived for the last 20 years here forgetting everything about my Christian way of life in Korea Since my husband and I work during weekdays, Sunday is the only day to do the grocery shopping and other chores. It is very hard to keep the Sabbath as I used to I could not make time for prayer I am not satisfied with my Christian life.⁵

What would it mean for these first-generation Korean immigrant parents to rear their second-generation Korean-

⁵Interview #13, p.2,3,8.

American children as Christians in American society? How are their own inner conflicts as Christians reflected in their struggle with their children? How do they seek to protect their children from the influence they perceive to be harmful to their spiritual development? What are their aspirations for their children's future as Christians? How do they view the American Christian churches for themselves as well as for their children? In this chapter, we will examine the effort of first-generation Korean immigrant parents in the Christian education of their children. This chapter is organized around the following four topics:

1. Family devotion
2. Strategy to counter the influence of the secular culture
3. Prospect of the children's Christian marriage
4. The Korean ethnic church

1. Family devotion

Sanctity of the family is universally recognized and cherished by Christians. The struggle of the first American missionaries to Korea at the turn of the century was not for the sanctity and unity of the family per se, but for the supremacy of the spiritual family as children of God, the Heavenly Father, over the strong blood ties that constituted the framework of the Korean social structure. Often the stories of the early Korean converts were punctuated by painful conflicts with their family members who were

suspicious of this new religion. As Christianity gained acceptance among the Korean people and Christian families were established over time, however, the Christian view of family was nicely infused into the Confucian value of the centrality of family relations. The responsibility of rearing children as good Christians falls squarely upon the shoulders of the Christian parents as the Bible sanctions. At the same time, the desire to maintain genealogical purity in the family, extending down through the generations, motivates the Korean immigrant parents to rear their second-generation children as "good" Christians. The Korean Christians are fond of such expressions as "faith formed in the mother's womb" or "the third-generation Christian". For example, Mrs. Agnes Kim is a third-generation Christian. To her, marrying a third-generation Christian man was important because of the value she placed in the family history. She married Mr. Abraham Kim, who is a first-generation Christian. The marriage was interpreted by her as God's miracle in her life. Mr. and Mrs. Christopher Kang are both third-generation Christians whose maternal grandfathers were converted by American missionaries, and they are very proud of the Christian heritage in the family. The Christian and Confucian values of family are fused into one, and it finds its expression in the family life of the Korean Christians. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that first-generation Korean immigrant parents have a strong desire to

institute some form of family devotion in their family life that would include their children, so as to foster the Christian environment at home. They grew up seeing numerous Korean churches offering the early morning prayer meetings. Typically, a devoted Christian mother gets up at 4:00 or 4:30 am and spends a good hour or more in prayer in the church, often taking with her her daughter(s).⁶ Mrs. Agnes Kim attended early morning prayer meetings with her mother about five days a week in the summer and about two or three days a week in the winter. Usually before breakfast, a father initiates the family devotion which children are obliged to attend. Korean children show less resistance against the hierarchical enforcement of Christian faith by the authority figure, at least in their childhood. Maintaining such rigorous family devotion serves as a badge of honor for many Korean Christian parents.

Mrs. Edith Kwon spoke of her brother-in-law in Korea whose family maintains early morning family devotion with his teenage children. Mrs. Kwon's husband, she relates, likes the idea, but finds it very difficult to initiate it for his own family and feels inferior to his brother.

Mrs. Margaret Koh grew up in a Christian family, but her parents did not have any family devotion. She had a

⁶Somehow, daughters are more inclined to follow their mothers to the church early in the morning than sons. Because of the strong gender consciousness in the Confucian culture, for sons to follow their mothers to the church is somewhat unbecoming.

friend whose family had one every morning. She remembers her childhood in which she used to visit that family very often and join in their family devotion. She wants to provide a similar environment for her children in the U.S. and has made many attempts but failed to maintain it. Both she and her husband feel guilty for not doing a good job as Christian parents. Mr. Martin Koh:

We tried every evening before kids went to bed after their school study. We sang one hymn and read one chapter, each person taking turns by verse, then we talked and each person prayed in the seating order. It was very good. Then things happened that demanded time in the evenings, and we began to skip the family devotion My children like to join the family devotion, but we parents do not initiate it. We are too busy. We feel guilty about it.⁷

Mr. and Mrs. Abraham Kim try hard to have a time of family devotion. Mr. Kim admits that, in the main, it is his lack of discipline that hinders the plan and admires his wife who never misses a thirty-minute early morning prayer time alone daily.

Mrs. Grace Paik used to practice the family devotion regularly when her three sons were young. But now they are in their teens, and it became very difficult to maintain the regular family devotion.

Because we do not have much time, whenever we can, we pray together. In the past, we considered it very important and prayed as a family regularly. But as time passes, it becomes very difficult."⁸

⁷Interview #14. p.5.

⁸Interview #7, p.4.

For Mrs. Lucy Yang, maintaining a family devotion with her three sons has been an on-going struggle concurrent with her personal battle to be more devoted to God. Her tone of voice betrayed her frustration when she said:

Before we had children, my husband and I used to pray together. But I had children for three consecutive years. I quit my job and my husband worked in two jobs we could not restore our family prayer time. My desire was to have a daily prayer hour in the family. Whenever I expressed this to my husband, he used to make a promise that we would have it in the near future. But since he was so busy every day, it was not possible. So I alone had a prayer time with my children whenever I could. I continued this on and off for a while, but when my sons grew older, it became harder My children had a mixed response; half good, half complaints. They begged to make it short. Anyway, this continued another year and a half. Then my sister's family came to the U.S. and lived with us for about a month. Our family prayer stopped again, and, to this day, we could not resume it. I really desire that before my first son goes away to college, we establish the daily habit again. Nowadays, I try to read their minds. I ask them, "Don't you think we should have family devotions?" But I know that all three are too busy to get together regularly with me. I am struggling with myself to know whether it is worthwhile to try again if we are going to fail anyway. I even thought about writing a Bible verse on a piece of paper and put in their lunch boxes or stick it on the mirror in their washroom so that they can read in the morning. But I was not able to put that into practice yet.⁹

Providing a good Christian environment at home and giving their children spiritual discipline through regular family devotion are the aspiration and desire of the first-generation Christian Korean immigrant parents. But life as

⁹Interview #13, p.3-4.

immigrants in a large city such as Chicago is extremely stressful, and the proper time management to make room for the family devotion is difficult. They are also well aware that when too rigidly enforced, it may backfire and result in an adverse effect on their children's spiritual life. It is doubtful that any definitive statistical data exist on the practice of family devotion in the Christian families in Korea. However, the childhood experiences and the level of expectation for the practice held by the first-generation immigrant parents interviewed, leads one to presume that the practice of family devotion is much more common in Korea than in the U.S. For many Korean Christian immigrant families, to maintain regular family devotion seems to be a practical impossibility however noble and desirable the idea may be. Family devotion is one of the Christian practices that they see slipping away from their family life. It adds to their inner conflicts between their expectations as Christians and the reality of daily life as immigrant parents. However, when we place their struggle in the larger context of the American society which is grappling with the problem of disintegration of the family, their deliberate efforts to provide a Christian home for their children through family devotion must be viewed as a positive contribution to the preservation of the American family. How much their second-generation children will share their parents' struggle for Christian life and family

unity through such a vigorous practice as family devotion remains to be seen.

2. Strategy to counter the influence of the secular culture

One of the major concerns of Christian Korean immigrant parents is the influence of secular culture upon their second-generation children. As Christians, they share their part in the perennial struggle of "being in the world, but not of the world." Added to their struggle is the conflict between the two cultural extremes. On the one hand, they brought with them Korean Christianity, characterized, in its cultural expressions, by hierarchical rigidity and absolutism found in both the Puritanical Christianity from America and the Neo-Confucianism of Korea. On the other hand, they find themselves in the secularized culture of the new land which takes for granted egalitarian fluidity and relativism.¹⁰ In their desire to impart their Christian faith and tradition to their children, they try not only to provide the spiritual environment at home but also to set limited social boundaries for them. But as children grow older, their effort is met by increasing resistance from their children and practical impossibility. Many of the first-generation Christian Korean immigrant parents feel helpless as they gradually lose control over their

¹⁰Christian cross-cultural mission scholars have long identified this conflict as the clash between the two opposing worldviews.

children's life outside the home in what they perceive to be a godless culture. They seek help from the church, but the majority of the Korean ethnic churches are not yet prepared to help the second-generation. Probably the three most common areas of concern are 1) the exposure to the popular American culture such as the kind of music their children listen to and tv programs their children watch, 2) the observance of Sunday, and 3) the curfew on weekend night socials.

Mr. and Mrs. Bernard Lee, whose two sons are both in high school, like to listen to Christian as well as classical music. But they find it hard to enjoy the rock music to which their sons listen. In order to help their children acquire good musical taste, they had their two sons take piano lessons from an early age. Mrs. Betty Lee feels that she has been able to control what their children listen to at home, although she tries to be careful not to force it too hard. She would like to think that she does not control her children too much, but she finds herself exercising her parental authority to control them quite often. Her words in the following quote reveal the all-too-common ambivalence on the part of Christian Korean immigrant parents.

My children sometimes express their dislike of classical music, but some other times, they do listen to it. I emphasize to them that the heavy rock music is not good. Especially, I pay attention to its lyrics When such music (heavy rock with dirty slang) is played, I cannot tolerate it. I stop them from listening They listen to the rock music because of their

friends, but I think they are not crazy about it. They know that I pay attention to the music they listen to and the kind of music I do not like. But I do not draw the line for the acceptable and the unacceptable. I only try to influence them. I do not decide for them.¹¹

Although Mrs. Lee may not decide every piece of music for her sons, it is clear that she sets the boundary beyond which she is not willing to allow her sons to go. As a Christian, her boundary seems to be the level of decency in lyrics. But parental concerns about the moral quality of music their children listen to is hampered by the unfamiliarity of the immigrant parents with popular American slang. Mrs. Lee's husband, Mr. Bernard Lee, thinks that parental control is limited because most first-generation Korean immigrants are not familiar with the slang often used in lyrics. Mr. Lee admits:

Few Korean parents are able to understand the lyrics of the music which are mostly slang All we know about is the obvious words that begin with "f". Their jokes are too difficult to understand.¹²

Other parents take more drastic measures to control the environment for their children at home. Mr. and Mrs. Abraham Kim are well-to-do financially. But to protect their two teenage children from the influence of the secular media, they did not buy an expensive television set. Mr. Kim says with pride, "As you can see, the tv set in our

¹¹Interview #2, p.25-26.

¹²Interview #2, p.26-27.

house is 17 years old. My children do not like to watch tv. It is their least priority. I myself do not watch tv." He gets news mainly from listening to radio and reading newspapers. Mrs. Agnes Kim is especially proud that her two children are deeply involved in the church choir along with her husband. Mrs. Kim:

My son has a talent for music. He serves by playing the guitar for the hour of praise in my church. My husband has a variety of hobbies. But the hobby we both share is singing and praising God. My two children lead the singing program in the church. I believe God will use them.¹³

Mrs. Jane Park came to the U.S. with her two teenage children in 1990. At first, she did not allow them to watch tv programs or videos. Then she relaxed the rule after realizing that they had a lot of stress and needed to relieve it. Mrs. Lucy Yang also feels precarious when she tries to control her three teenage sons' exposure to the secular culture. She feels that she has to oversee what they watch and hear. At the same time, she is afraid that by interfering too much, she might jeopardize her relationship with them. Mrs. Yang echoes the fear many Christian Korean immigrant parents have when she says:

I worried a lot. I controlled their tv watching by limiting it to one or two good programs of my choice. But from last year, I realized that my control is very limited. For instance, when they visit their friends, they watch movies together with them. When they come home, I ask them, as if in passing, "How was the visit?" In my mind, I worry very much and want to know exactly what they

¹³Interview #1, p.30.

did there. But I cannot put the question too directly lest they are forced to lie. So when they answer that they have watched a movie, I just tell them not to watch violent movies. In my mind, I worry whether they watch X-rated movies. But I cannot confront them directly. I tell them, "You know, when I was young, I watched only good movies with aesthetic values. Still, the society was very violent and I became used to it. How much more if you watch violent movies from a young age!" I taught them the Korean maxim which is translated literally into English: "A white heron stays away from black crows." But at one point, I realized that no matter what I tried to say or do, they were already outside of my control. So I ask only indirectly and no more. I am careful because none of their friends' parents interfere with their children as I do. And if I do too much, they may not have a good relationship with me.¹⁴

Mrs. Yang used to fight with her sons over what music the family listened to over the radio. She preferred Christian music and her sons preferred rock music. Then she remembered her own teenage years in which she liked to listen to secular Korean pop songs even if she was a serious Christian. She finally made a concession by accepting her sons' preference in music. For the Christian Korean immigrant parents who used to see things as black and white, making concessions or negotiating with their children in such cultural matters as music or tv program does not come easily. But when it comes to distinctively religious issues such as Sunday church attendance, it becomes even harder because they deeply feel that they should not compromise in their Christian faith. True to the Puritanical tradition, Sunday observance is strictly enforced in the churches in

¹⁴Interview #13, p.18.

Korea. Mrs. Agnes Kim remembers her mother's motto as a Christian when she was growing up in Korea. She says, "In my childhood, my mother laid down the rule: No church, no eat; no study, no eat; no work, no eat." But in the U.S., by all counts, the numbers of Sunday church attendance are decreasing. Sunday observance does not seem to carry the weight of spiritual significance as the culture becomes more and more secularized. Mr. Edward Choi, who has lived in the U.S. over thirty-five years, considers his adult daughter spiritually mature even though she is not attending church services on Sundays. But to Mrs. Lucy Yang, Sunday observance is central to her faith. It takes on an absolute meaning reflecting her personal commitment to God. Until her first son was in the 7th grade, she maintained Sunday observance absolutely. All of her three children were good in sports. But if the sports events fell on Sundays, they were not allowed to participate. The entire school knew that Yang's boys would be absent if a basketball game happened to be on Sunday. But once, when her first son was a 7th-grader, there was a very important basketball game which would determine whether his school would advance to the championship game or not. And it was on Sunday. All her boys were in the team. They begged her to allow them to go, and, after much hesitation, she conceded. She regrets as she remembers that day:

As they were leaving, I told them that they would surely lose the game because God would not be

pleased for their violation of the Sabbath. They did lose the game. But I learned that by making a compromise in a small way, I lost consistency. Since then, it became harder to keep the Sabbath . . . Now that they are in high school, although they know that Sundays are set apart for God, they make excuses. Many important things keep happening that require their participation on Sundays. I should have kept the principle absolutely from the beginning. But since I made one compromise, it became impossible to keep the Sabbath consistently.¹⁵

Mrs. Yang feels guilty for having given her sons a bad influence and worries that they have little understanding about the absoluteness of the Christian faith.

Perhaps the greatest anxiety that Christian Korean immigrant parents feel about is whether to allow their children out on weekend nights for various social gatherings. On the one hand, they want to protect their children from secular and often immoral elements of the world outside their Christian homes. They fear that teenage boys and girls' weekend parties become the breeding ground for the social evils that afflict young peoples' minds and bodies. On the other hand, they do not want their children to be isolated from their peers. They are well aware that in this excessively individualistic culture, weekend evening social gatherings offer rare opportunities to interact and socialize among peers. Some Korean churches are able to organize the weekend evening activities and socials in order to encourage Christian fellowship among the second-

¹⁵Interview #13, p.6.

generation Korean-American children. But many more churches are not able to do so. In addition, the circles of friends for the second-generation Korean-American children extend far beyond the boundaries of the ethnic Korean church community. For example, Mrs. Lucy Yang's three sons have friends who are not Koreans and not Christians. It is unrealistic to expect Mrs. Yang to limit her sons' friends to Christians. She recalls the conversation she had with one of her sons regarding friendship and being a Christian.

Since most of his friends are not Christians, I told him, "Of course there is no reason that you must make friends only with Christians, but you must evangelize your non-Christian friends." Do you know what his answer was? He said, "Mom, I must not invade their private matter of religion. Why should I push my religion on them?" I answered, "It is not a push, but an evangelism. Jesus commanded us to preach the gospel to the ends of the earth. If you know that believing in God is the greatest blessing and those who do not know God are to be pitied most, why should you not love your friends by evangelizing?" But My son did not agree with me.¹⁶

Christian Korean immigrant parents struggle with their second-generation children in a tug of war when it comes to the question of the amount of freedom children should have on weekend evenings. Most first-generation Korean immigrant parents grew up in Korea when midnight curfew was still in place, which rendered any gathering beyond midnight impossible. To let teenage children out late on the weekend nights is very unsettling indeed.

¹⁶Interview #13, p.10.

Mr. and Mrs. Donald Chung manage to entertain their two sons at home on weekends so that they do not have to go out. They let their sons invite friends to their home every weekend. This practice began in their high school days and continues to the present in their college years. Mr. Donald Chung:

Every Friday, their friends come to my home. They play basketball, and then, they have great fun with karaoke at home. I urge them not to go out to the commercial music studio where karaoke is offered, because the environment is violent and dangerous. So far, they responded favorably to my words.

Mrs. Doris Chung adds:

I believe they need to drink beer in such occasions, so I stock up beer for them. Then they sing loudly and have great fun, drinking beer. I only want them to stay home and have fun because it is dangerous out there. We usually go to church for choir practice, or, sometimes, just go to bed so that they can have their own free time. So far they have good friends.¹⁷

Not all Christian Korean immigrant parents would be willing to serve beer to entertain their late-teen sons as one of the ways to encourage them to stay home on weekends. Drinking and smoking have long been considered as sinning in Korea ever since the first American Protestant missionaries fervently advocated holy living for Christians.

Most of the Christian Korean immigrant parents exercise their parental authority to limit their children's socialization on weekend evenings. Mr. and Mrs. Abraham Kim

¹⁷Interview #4, p.10.

admit that they had to struggle a lot with their two teenage children on that issue. They do not allow their children to come home too late on weekends even if it is due to a church function. Mr. Kim has no apology as he expresses his resolve by saying, "On that issue, we are firm and exercise our authority."¹⁸

The struggle between parents and their teenage children over how late children can stay out reveals the inner anxiety of Christian Korean immigrant parents. Those who have teenage daughters experience this anxiety more intensely. Mr. Edward Choi, who reared two daughters, explains:

The important question is how much freedom I should give. At first they want to stay out until 10:00 p.m. Then they want until 11:00 p.m. Wait a minute! Then they say they will be back by 12:00 a.m. Wait a minute! I am receding, but there always is a tension. In dealing with children, this is the difficulty. In addition, this is a girl. Again the Asian consciousness comes into the picture. Girls have to have a special area of protection. Am I protecting them or are they capable of protecting themselves? Again this becomes a tension. When they are young, it is easy. But once they reach junior high and adolescence, they become active in the community and want to go out and have parties. Suddenly there is a certain amount of freedom they can have. The question is how much independence can they have? How much control, in other words, how much parental guidance, do they need? This question recurs constantly. If you repress too much, you are regimenting their conduct and their thinking, and then, they lose their creativity. Creativity should be enhanced, supported and nurtured; yet you have to have a balance. It is

¹⁸Interview #1, p.23.

so damn difficult!¹⁹

The Kims, as mentioned earlier, are firm in their control of their two children's social life, especially for their daughter. Mrs. Agnes Kim says emphatically:

We cannot allow our daughter to stay in anyone's house overnight, period. For our son, he sometimes stays overnight in his best friend's house whose father is one of the elders of our church. We allow it because we know that family well When there was a sleep-over party for our daughter in our house, I sent my son to other's house overnight in order that no boy would be present in our house that night. This was the last time we allowed a sleep-over party, and it was about two years ago.²⁰

The greater concern over daughters than sons that these Christian Korean immigrant parents express betrays the deeply entrenched traditional view of women in Korea. Despite the rapid modernization that brought significant changes to Korea in the second half of the 20th century, the sphere of a woman's life is generally confined to the home while the outside world belongs to men. The Confucian ideal of a woman as an obedient daughter-in-law, devoted wife and sacrificial mother is still deeply rooted in the Korean consciousness. The teaching of the Bible that the husband is the head of a family has found no resistance in the minds of the Korean Christians, while the Christian message of the equality between man and woman has met with a quiet but persistent resistance. It is generally agreed upon among

¹⁹Interview #11, p.16.

²⁰Interview #1, p.22.

Christian Korean immigrant parents that rearing daughters in the U.S. causes greater anxiety and fear than rearing sons, because the strong idea of equality between male and female in the American culture is often the source of intense cultural and generational clash in the Korean-American family. Mr. Fred Jun has two teenage daughters both of whom were born in the U.S. He and his wife are in the process of divorce, and his two daughters are rebelling violently against both of their parents. Often they stay out all night on weekends and are experimenting with drugs. They stopped attending church. He cannot bear the guilt that he has lost control over his daughters when they needed parental guidance most. He believes that girls need greater protection than boys. He says in utter despair, "If they were in Korea, it would have been different. I realize how real the cultural differences are."²¹

Mr. and Mrs. Martin Koh also struggle with their growing children. But fortunately, their two children are both boys, and they allow them to stay out late with their church friends. But Mr. Koh puts pressure on his sons by not going to bed until they return home on weekend nights. Until his older son started driving a car, he used to go and pick them up wherever they happened to be on weekend nights, usually from their friend's house or restaurant. But now that the older son drives, he has more reason to worry.

²¹Interview #12, p.4.

Once he disciplined his older son severely because his son failed to call home at midnight even though they made an agreement that his son must call home if he happened to be out past the midnight. Mr. Koh explains his tactic in coping with the situation:

It often becomes midnight when they finally come home. They feel sorry for me that I have to stay up that late, but I cannot go to bed knowing that they are out there with a car. Of course I do not go to bed because I am worried. Another reason is to give them a tension to be responsible for their actions. If they know I leave them alone and go to bed to sleep, they will get loose.²²

The Christian Korean immigrant parents feel threatened by what they perceive to be the godless culture of the American society, and they devise whatever strategy available to protect their second-generation children from its bad influence. They tend to be ambivalent when it comes to such cultural issues as music their children listen to or tv programs they watch. They are suspicious of rock music, but, as long as lyrics are not too offensive, they seem willing to tolerate the different taste of music their second-generation children have acquired by growing up in this country. In religious matters such as observing Sunday and attending church, they feel strongly that the absoluteness of the Christian faith needs to be emphasized through strict adherence to the teachings of the Bible. Unlike many of their American counterparts, the Christian

²²Interview #14, p.13.

Korean immigrant parents are extremely wary about letting their children out on weekend nights for social gatherings. They exercise parental authority to set the social boundaries for their children although they know that the boundaries necessarily expand and they have less control as children grow older. Being Christians in the secularized culture of America, Koreans with the Confucian cultural makeup, and first-generation immigrants with the responsibility to rear the second-generation children, make the parental responsibility of Christian Korean immigrant parents a formidable as well as laudable one indeed.

3. Prospect of the children's Christian marriage

As was discussed in the previous chapter, the Christian Korean immigrant parents face the cultural and racial issues regarding their children's future marriages. They have varied responses toward exogamy. A greater concern about their children's marriages, however, rises from the belief that their children must marry those who share the same faith. It is not surprising to find that the levels of Christian conviction they hope to see in their future children-in-law correspond with their own levels of Christian conviction generally reflected in their own marriages.

Mrs. Edith Kwon grew up in a Buddhist family, but was converted to Christianity after she immigrated to the U.S.

in 1978. Then she sought out a Christian man to marry. She went back to Korea to marry her husband who had a "faith formed in the mother's womb." Marrying a Christian man was very important to her. She has made it clear to her twelve-year old daughter, who just began to be interested in boys, that she must also marry a Christian man.

Similar certitude was found in both Mrs. Grace Paik and Mrs. Lucy Yang. Mrs. Grace Paik grew up, by her own account, as a nominal Christian in Korea. Christian faith was not an important factor in her decision to marry her husband although her husband was also a nominal Christian. But since she immigrated to the U.S., her Christian faith has taken on a new life. Especially the difficulties she had to face in rearing her three sons contributed to her spiritual growth. She is confident that her newly vitalized faith had a good influence upon her three teenage sons, and they will marry Christian women. Mrs. Paik:

From their childhood, they were clear about marrying Christians. We parents did not marry as Christians, so our children must do better and live under God's blessings. At first, they laughed at the idea, but they observe how we live and know that, for their parents, church is everything. I believe one's way of life affects children absolutely. They know that church is the place for them. Even my youngest son with whom I had the most trouble began to accept it.²³

Mrs. Lucy Yang, who also has three teenage sons, does not have the confidence that Mrs. Grace Paik has for her

²³Interview #7, p.7.

sons' future marriages to Christian women. Mrs. Yang married a Christian man in Korea. But at the time of marriage, her devout mother was not satisfied with her son-in-law's level of Christian conviction. Mrs. Yang was confident at that time that she could help her husband improve spiritually after marriage. But it did not work as she had expected. She does not hide her dissatisfaction with her own Christian life in the U.S. She wishes a better Christian life for her children. She sounds as if she was battle-fatigued when she discusses her three sons' future marriages:

When they were young, I declared that their wives must be, first, Christians, and, second, Koreans. If it happens that they would be Americans, then they have to at least be Christians If they choose not to adopt my view, what can I do? That's all I can do. This is America.²⁴

Mrs. Lucy Yang is not as optimistic as Mrs. Grace Paik is about their children's Christian marriages. But both agree that the Christian conviction should be the top priority in considering their future daughters-in-law.

Mrs. Betty Lee acknowledges that the Christian faith is a very important component in her children's future marriage. But to her, mutual love is still more important. She was not a Christian until she immigrated to the U.S. It was in a Korean ethnic church in Chicago that she dated and married a Christian man, Mr. Bernard Lee. The subject was

²⁴Interview #13, p.25.

brought up when her older son asked her if she wished that he would marry a Korean girl. She answered, "It is good to marry a Korean woman, but that is not most important. The most important thing is that you love her and she loves you." She also told him that the family background of the girl was important as well. Then she was surprised to hear from her son that having the same religion was more important to him. She said, "I was very glad to hear that . . . But I think the most important thing is still their mutual love."²⁵

Mutual love above Christian faith as the most important factor in their children's future marriages is also a priority shared by another couple, Mr. and Mrs. Donald Chung, both of whom serve as officers of the church they attend. Mr. Chung became a Christian after he immigrated to the U.S., and his wife grew up in a Christian family. They married in Korea while Mr. Chung was not a Christian. Mrs. Doris Chung believes that her sons will most likely choose Christian women to marry since they themselves are Christians. But she does not want to exert too big an influence on them. Mrs. Chung:

Based on my own experience, my father was very picky when he chose my future husband. But my father could not live my life. Let's say that my father forced me to marry someone I did not like. If something bad were to happen later, what would he do? My sons have to be responsible for their

²⁵Interview #2, p.29.

own choices.²⁶

In response to the question whether he wished his sons to choose their future wives only from among Christian women, Mr. Chung answers unequivocally:

No. We do not like to create our own mold and try to fit everyone into it. I never draw a line and tell them not to cross it. There are no fixed formulas in life They do not say that their wives must be Christians. They do not make friends with only Christians either.²⁷

Unlike the Chungs, Mrs. Agnes Kim believe that marrying non-Christians is not God's will for their two children. She is even more serious about the importance of Christian faith in her children's marriage than the three mothers quoted earlier. Mrs. Kim is a third generation Christian and serves as the chairwoman of the women's committee on evangelism in her church. Her husband, Mr. Abraham Kim, was not a Christian until he immigrated to the U.S. in 1973. He became a Christian in Chicago where he met Mrs. Kim in a Korean ethnic church and married her. He admits that it was after marriage that his Christian faith grew deeper. To Mr. Kim, the high rate of divorce in America looms as the most serious problem when he thinks about his two children's future marriages. He believes that Christians are not immune to the malady. As far as the religious conviction is concerned, Mr. Kim can accept anyone who simply identifies

²⁶Interview #4, p.15.

²⁷Interview #4, p.16.

himself or herself as a Christian. His wife cannot disagree more. She does not see the possibility of divorce in a truly Christian marriage. Mrs. Kim's focus is quite different. Mrs. Kim:

To me, regardless of the divorce rate, if two can share their faith in Jesus and serve in discipleship, divorce is not even a possibility Recently I began to work hard to let my children know that I pray for their marriage partners. Their marriage partners must have an assurance of salvation, and they must be the discipleship material. It is the top priority in choosing one.²⁸

There is an increasing awareness of the multi-cultural and multi-religious nature of the American society. Christian Korean immigrant parents sense that the religious distinctions may not be considered as significant in their children's generation as they are now. The more serious they are about their Christian faith, the more concerned they become about their children's future marriages as Christians. Like most other Christian parents, they try to foster their own Christian convictions in their children as best as they can. Will the second-generation Korean-American children meet the expectations of their Christian parents?

4. The Korean ethnic church

From the very beginning of the Korean immigration to the U.S. in the early 20th century, the Korean ethnic church

²⁸Interview #1, p.13.

has been a haven for the immigrants as a community center meeting their social and cultural as well as religious needs.²⁹ Especially, since the late 1960's, when the influx of Korean immigrants began in earnest, the number of Korean ethnic churches has increased dramatically: 264 in the entire United States in 1976 to over 400 the next year,³⁰ and by 1981, the number exceeded 1,000. It is estimated that before the 1980s ended, the number of Korean ethnic churches in the United States doubled to over 2,000. The 1995 directory published by the Korean Churches Federation of Greater Chicago lists approximately 200 churches in the Chicago metropolitan area alone. Several studies independently conducted in late 1970s and early 1980s found that 70% to 80% of the Korean immigrant population in the U.S. were affiliated with Korean ethnic churches. Although more recent statistics are not available, it is generally accepted that the church affiliation ratio is declining as the organizations not related to the churches began to be formed and offer social

²⁹Historically, this is true with most of the groups of immigrants to the U.S. as evidenced in the early Irish Catholics, German Lutherans, Swedish and Norwegian Protestants, Eastern European Jews as well as Italians and Mexican Catholics.

³⁰Won Moo Hurh and Kwang Chung Kim, Korean Immigrants in America (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1984), 129.

services to the Korean immigrants.³¹ Considering that the Christian population in Korea is 25%, however, the ratio of church affiliation among the Korean-Americans remains high. When Korean-Americans introduce one another, one of the first identifiers is their church affiliation. It will be rare indeed to find a Korean-American who has not been affiliated with a Korean ethnic church at one time or another. Some point to the "church boom" in Korea during the 1970's as an explanation of the unusually high rate of church affiliation among the Korean immigrants. It is said that six new churches were being started everyday in Korea during this period,³² thus resulting in the higher rate of Christians among the immigrants to the U.S.³³ Others explain the high rate of church affiliation among the Korean immigrants in the U.S. in terms of their motive of immigration. One research study found that the main purpose for the recent Korean immigration to the U.S. is to

³¹The attempt to find the statistical data on the percentage of the Christian population among the Korean immigrants in Chicago was not successful. Three major Korean newspapers in Chicago, which are also distributed nationally, simply do not have an access to the data if it exists at all. A Korean pastor well placed in the Korean immigrant community estimates that while the Christian population among the Korean immigrants is relatively high, the actual church attendance on any given Sunday does not exceed 15%.

³²J. Herbert Kane, The Christian World Mission: Today and Tomorrow (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1981), 67,80.

³³One study shows that over 50% of the immigrants to the U.S. were already affiliated with Christian churches prior to their immigration. Hurh and Kim, Korean Immigrants, 1984.

"preserve, enhance and establish" themselves in the land of opportunity, quite different from the earlier immigration to Japan as forced laborers as well as to Hawaii as sugar plant laborers for survival.³⁴ At least to many Korean people, the United States has been known as a land of opportunity and justice. The reality of immigrant life in the U.S., however, was quite different. Many found themselves marginalized and came to the Korean ethnic church for self-affirmation and socialization. Most importantly, they did so in search for the answer to the ultimate question of life's meaning.

Along with the numerical explosion of Korean ethnic churches for the last three decades, the psychological and social maladjustments and the accompanying spiritual crises experienced by the Christian Korean immigrants, also exploded within the Korean ethnic church community. In recent years, a bulk of research materials was produced making critical examination of the role of Korean ethnic churches.³⁵ One of the most prominent issues raised in these discussions is the ethno-centric tendency of the Korean immigrant church community and the need for a new

³⁴Geunhee Yu, Pastoral Care in Pluralistic America: A Korean-American Perspective (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1988), 103.

³⁵For example, Young Lee Hertig, The Role of Power in the Korean Immigrant Family and Church (Ph.D. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, School of World Mission, 1991) and Yu, Pastoral Care.

theological and sociological paradigm for the ministry serving both the first and especially the second-generation Korean-American Christians.

Among those who were interviewed as part of this research, all but one couple currently are members of one or another Korean ethnic church. They remain as active members, but the general sense of discontentment in their church involvement was evident. Notwithstanding the many issues raised in the discussion about the role of the Korean ethnic church in the U.S., the interview focused on the immigrant parents' views of the church as the place for the Christian education of their second-generation children. Three different types of response were identified based on their expectations and the mode of participation. The first type relies heavily on the Korean ethnic church for their children's spiritual welfare. The parents of this type tend to congregate in a few larger churches which are capable of offering fairly well organized youth ministries. Most of these churches offer the Korean language and cultural education programs in conjunction with the religious activities. The second type takes their children along with them in their struggle to begin and build up new churches. The parents of this type try to incorporate children and youth ministries in their church agenda however haphazard it may be in the present situation. They are members of the majority of the smaller churches. The third type is the

opting out of the Korean ethnic church in favor of the American church.

Mr. and Mrs. Martin Koh met each other and married in a Korean ethnic church in Chicago. They have been active members for the last twenty years. Over the years, their church has seen a healthy numerical growth in membership. Naturally, their two teenage sons were reared in the church ever since their births. Church has become everything to the children. They participate in the church youth group activities without failure. They spend weekends with their Korean Christian friends in the church although they also maintain friendship with classmates in their high school most of whom happen to be Asian. Mrs. Margaret Koh is happy to speak about her sons' spiritual life:

...my sons have regular QT (Quiet Time with God) every night. It became their habit. Especially the younger one stops doing homework at ten at night for QT even when he has much homework, reading the Bible passage and writing something about it.³⁶

The Kohs have a strong sense of belonging to the church as early members in the church's history. Now that their first son is preparing for college, and the number of college-bound second-generation children are growing in the church, Mr. Koh is involved in organizing the ministry specifically targeted on the second-generation college students. He is wary about the new generation of young Korean-American

³⁶Interview #14, p.5.

pastors who are being recruited for the second-generation Korean-American ministries. "They are, rather, interested in the monetary compensation and articulate about the non-interference from the church elders," Mr. Koh complains. Despite the problems in the Korean ethnic church, however, the Kohs are content with the spiritual progress their sons have made over the years through their active church involvement.

Two other families feel the same, but with reservations. Both the Kim and Lee families belong to two of the larger congregations in the Chicago area. Their children's age range from 14 to 16, and, as parents, they are generally satisfied with what their churches have done for their children's Christian education so far. Mrs. Agnes Kim observes that the youth meeting hall in her church used to be a dating place for teenagers, but a dedicated youth pastor took charge and turned it around. But she has serious doubts about her churches' ability to minister to the growing number of the late teens and early twenties. The first-generation Korean immigrants are reluctant to go beyond the narrow enclave of the Korean ethnic church community. Mr. Abraham Kim sees his wife as a typical Korean-American who knows little about Americans and about the American society beyond the small confines of the Korean immigrant community, especially the Korean ethnic church.

Without developing a strong bi-cultural attitude among

the first-generation Korean immigrants, Mr. Kim fears, Korean ethnic church community will lose their second-generation membership, who find themselves increasingly uncomfortable in the ethno-centric atmosphere of the church. He is pleased that his two children have developed the bicultural attitude. He observes it in their circles of friends. During weekends, they associate with Korean Christian friends in the church, and during weekdays, they mix with American friends at school. He does not mind at all even if his children decide to attend an American church instead of a Korean church once they become independent of their parents. He is content with the spiritual provision made by the Korean ethnic church for their children. But unless the change toward the bicultural ministry is actively pursued, he does not see the Korean church as the right place for his children. Mrs. Kim approaches the issue of biculturality of their children from a different perspective. Mrs. Kim:

I think our Korean ancestors will be pleased if the pure ethnic line of Koreans continues generation after generation. But our purpose of life is for the glory of God. When we stand before God in the kingdom of God, what matters is not racial but spiritual quality of life.³⁷

The Kims have relied heavily upon the Korean ethnic church for the Christian education of their children in their formative years.

³⁷Interview #1, p.18.

The Lees also are content with their church's youth program for their two sons. Mr. Bernard Lee has been a member of his church for 8 years and is now a deacon. But, in recent years, he chose to take a back seat rather than being involved too much in the church affairs. He feels that his two teenage sons are well cared for by the youth ministry of his church. But he is critical about the tendency of the Korean-American Christians to live in isolation. He realized it when his church hired an American assistant pastor for the youth ministry of the second-generation children. Mr. Lee:

About three years ago, our church hired an American assistant pastor. Many in my church objected to it. Many do even now. They do not make room for Americans. I think such people should not be allowed to live here. They are too self-centered. Now we have grown this much as a church, and it is time that we open the door to Americans and, through them, let other Americans know about our Korean churches Since the third-generation Koreans will have less ethnic identity, and eventually the Korean identity will not be important, I wonder why we do not open up our churches to Americans? But I don't think many Korean pastors have that vision. I am disappointed by that.³⁸

His wife adds: "Those who oppose the American assistant pastor want to live in a Korean enclave. Their reason is that they feel uncomfortable. Their main concern is not their children's spiritual welfare but themselves." The Lees have no objection to the idea that their sons may choose to attend an American church after college

³⁸Interview #2, p.37,38.

graduation. In fact, they believe that it is a desirable direction to take for the second-generation Korean-Americans.

Except for a few large churches, the majority of the Korean ethnic churches in the Chicago metropolitan area are small in membership size and relatively new. Their budgetary constraints do not allow them to allocate a sufficient fund for hiring youth ministers who can care for their growing second-generation children. They take their children along with them to church on Sundays, but the service caters mainly to the first-generation immigrants. The second-generation children become a captive audience sitting through the service next to their parents. As children grow older, each church tries to utilize whatever human resources they can garner to somehow provide some type of youth program. The effort is often hampered by the lack of consistent supply of human as well as financial resources. Most of the parents are left alone without any meaningful support from their churches for their children's spiritual welfare. Mrs. Lucy Yang's church meets each Sunday afternoon in a rented space of an American church building. Since the church does not own a building, it is not always possible to maintain a consistent youth ministry for the second-generation children, except for a brief Bible study session for children just before the worship service on Sunday. A youth pastor tries his best, but he himself is

attending a seminary during the weekdays. In this situation, Mr. and Mrs. Yang are left alone to battle with their three children to somehow instill in them the spiritual values of life and reverence for the Bible. Mrs. Yang admits, however, that the primary responsibility of the children's Christian education falls on parents, and she has no plan to move to a church with a better youth ministry.

Mrs. Yang describes her situation.

Well, I am not satisfied with the youth program of my church. People change their churches looking for better youth programs for their children. But I don't think church should be primarily responsible for their Bible study. I believe that parents at home should help them in the context of their family life.³⁹

Mrs. Yang has been trying to set a good example to her sons as a Christian. She tries to give the priority to Sunday worship attendance over other things and maintain family devotions, neither of which she feels she has done well. Her sons sometimes complain that their parents are peculiar in their Christian way of life. Again, Mrs. Yang:

They say that everyone recognizes their Christian faith except their parents. I explain to them that it is because parents have deeper concerns and higher expectations than others. As for my first son, I am a little worried that he would not keep the spiritual as his priority when he goes to college. Even now, he is not that absolute about giving Sunday worship the priority.⁴⁰

Mrs. Yang represents many Christian Korean immigrant

³⁹Interview #13, p.9.

⁴⁰Interview #13, p.9.

parents in their discontentment with the youth ministries in the Korean ethnic churches. The situation begs the question: Why do they not encourage their second-generation children to seek out American churches with strong youth ministries? Of course, ethnic prejudice and cultural barriers preclude them from actively assimilating into the American church communities. Mr. and Mrs. Christopher Kang thought about attending an American church when they faced the problem of backbiting among members in the Korean ethnic church. Mrs. Doris Kang:

Once, when things became very bad, I thought about switching to an American church in our neighborhood. But I didn't think it would be emotionally healthy. Also I heard from others that it was very difficult to really be a part of the American church. I figured there are problems in every church, either Korean or American.⁴¹

In Mrs. Yang's case, she does not have a high opinion about the general spiritual condition of American Christians. She speaks of her personal experience with some of the American Christians whom she came to know as her customers in the dry cleaning business she once worked for.

I think in general Korean Christians take their faith more seriously and place it more at the center of their lives. The American Christians do not seem to be the same. They are much more relaxed. They do not like to be restricted. Sometimes, I notice that they appear to be very enthusiastic because they talk well, but I am not sure whether they are as sincere and devout as their words would indicate. When I ask them further questions, I find that they had not been

⁴¹Interview #3, p.28.

to the church for a couple of years.⁴²

Mrs. Yang's opinion about American Christians in general may not be shared by other Korean immigrant Christian parents. At any rate, like Mrs. Yang, the majority of the Christian Korean immigrant parents have to struggle to provide the Christian environment at home as well as in the fledgling Korean ethnic churches they belong to. Some of them find themselves in a peculiar situation in which parents attend one church while their teenage children attend another, primarily because the children prefer to attend the church with a larger population of the second-generation Korean-American peers with whom they can identify.

Then there are those who have opted out of the Korean ethnic church in favor of the American church. Mr. Bernard Lee is currently a deacon of a Korean ethnic church. When his children were still very young, he and his wife tried an American church for a few years. Now they are back to the Korean church, but they view their experience in the American church as a positive learning experience. The Lees have a high opinion about American Christians. Mr. Lee has been working for an American company in several managerial positions.

I come in contact with many American Christian in the course of interviewing prospective employees for my company. I think American Christians are very natural in their Christian life contrary to the Korean counterparts. I think Korean

⁴²Interview #13, p.22.

Christians have no consistency. Sometimes, they act as Christians in certain occasions and sometimes they do not. The Christian faith has not become an integral part of their lives yet. To my observation, they try to construct artificial frames of their Christian faith. American Christians, on the other hand, seem to have digested their Christian faith until it has become an integral part of their daily lives.⁴³

The Lees claim that they did not attend the American church to escape the problems in the Korean ethnic church. They did so in order to observe how an American church operated and to learn something good from them in the hope that they could contribute to the improvement of the Korean churches. But once back to the Korean ethnic church, the Lees has found themselves up against a long-standing Korean traditional way of church operation resistant to the changes they try to introduce. Again, Mr. Lee:

Yes, I am [a deacon], but it is difficult to try to solve the problems in the Korean church by myself. Sometimes, it is better to be quiet The main problem is the ego-centric tendency among Korean Christians. They find it very difficult to work with others. That is the main reason for the excessive factionalism among Korean churches. From their childhood, Americans have experienced and learned how to manage the differences others have. But Koreans do not have that experience. They mainly talk behind someone's back. That causes big problems.⁴⁴

Mr. Lee gives another reason.

In the American communities, when everybody knows that something is not right, someone is bound to raise questions, but Koreans tend not to. That is the basic problem of the Korean community, and

⁴³Interview #2, p.6.

⁴⁴Interview #2, p.8.

without improving on that, Korean churches are bound to go into a wrong direction.⁴⁵

The problem of excessive factionalism within the Korean Christian immigrant community is reflective of the similar situation in the homeland. It may also be the one single most significant factor in explaining why there exist so many small churches within the Korean immigrant Christian community in Chicago as well as elsewhere in the United States. Mr. and Mrs. Edward Choi made a clean break with the Korean immigrant church community after having experienced a "burnout". Unlike the Lees, the Chois did not return to the Korean ethnic church. They stayed in the American church, participating actively in the church activities. The Chois' bad experience was the problem of division within the Korean ethnic church which the Lees addressed earlier. Mr. Choi recalls his frustration:

I did not want to associate with the Korean ethnic churches because I disliked their tendency toward factionalism. But my wife was asked to play the piano for the Presbyterian church, so I went with her once in a while. To see them split was really disgusting. So I did not participate. When I came back from attending college for several years, each of the Korean pastors who came here to study theology as students began their own separate ministries as pastors.⁴⁶

The small Korean church the Chois once belonged to was divided after they had been members for 7 or 8 years. So they stopped going to the Korean ethnic church altogether.

⁴⁵Interview #2, p.8.

⁴⁶Interview #11, p.5.

Since then, they attend an American Protestant church in which they suspect that they may be the only Koreans. Their first daughter could not make this move together with the rest of the family since she was away from home in college. But the move provided an opportunity for the second daughter to take root in the American church and to fully enjoy the church youth fellowship among Americans. The Chois have an excellent command of English, and they seem to experience little practical difficulties to participate fully in the American church community. But it seems evident that the move took a heavy toll on them emotionally. Mr. Choi wishes to return to a Korean ethnic community. Mr. Choi's confession:

I want to come back to the Korean church. Once my second daughter goes to college, we will be left free. So now I am gradually withdrawing from the American church. I did not have much interaction with the Korean-American community. All I had was my high school alumni meetings. Since I cut the relationship with the Korean church, I do not have any. I want to return to the Korean community, but I don't have any church to go to. I have to look for one small church.⁴⁷

The Korean ethnic church community in Chicago is still in its developing stage. Every year, many new churches spring up while many others disappear. On the other hand, several well-established churches in the Chicagoland area offer extensive youth programs dedicated to the second-generation Korean-American children. And the number of the

⁴⁷Interview #11, p.29.

1.5 and second-generation Korean-Americans who are studying in the theological seminaries is growing. Most of them are expected to fill the pastoral positions for the youth in the Chicago area.⁴⁸ There is a general anticipation that they will be much more sensitive to the needs of the second-generation Korean-American children than the first-generation Korean pastors. In the mean time, the first-generation Christian Korean parents meet the challenges of the Christian education of their children in the new land with vigor. Given their particular life circumstances as immigrant Christians from Korea, the important issues related to parenting in general become much more intense and acute. It is a task filled with conflicts and anxieties, hopes and despair. It is "a profound spiritual experience" in the words of Mr. Choi, who testifies that his experience of rearing two children in the U.S. brought him to the new spiritual dimension in his life. The Korean ethnic churches are placed in a historical juncture as the depository of such profound spiritual experiences of their members who bring their struggles as parents into their worship as well as their Christian fellowship.

The majority of the first-generation Korean immigrants

⁴⁸For example, the Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois, has a student population of 1,135 who are enrolled in the degree programs in the 1995-96 school year. Among them 180 students (approx. 16%) are Koreans. Even if we exclude 77 Korean students who came on student visas, over 100 Korean-American students are pursuing degrees in the field of theology and missions.

are Christians. Many of them come with the Christian experience rooted in the American Protestantism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Others were not Christians in Korea but, after their immigration to the U.S., turn to the Christianity of their fellow Korean immigrants as they try to cope with the challenges in the new land. For both groups of the Korean immigrants, being a Christian in the increasingly secularized society means facing new challenges. Moreover, Korean Christianity has maintained a particular set of beliefs that are found in some of the most conservative branches of American Protestantism in the last decade of the twentieth century, often dubbed as fundamentalism or evangelicalism. The first-generation Christian Korean immigrant parents find themselves minorities not only in the ethnic distinctions but also in the religious ones as well.

In their struggle to nurture their children as Christians at home, they try to institute some form of regular family devotions although the practice proves to be too difficult to maintain for most of them. Whether they succeed or not, however, their effort to provide their second-generation children with the Christian family environment should be recognized as a contribution to the preservation of the American family.

In cultural matters such as music and tv programs their children enjoy, the Christian Korean immigrant parents are

ambivalent. When it comes to the matters of religion, however, they tend to enforce their Christian faith hierarchically in a truly Confucian manner. Their deliberation on the children's future marriages reflect the different levels of their own Christian conviction. Marrying their children to Christians is their primary concern in the increasingly multi-religious milieu of American society. The Korean ethnic churches are yet in the developmental stage, and except for a few larger congregations in the Chicagoland area, the ministry for the second-generation Korean-American children is very limited. What effects these struggles of the Christian Korean immigrant parents will have upon their second-generation children as well as, more indirectly, upon the American society in general is to be seen. However, the first-generation Christian Korean immigrant parents occupy a unique space in American history as cultural (Confucian), religious (fundamental Christian) as well as ethnic (Korean) minorities.

CHAPTER 6

FIRST-GENERATION KOREAN IMMIGRANT PARENTS AS MINORITIES

About any review of human history, it can be said that conflicts between mainstream and minority are a universal experience of people trying to live together. The story of the ethnic minorities in the U.S. is rich in its historical content and very complex. In fact, most of U.S. history is the history of the immigrants who have begun their lives in the new land as minorities. Most Americans who are not themselves immigrants have ancestors who came from foreign lands and, thus, belong to one or more ethnic minority groups whether old or new, large or small.¹

As an ethnic minority, Korean immigrants are fairly new to the scene. It was not until the Korean War in the early 1950s that the average American began to hear about Korea, and the Korean immigrants received very little attention until their numerical explosion in the 1970s and 1980s. It was not until the 1970 Census that the U.S. Census Bureau counted Koreans as a distinct ethnic group. They were often

¹Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups identify 106 distinctive ethnic minorities in the United States. Stephan Thernstrom, ed., Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980), vi.

mistaken for Chinese or Japanese whose own immigration preceded that of the Koreans by many decades. Like these two larger Asian ethnic minorities, the early Korean immigrants met a hostile reception by the whites in the mainstream. The overt racial discrimination against Asians, such as that practiced by the Japanese and Korean Exclusion League in San Francisco in 1905, has largely disappeared. The increasing awareness of the cultural and racial diversity of American society fosters more civil and amicable relationships between the mainstream whites and other ethnic minority groups as well as among minority groups themselves. But subtle discrimination against ethnic minorities, probably excepting the white European minority groups, remains very much a fact of life. As relatively new immigrants to the U.S., the Koreans have their share of this unpleasant, and often confusing, reality.

But the conflicts experienced by the Korean immigrants as minorities are not simply imposed upon them from outside. It cannot be said that they are an "oppressed" minority. The conflicts are also caused by themselves. On the one hand, the Korean immigrant parents eagerly desire that their second-generation children enter the mainstream American society and succeed. On the other hand, these parents do not wish their children to lose the cultural and ethnic uniqueness of being Korean. In other words, they want their children to maintain the minority identity. Certainly, the

Korean immigrant parents set a very difficult task for themselves.

In this chapter, the first-generation Korean immigrant parents voice their concerns as well as hopes as members of a small minority group in the land where they chose to live and rear their children. They share their inner conflicts as they try to guide their children to cope with the reality of the minority status. It needs to be said at the outset that most of the interviewees had had only a vague notion of racial discrimination when they decided to immigrate to the U.S. Korea is a homogeneous society both in language and in ethnic origin. Being an ethnic minority is not part of the Korean experience except for the Korean nationals who live in China and Japan.² Those who go to countries such as Germany, Saudi Arabia and Iran through work contracts or as employees of Korean companies are not given permanent residency, and no recognizable Korean ethnic community exists. Like most of the immigrants to the U.S. from many other parts of the globe, the Korean immigrants to the U.S.

²As early as in the 17th century, some Koreans began to take residence in southern Manchuria across the border between Korea and China marked by the Yalu River. In the late 19th century, when a severe famine hit the northern part of Korea, more Koreans crossed the border and settled in the southern Yanbian area of northeastern China. Southeastern Manchuria served as the center of anti-Japan guerrilla activities during the Japanese occupation of Korea. Also, during the same colonial period (1910-1945), many Korean workers were rounded up and shipped to Japan to supply the labor shortage in Japan. By the end of the Japanese occupation of Korea in 1945, 2.4 million Koreans lived in Japan. Nahm, Korea, 250,319.

had high expectations as they were coming to the country widely known as the land of freedom and justice, the land of equality and opportunity. But they found themselves marginalized and restricted because of their minority status, and they were forced to make adjustments to a reality of which they had only a vague idea. It must be granted, however, that their expectations were met to some extent. If we place the American experience in the larger context of world history, the amount of freedom and opportunity extended to the various minority groups in the U.S. can be appreciated with the two glaring exceptions of the slavery of the blacks and the subjugation of the Native-Americans.

One research conducted by two prominent Korean-American sociologists found that, after an average of nine years of residence in the U.S., the Korean immigrants learned to face reality and make necessary adjustments to the unrealistically high hopes they had entertained at the time of their immigration.³ The majority of the first-generation immigrant parents interviewed have lived in the U.S. over nine years; in fact, at the time of the interview, the years of their immigrant experience averaged 18.6 years. We can assume that the majority of them have had an opportunity to take stock of their life experience in the new land and make some form of adaptation. How do they

³Hurh and Kim, Korean Immigrants in America, 142.

assess their own experience as minorities? What are their hopes for their second-generation children as minorities? What problems do the immigrant parents foresee for which they try to prepare their children as members of a minority group? The interview questions were designed to solicit their views on their own minority status as well as that of their children. The discussion centered on some of the most common issues of immigrants such as (1) language maintenance, (2) ethnic identity and (3) racial discrimination.

1. Korean language acquisition

For the immigrants whose native language is not English, a language barrier is the first obstacle they face in their life in the U.S. Although students learn English from the 7th grade in Korea, and the majority of first-generation Korean immigrants have college degrees, mastery of the English language requires much time and effort on their part. Most of the first-generation Korean immigrant parents interviewed had a good command of English. Out of the twenty interviewees, only four persons seemed to have any difficulty in English in their every day life. Clearly, acquiring good English language skills was a priority as they began their life as immigrants in the U.S. Unlike the first-generation parents, however, their second-generation children do not have a strong motivation for acquiring

Korean language skills. Although their parents are Koreans, as children begin schooling at an early age they are immersed in the English-speaking environment. Learning to speak, read and write in Korean is an optional activity that requires deliberate and persistent effort on the part of their parents at home. As members of an ethnic minority, the first-generation hope to impart to their children the unique Korean cultural heritage. How important do they consider acquiring proficiency in the Korean language? In what different ways do they try to help their children learn the Korean language?

The Kims agree with one another that their children must learn to speak well in Korean. But they disagree on how to help their children do so. Their two children are in their teens, and Mrs. Agnes Kim thinks that they are not proficient enough in Korean. She blames her husband for not making an effort to use Korean with them at home while insisting on speaking with her in Korean only. Mrs. Kim:

My point is that in our daily life we must use Korean. My husband speaks 100% English to our children but speaks 100% Korean to me. He asked me not to speak to him in English. He feels awkward if I speak English to him. But the opposite must be true.⁴

Mr. Abraham Kim, on the other hand, believes that his children will be able to pick up the Korean language later in college without much difficulty, because, when they were

⁴Interview #1, p.21.

very young, they were taken care of by their grandparents who spoke to them only in Korean and taught them how to write in Korean. He does not believe that forcing children to speak and write in Korean either at home or by sending them to a Korean language school will be effective. As for speaking only in Korean to his wife, Mr. Kim, who has lived in the States for over 21 years, has his defense:

I have already declared to those under me at work not to talk to me in English on Monday mornings, because I might respond in Korean since I spend the entire weekend speaking Korean with my wife. I feel that for me speaking English is only a means to live in this society. I don't feel that I need to speak to my wife in English because I cannot express in English the delicate nuances the Korean language is capable of.⁵

Mr. Kim once tried to speak with his children in Korean but gave up, because they did not understand Korean well. He chose to wait until they will have a chance to learn the language more systematically by taking Korean language classes in college. He knows many Korean young people who restored fluency in Korean that way.

Mr. Kim has a good command of English, good enough to communicate with his two children without any significant barrier. But not all Korean immigrant parents have sufficient proficiency in English to have meaningful conversations with their children. Mrs. Edith Kwon worries that the language gap between her and her children will develop into a problem in the parent-child relationship.

⁵Interview #1, p.21.

Her two pre-teen children speak and read Korean fairly well, probably better than most other Korean-American kids. So far in the family, they have used both English and Korean. The children are more comfortable with English, and the parents feel more comfortable speaking in Korean. Like the Kims, the Kwons also speak with one another only in Korean. Mrs. Kwon is making her best effort to help her children master Korean at home by building on the work their grandmother did with them in their early years. She takes the communication problem between the parents and children seriously. Mrs. Kwon:

I sense a problem about our communication with children in the vertical relationship. . . . My daughter learned Korean from her grandmother who helped rear her for the first seven years. So she speaks relatively well. We mainly speak in Korean to each other, even though she does not know difficult words. My son does not speak as well as my daughter. He claims that he does not have to learn Korean because he will not be using it. Anyway, I have them read two Korean books a month. It is my homework for them. The younger one reads kindergarten level books. The older one reads novels. And once a week, I borrow a Korean video for them for their hearing practice They like it. Since they do not attend a Korean language school, it is the only way to help them learn Korean.⁶

Others, like Mrs. Caroline Kang and Grace Paik, try to manage communication with their children using half Korean and half English since neither side has complete command of both languages. Mrs. Kang hopes that by using Korean as much as possible her children may be exposed to the language

⁶Interview # 5, p.11.

and be able to pick up at least some Korean words and expressions. Mrs. Kang: "I speak to my children in Korean. When they answer, they usually answer in English. Then I respond back in Korean I feel that they need to be exposed to the language."⁷ Mrs. Paik finds herself in a similar situation. Mrs. Paik:

I try to use Korean to my children at home. They speak half in Korean and half in English. They feel uncomfortable about speaking in Korean, but I try to encourage them to answer me in Korean.⁸

The Koh family also uses both Korean and English at home. When the two sons open up and talk about things that are really in their hearts, they use English. Mrs. Margaret Koh is not sure how well they understand Korean. Mrs. Koh:

I sometimes wonder whether they really understand Korean, or how much if they do. Sometimes, after I have said something in Korean, they come back later and ask what I meant. I am not sure whether they are pretending that they do not understand or they really do not understand.⁹

Since they entered high school, they began to want to learn Korean. Again, Mrs. Koh:

In the church, nowadays, the second-generation children speak only in English. I think my sons feel proud that they can speak Korean even a little bit. And the adults compliment them when they hear them speak well in Korean. They asked us to speak to them in Korean, not in English. But sometimes, even for me, speaking in English is more comfortable. I have lived here for a long

⁷Interview #3, p.10.

⁸Interview #7, p.7.

⁹Interview #14, p.6.

time.¹⁰

The Kohs believe that their two sons must be good in Korean language so that they can understand the Korean culture. Mr. Martin Koh:

Since they were born and live in the U.S., their primary language is English. But their parents are Koreans. So it is only natural that they learn how to speak in Korean. Although they were born here, they are Koreans. In order for them to understand the Korean culture, they must know the language. If they do not know the language, it is hard for them to approach the culture.¹¹

The Kohs believe that it is important for the second-generation Korean-American children to familiarize themselves with the Korean culture, and that a good command of the Korean language is essential. But the Lees disagree. Mr. Bernard Lee responds to the question whether he thinks it is essential that his children learn the Korean language: "I don't think it is essential What is important is to have a sense of their roots as Koreans rather than to have good language skills per se." Mrs. Betty Lee joins in:

I think the Korean language is not that essential. I know some parents who force their children a lot, but I do not agree with them. I tell my children clearly that they are Korean-Americans. While I emphasize their roots as Koreans, I tell them that their competition is with Americans. I show them positive aspects of the Koreans and encourage them to catch the opportunity to learn Korean. They learned a lot about Korea through their Saturday Korean language school. They

¹⁰Interview #14, p.6.

¹¹Interview #14, p.7.

learned about the Korean history, even the ancient history of the Three Kingdoms. I tried to help them understand the history of the United States as well, reminding them that this country began and was built by people like them. I teach them the story of the Puritans and their influence in the history of this country. I have a similar attitude toward food. I do not insist that they should eat Korean food. They eat all kinds of food well. A few years ago, our entire family went to Korea, and we took them to the ancient historical sites and they were deeply impressed by their Korean heritage.¹²

Understandably, the Lees speak mostly in English at home with their children. But they report that, recently, their two sons began to express some desire to learn Korean. Like the Lees, the Chois make no serious effort to teach their two daughters Korean. Mr. Edward Choi explains the situation in which a change of attitude toward the language at home came about:

I do not speak Korean at home. When she (the first daughter) was growing up, we purposely avoided speaking Korean. When my first daughter was three years old, we put her in a day care center. Once, she wanted to go to the washroom, but did not know how to say it in English. In those day, we tried to speak only in Korean at home. She ended up wetting her pants, and all her friends laughed at her all day. You know how important a child's self-esteem is. Language comes next in importance, not before. It is personality that comes first. Be a human being first; then be a Korean, American, Chinese, Japanese or whatever. My desire was that she be a wholesome person. Since then, we have spoken only in English at home.¹³

The Chois have excellent command of English and were able to

¹²Interview #2, p.14.

¹³Interview #11, p.7.

communicate with their daughters in English without any difficulty. They did not have to struggle to teach their daughters Korean at home since it was not their priority. But the Korean language acquisition by their second-generation children is still a major concern to most of the Korean immigrant parents. They know that their children do not have to go through the struggle with English that they did, and they are glad. But they do not want their children to lose the Korean cultural heritage embodied at least partially in the Korean language. Trying to create the Korean-speaking home environment seems to have had only a limited success. Those who had their own parents come and help rear the grandchildren in the early years after their birth feel that the foundation of the Korean language was laid. But the children soon forgot the language as they entered the American school system. Most of the parents who sent their children to the Saturday Korean language schools affiliated with their churches found that the schools were not well prepared for language training. The Lees and the Chois expressed their bitter disappointments. It was noteworthy, however, to hear the majority of the interviewed parents report that their children began to show a genuine interest in learning Korean as they entered high schools. Mrs. Agnes Kim was very elated as she spoke about her son who is in high school. "He said that his generation should

be bilingual. He asked me to teach him Korean."¹⁴ In spite of the limited success in trying to help their children acquire the Korean language skills, the first-generation Korean immigrant parents are encouraged because they observe that their children are motivated to learn Korean as they grow older and as their identity as members of a minority group begins to take shape.

2. Korean-American identity

Like other "hyphenated" Americans, the Korean-Americans naturally seek their place in the new society by using the majority white Americans as a reference group, quickly finding themselves "different" and also treated differently as minorities. They have no confusion about what they are: they are Koreans living in America. They accept their marginal status as minorities and strive to somehow cope with the cultural differences in the best way they know how. But to their second-generation children, the ethnic identity is not as clear as that of the first-generation parents. All but a few of the children of the interviewees were born and reared in the U.S. They have roots both in Korea and in the U.S., but their Korean experience is only secondary, mostly through their family members and others in the ethnic community, especially in the Korean ethnic churches. Children's sense of minority status comes gradually as they

¹⁴Interview #1, p.21.

are increasingly exposed to the world outside their homes and ethnic community. To them, being different from the rest of the world can be a very unsettling experience. They ask, "What am I? Am I a Korean or an American?" It is often asked in a state of confusion or in a crisis situation.

The problem of identity has long been studied from various angles in such disciplines as psychology, sociology and social work. The need for a strong sense of identity for the mental health of a person is well established. It provides a person with "wholeness, continuity and purpose."¹⁵ For Erik Erikson, who wrote extensively on identity crisis among adolescents, identity is a reconciliation of inner and outer experiences, culminating in a sense of wholeness or unity that is recognized by both oneself and others.¹⁶ Building self-identity, therefore, is not a private project, but necessarily involves the participation of "others."¹⁷ For first-generation Korean-Americans, "others" are white Americans as well as various ethnic minorities in the U.S.. How these "others" recognize

¹⁵Samuel L. Dixon and Roberta G. Sands, "Identity And the Experience of Crisis," Social Casework, 64:4 (1983), 223.

¹⁶Erik H. Erikson, Identity: Youth and Crisis, (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968), 22-25.

¹⁷Pai Young, Deloras Pemberton, John Worley, Findings On Korean-American Early Adolescents And Adolescents, (Kansas City: School of Education, University of Missouri-Kansas City, 1987), 37.

them contributes in part to forming their sense of identity as Korean-Americans. The same can be said to be true with their second-generation children. But, for the children, at least in their initial stage of the development of identity, "others" are primarily the parents. According to Erikson, formation of identity stems from the childhood identification with parents.¹⁸ And it is with this assumption that we look at the attitudes of the immigrant parents toward their own cultural or ethnic identity as well as the identity of their children. The first-generation immigrant parents interviewed invariably express their desire for their children to have an identity that incorporates both Korean and American roots, i.e., the bi-cultural or inter-cultural identity. But there are subtle differences among them in terms of the emphasis and the rationale behind it. How their varied attitudes toward their own minority status and that of their children will affect the formation of the cultural or ethnic identity of the second-generation children is yet to be studied. The traditionalists among the immigrant parents emphasize the fact that they are Koreans in spite of their residence in the U.S., and their children are primarily Koreans as well. The adoptionists among the immigrant parents emphasize the fact that they are Americans in spite of their roots in

¹⁸Erik H. Erikson, "Identity and the Life Cycle: Selected Papers by Erik H. Erikson" Psychological Issues 1, no. 1 (1959): 113.

Korea, and their children are primarily Americans. Then there are those who see the Korean-American identity as neither Korean nor American but a separate entity that needs to be recognized and developed. We may call them the modificationists.¹⁹ Of course, it must be mentioned here that there are more commonalities shared by the above three types of interviewees than this classification may seem to indicate.

Mrs. Lucy Yang has lived in the U.S. over 20 years, and all of her three sons were born here. She readily admits that she would not have chosen to immigrate to the U.S. if she had thought hard about what it would mean to rear children in America. Her primary reason is what she perceives to be the spiritual poverty that permeates the American society. She is not sure how her three teenage sons will identify themselves culturally once they leave home. She worries that they may lose their Korean heritage of filial piety and propriety and become too individualistic as other Americans are. She is asked, "What is your answer if one of your children asks you, 'Am I a Korean or an

¹⁹The term, "modificationists," is chosen here with William M. Newman's theory of modified cultural pluralism in mind. Newman maintained that there are four major theories of cultural pluralism: (1) assimilation, (2) amalgamation, (3) classical cultural pluralism and (4) modified cultural pluralism. The theory of modified cultural pluralism holds that different ethnic groups will assimilate into the dominant group to some extent, but, at the same time, retain unique cultural characteristics. William M. Newman, American Pluralism: A Study Of Minority Groups And Social Theory (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 53-79.

American?'" Her answer is clear:

I will say, "You are a Korean." They have Korean blood. When they look themselves in the mirror, they look Korean as well. The only difference is that they were born in America.²⁰

She wishes that her sons maintain the Korean identity. So she told them, "Once I die, I cannot know what you do. But at least as long as I am alive, please follow my direction."²¹

Mrs. Yang has lived in America for a long time, but she tries to maintain her Korean heritage, both spiritually as a Christian and culturally as a Confucian. Her response betrays her feelings of frustration over her inability to infuse in her children more of the Korean identity.

The Chungs, unlike Mrs. Yang, do not regret that they immigrated to the U.S. But they maintain their longing for their Korean way of life ever since they immigrated 6 years ago. Mr. Donald Chung:

I am neither regretful nor proud of my decision to immigrate. If I thank God for each day, that's enough. Of course, my wife and I live in longing for Korea since our root is there. Once in a while, we talk about it.²²

Their two sons are 1.5 Korean-Americans and are attending colleges. The Chungs want to return to Korea if their sons decide to do so after college education. In the

²⁰Interview #13, p.24.

²¹Interview #13, p.25.

²²Interview #4, p.8.

meantime, they hope that their sons do not lose their Korean heritage. Clearly, the Chungs have anchored their daily life in Korea even though they live in America. In a sense they have never left Korea.

The way of life of the traditionalists such as Mrs. Yang and the Chungs, and their strict adherence to the Korean identity are deemed undesirable by the adoptionists. The Lees have lived in the U.S. for 25 years and believe that their family is different from the majority of the Korean-American families. Mrs. Betty Lee:

I see that there are many Korean families who insist on the Korean ways I believe that my children have to learn America well My husband is a conservative, but he does not insist on the Confucian ideal about women. We both try to learn good things about America, since we live in America.²³

She relates her experience when she visited Korea in recent years:

When I visited Korea, I realized that I was a foreigner. I only looked like a Korean, but I was a foreigner. All my family are still in Korea, and we maintain family relationships. But I don't think I have a place to stand in Korea.²⁴

The Lees have a lot more positive attitude toward their life in the U.S. than the traditionalists. They adopt the American ways of life more readily. They admit that they are "Americanized." The Lees participate in community affairs, and are sometimes active in the local political

²³Interview #2, p.36.

²⁴Interview #2, p.36.

campaigns. They are the only Korean-American family who regularly participate in the social events of their neighborhood, even though many other Korean-Americans families belong to the same neighborhood. But the Lees have no illusion about their identity as the Korean-Americans.

Mr. Lee:

I am a Korean-American. We are bi-cultural. My two sons are also bi-cultural, more toward American I try to tell my children clearly that they must accept the fact that they are minorities with a different skin color. I tell them, "You must work harder to overcome the minority status. When you are not selected in hiring due to your minority status, do not feel discouraged but simply accept. In order to overcome it, you have to be better prepared. When the opportunity is given, you have to learn about Korea."²⁵

Since the Korean-Americans are so-called "visible" minorities, their minority status is almost unavoidable. The Lees noticed that their two teenage sons always carry with them the sense of being minorities and try to avoid being a visible target of others' attention due to their minority status. They also noticed that in the subconsciousness of their children is a sense of dissatisfaction about other Koreans. When they attend Korean gatherings, the Lee's children often speak out against certain things they do not like about Koreans. Naturally they make friend with Americans more than they do with Koreans.

²⁵Interview #2, p.16.

The Lees' adoptionist approach toward the Korean-American identity stands in contrast to that of the traditionalists. In between these two are the modificationists who want to see a modified identity created that is more than just a simple mix of the two. The Kangs have been in the U.S. for the last 23 years and reared their two children in an affluent white American community. Mrs. Caroline Kang recalls the day when her father called her to take a walk. It was only a few days before her departure for America. This is what her father told her:

Once you go to the States, you must be an ambassador of Korea in your actions and words. Make sure that you keep this in mind so that you may not shame your country. When you have children, you must inculcate the Korean identity in them.²⁶

Mrs. Kang believes that she did her best to do for her children what her father told her to do. She read to them about Korean history and about many laudable aspects of Koreans. She also took them to Korea on several different occasions and showed many good sides of the life in Korea. Her two children grew up with strong pride about being Koreans. At the same time, her son graduated from his high school as valedictorian and went on to one of the Ivy League universities. Mr. Christopher Kang spoke of his son's struggle with his Korean-American identity:

The more he experienced the American social life among white American youth, the more acutely he

²⁶Interview #3, p.9.

felt the (identity) problem. He said that one must have an identity, but simply having an identity as a Korean-American was not enough. One must also possess the superior quality to contribute to others. I realized that my son was much deeper in thinking than I thought he was. I often learn good things from him in the course of talking with him.²⁷

The Kangs envision the Korean-American identity of their son as one with Korean pride on the one hand and superior quality as an American on the other. Mr. Kang is proud of his son's clear concept of what it means to be a Korean-American and cannot stop talking about him:

He said that he was different from me in that he was born here. He possesses the priceless treasure of the Korean heritage as a Korean-American, but that is not what he operated by in this country. He thinks of himself as an American. But his background is Korean, and he would like to treasure it. I think he has clear identity as a Korean-American. He is not satisfied with those who teach the Korean-American young people to hold on to their Korean heritage but do not encourage them to operate as Americans.²⁸

The case of Mr. Kang's son reveals that developing one's identity involves more than one's ethnic origin. It is also affected by one's intellectual, economic and social competencies as well as emotional and spiritual maturity.²⁹ As parents, the Kangs have participated in the formation of their son's sense of self-identity through their healthy

²⁷Interview #3, p.13.

²⁸Interview #3, p.31.

²⁹Young Pai, Findings On Korean-American Early Adolescents And Adolescents, 37.

outlook of life as immigrants.

Mrs. Florence Yu shares a similar view of what the Korean-American identity should mean to her children. Mrs. Yu:

I tell them that they are very lucky because they can eat both good Korean food and good American food. Likewise, we can have the good cultural traits of both Korea and America. I think American culture encourages a person to be clear about things. Koreans use the word "Kulsse" (expression of ambiguity such as 'well' or 'maybe') very much. When things are not clear, life becomes chaotic. On the other hand, Koreans are much more affectionate. They are warm in personal relationships while Americans are very individualistic. So, they must be bi-cultural. I do not know about other families, but I think it is the only way to go. We cannot insist upon being a Korean in this country. We must not erase being a Korean, either.³⁰

The Korean-American identity conceived by the modificationists seems to rise above the ethno-centric pride and the victim mentality of a marginalized minority. It takes the best advantage of the bi-cultural situation and seeks to make a contribution by improving upon both and creating something better. One family, the Chois, has made a drastic change in an effort to discover their own identity as human beings as well as ethnic minorities in a country made up of present and former minorities. The Chois' decision to cut the ties with the Korean-American community at one time and then having a serious consideration to return reflects the ambiguity and complexity of the question

³⁰Interview #6, p.22,23.

of one's identity. Whether one is a traditionalist, an adoptionist or a modificationist, the first-generation Korean immigrant parents are forced to charter the course in search of the Korean-American identity for themselves as well as for their second-generation children. As for the interviewees, most of whose children have grown up well into the teens, they have done their best as they knew how. Now they wait for the verdict as they observe their children leaving home and formulating their own independent identities as second-generation Korean-Americans in the land where they did not choose to come.

3. Racial discrimination

It is expected that first-generation Korean immigrant parents have many stories to tell about the racial discrimination they have experienced. Especially when it involves their children, many become passionately indignant. The issue of discrimination against a minority, whether against ethnic or racial minority, against women or the disabled, is always painful, and sometimes, too sensitive to deal with without allowing our emotions to get the better of us. It comes as a bit of surprise, therefore, that we hear the first-generation Korean immigrant parents interviewed approach the subject of racial discrimination with realistic assessments and well-reasoned counteractions. Of course, some incidents are too painful to tell, and they choose not

to articulate. But, overall, there is a sense that they manage to deal with the problem and are able to develop some realistic plans to help their children cope with it in the future.

Mr. Abraham Kim is not optimistic about the future of ethnic minorities such as Korean-Americans. His assessment of the situation is representative of others; hence, here is his rather long quote. Mr. Kim:

I worked in various American companies, and I learned that there are many kinds of stereotypes, and I feel discriminated against. I am a manager in an American corporation. I don't think I would ever be promoted to the CEO level, partly because of my lack of ability and partly because I am an Asian. From the point of view of Americans, it is understandable that they have their own corporate culture, and it will be expecting too much for them to invite me in. Sometimes, I wonder whether I got on the wrong plane when I left Korea for the U.S. But I have already made a choice, and I comfort myself thinking that even if I were in Korea, I might be subject to other kinds of discrimination. I hear that nowadays in Korea, you are forced to retire once you reach the age of 55. I accept the fact that anywhere I go, there are problems. It may be that I will not fit well in the Korean society because I grew up without rigid formality in relating others, and I do not like group-infighting which is very common in Korea. I wonder whether I could have survived it. At least in the U.S., such matters are dealt with in fairness. This is how I comfort myself. Still I wonder whether this is the right place for my children, especially when I hear the extreme anti-Asian comments. Until now the U.S. is well organized, and many different ethnic groups live in relative harmony. But I see the problem erupting in California in their proposition #187 against illegal immigrants. There is no guarantee that it will not spread to the Midwest. I have a mixed feeling about anti-foreign sentiment in society in general. It may be a measure of self-protection for the Americans, but I feel apprehensive, especially because there seems to be

no plausible solution for the problems that minorities face. I hope that something can be done, but I doubt it can be done in my generation.³¹

Mr. Kim is a successful engineer who completed his professional training in the U.S. He is envied by other Korean immigrants as one who "made it" in the land of opportunity. Although the limitation he faces as an ethnic minority in America is very real, he recognizes the fact that other kinds of discrimination, such as discrimination based on age, would have limited him if he had stayed in Korea. Still, life as an immigrant is stressful, and he knows that his two teenage children will have to face the anti-foreigner sentiment that flares up whenever the U.S. economy is not doing well. He does not believe that there will ever be a day when the Korean-Americans become a part of mainstream America while maintaining their ethnic identity. He can only hope that the relationship between the mainstream and minority Americans is improved in his children's generation. As for him, he would like to return to Korea after the children become independent and spend his retirement years there.

Like Mr. Kim, Mr. Bernard Lee has also worked for an American corporation in various managerial positions for many years. He is still fighting for a promotion although he is realistic enough not to put hopes too high. Mr. Lee:

³¹Interview #1, p.28.

Even to be a manager as an Asian is not easy. Since I work in a technical field, it was possible in 1985 for me to be a manager. I've worked for my company altogether for 16 years now. I know that it would be hard for me to be vice president which is one step higher over the managerial position I have. I challenge this reality, mainly because, without such a challenge, life in the work place is too monotonous. Now globalization is on its way in every field, and the company I work for needs a challenge to advance one step further toward that direction. I am the only Asian in my company. There is not even one African-American or Hispanic-American. I have to bite my tongue sometimes, but I manage to adjust to the all-White environment.³²

Mr. Lee is aggressive in his style of coping with the disadvantages of a minority. His style is also reflected in helping his two second-generation sons face the problem in their future. Mr. Lee:

I believe the most important thing in life is to maintain inner peace about one's own life. If one cannot, he would go crazy. Then who can help him, especially in this individualistic society? So I push them for the things they have the capability of, and do not for what they do not possess such a capability. My children express their dissatisfaction about Asian families putting too much pressure upon their children. Then I answer them, "The second generation children are born into a situation where they are given a lot of pressure. It is unavoidable. The important thing I want to give you is how to cope with such pressure. You cannot run away from the pressure." I think they understand even though I cannot be 100% sure I wonder how they will cope with the hurt they will receive as minorities when they face racial prejudice. One thing I can do is to help them have a clear identity. Another thing is that I show them my toughness in dealing with such problems. Sometimes I overact in order to show my children. I don't know how they digest it.³³

³²Interview #2, p.6.

³³Interview #2, p.35,42.

Mr. Lee deliberately trains his two teenage sons through a vigorous daily schedule in extra-curricular activities such as violin and martial arts lessons, to help them learn to survive under pressure with his eye on their future in America as members of a small minority group. He believes that to help them learn to cope with pressure is the best thing he can do for his children. He is mindful of the fact that the second-generation did not make a choice to come to America but have to live under much pressure as minorities, while the first-generation immigrants have made a choice to come to America and are ready to accept the outcome of their choice whatever it may turn out to be.

One of the most practical considerations in the minds of the immigrant parents is the future career choice of their second-generation children. Mrs. Florence Yu reflects upon her experience of racial discrimination at her work place and concludes that she has to prepare her children in more practical ways. Her way of thinking is very common among the Korean immigrant parents. Mrs. Yu works as a nurse:

In my work place, I was selected to fill the vacancy of an assistant director, and I had people who supported me, but I also had people who vehemently opposed me because I was an Oriental. Through that experience, I realized that my children would face much racial discrimination in the society even though they may be very able people. So I tell them from their youth that they must either be outstanding persons in their fields, or they must have their own businesses. I encourage them to go into some business which connects Korea and the U.S. I emphasize that they

should not live such a hard life as their parents do. Then they have to be brilliant in their major fields whatever they might be, either as a cook or whatever. If they do not have confidence in something, they should rather do their own business.³⁴

Mrs. Yu's children are still young. Mr. Donald Chung's two sons are in college. Mr. Chung speaks of his first son who attends Northwestern University.

When he first entered Northwestern University, he had a confidence that if he studied well and excelled academically, he could choose whatever he liked and succeed. But now it has changed. He realized that there was a limit that minorities can not go beyond. He was wounded. So he is thinking about having his own business as the best means to survive in this society.³⁵

The Kohs are also aware of the reality that the ethnic minority children will face in the future. Their ambition is that their two sons live a comfortable life and avoid, if all possible, the stress of climbing the ladder of success in American society, especially as visible minorities. Mrs. Margaret Koh shares her concerns about their sons being visible minorities. Mrs. Koh:

What worries me a little bit is that it is hard for the Oriental to survive here. Even if they were born and grew up here, they look Korean. Their inside may not be Korean as they look outside, but others do not look at them as Americans.³⁶

Mr. Martin Koh has a plan for the children's survival:

³⁴Interview #6, p.17.

³⁵Interview #4, p.18.

³⁶Interview #14, p.8.

I don't want them to excel too much over others and hit the glass ceiling for the minorities. It is accompanied by much stress. I don't think it is necessary to go that far. As long as they are satisfied with what they do and maintain a good Christian life I will be happy. I want them to have good relationships with others and live a comfortable life.³⁷

No parents would wish their children to suffer for any reason. For the Kohs, the "good Christian life" they wish their two sons will have includes freedom from unnecessary stress caused by an attempt to beat the so-called "glass ceiling" for ethnic minorities. But the Kangs turn the adverse situation as minorities into the spiritual benefit for themselves as well as for their children. Mr. Christopher Kang is a medical doctor, and his son aspires to follow his footsteps. Mr. Kang speaks about his experiences of racial discrimination:

It is very difficult for me to put such experiences into words. I think it is safe to say that I experience it every day. I had had serious discrimination cases the number of which can be counted with ten fingers. If I had lived in Korea, such incidents would have never been a part of my life. I tried to deal with them in various ways, but I think my faith in God helped me most. To a certain sense, such difficulties helped me and my wife to come closer to God and to each other. They were good opportunities to receive spiritual discipline.³⁸

Mrs. Kang speaks about her struggles when her two children were called names and accused of something they did not commit simply because they were Asians in an all-White

³⁷Interview #14, p.9.

³⁸Interview #3, p.24.

community. She knew that her children endured a lot. She decided to take a positive attitude toward the suffering and plant faith in her children. She told her son when he was wronged by a white boy: "I am very proud of you. What does it mean to have faith in God? Through your good influence they can become better people. It will be a victory for you before God."³⁹

Like any other human suffering, suffering from racial discrimination can either cause the sufferer to withdraw and feel victimized, or to fight and grow stronger. As Christians, the Korean immigrants can have an advantage in dealing with suffering in the form of racial discrimination against minorities in the new land, although they might not have planned to suffer when they chose to come to America. When we consider the anti-social and often too other-worldly theological tendency in the Korean-American Christian community,⁴⁰ the Kangs' approach toward suffering of racial discrimination as ethnic minorities provides a healthy alternative.

³⁹Interview #3, p.26.

⁴⁰Dr. Ha Tae Kim's "Third Canaan" theology and Dr. Sang Hyun Lee's "Pilgrim" theology" were both developed in the 1970s in response to the urgent need of the Christian Korean immigrant community to cope with the suffering and to find meaning for their marginal existence in America. Both are criticized for their ethno-centric and escapist tendencies. An extensive analysis and critique of these theologies is given by Dr. Geunhee Yu in his doctoral dissertation titled, Pastoral Care in Pluralistic America: A Korean-American Perspective, (Nashville, TN: the Graduate School of Vanderbilt University, 1988), 124-178.

The issue of racial discrimination is a very sensitive and enduring one in America. The first-generation Korean immigrant parents meet racial discrimination against them and their children as members of a small ethnic minority with courage. If they lacked a grandiose vision for their children, it probably is because of their realism that forced them to make adjustments and not take a risk for the ones they care about most, their second-generation children. Especially as Christians, they can rise above the prevalent victim mentality of the oppressed and turn their painful experiences into spiritual benefits for themselves and their children.

The story of the first-generation Korean immigrant parents as minorities may not be a unique one, probably, similar to the stories of other Asian minorities in the U.S. whose immigration preceded them. The questions of language maintenance, ethnic identity and racial discrimination are most commonly discussed, and the solutions are diligently sought in the minority communities across the U.S. The Korean-American experience adds to the struggle, especially by bringing in the Christian perspective to the discussion, and contributes to the racial harmony and unity among the diverse ethnic communities through their age-tested Confucian ethics and positive Christian attitude toward human suffering.

CONCLUSION

In the words of Kenneth Scott Latourette, one of the best-known mission historians of our times, "...measured by its effect, Christianity has become the most potent single force in the life of mankind."¹ The Christian movement has always been the interest of many throughout its history. Informed observers of the modern Christian movement agree that the phenomenal growth of Christianity in Korea stands out as one of the most significant events in the 20th century. Prior to this, Korea has not assumed a significant role in the world's affairs, owing partly to her modest size and her location in between the two larger and more powerful neighbors, namely China and Japan, and owing partly to her consistent closed-door policy toward others. But the dawn of the 20th century saw the technological advancement enabling people who were once far removed from one another frequent each other's shores. As the century wore on, the available means of communication and transportation brought the human race closer and closer. The world as a "global village" has become a reality.

The story of the westward movement of American

¹Kenneth Scott Latourette, A History of Christianity (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), xii.

Christianity to Korea across the Pacific Ocean in the late 19th and early 20th century, is a fascinating one which the church historians began to take a closer look at in order to trace the Christianization of Korea to its roots. The story of the eastward movement of Korean Christianity to America through the Korean immigrants since the late 1960s is also a fascinating one. The timing of the arrival of a large number of Asian immigrants on American shores coincided with the increased awareness of the multicultural make-up of American society. However we may define multiculturalism, it is the reality with which we are to come to terms. Although the "melting pot" theory is largely dismissed among the sociologists, anthropologists and historians, there is yet to emerge a dominant theoretical framework with which to study the many kinds of "peoples" that make up the American society. The Korean-Americans are relatively new to this country. But, for the last several decades, they have been one of the fastest growing ethnic groups in America, exceeding one million in number today.

The Korean immigrants bring two unique elements that deserve notice: First, the majority of them are Christians. The Christianity transplanted in Korea was 19th century conservative American Protestantism. While the American church community was going through a fundamental change, conservative American Protestantism was kept fairly in tact in Korea both in its theology and practice. Second, the

Korean immigrants trace their cultural roots to the Neo-Confucianism of the Yi dynasty which dominated Korea for over five centuries from the late 14th century to the early 19th century. More than any of its counterparts among the Asian neighbors who share the common Confucian cultural roots, Korea preserved its Confucian ideals in its pristine form thanks to the zealous Neo-Confucian scholar-officials of the Yi dynasty. Although the majority of them are Christians in their religious conviction, the Korean immigrants are more Confucian in their cultural make-up than any other Asian immigrants.

It is simply a fact of life for the immigrants in America that education is the only way they and their children can move out of their marginal status into the mainstream of America. When we add to this fact the high value Koreans traditionally place in learning and their chronic elitism due to the strict social stratification in Korean society, the enthusiasm of the Korean immigrant parents for their children's education should not surprise anyone.

This research was motivated by the desire to capture the time-bound phenomenon of the first-generation Korean Christian immigrant parents' effort to rear their second-generation children in the Christian faith. It is a phenomenon in which many conflicting traditions and ideas and worldviews merge. It is also an on-going phenomenon

still in progress in the social context of America nearing the dawn of the 21st century. As an ethnographic study, this research is only an exploratory attempt. Further research needs to follow in the future to revisit the phenomenon from the vantage of later days when a new perspective is gained. In spite of its limited scope and tentative nature of a qualitative research, the following conclusions can be drawn at this time.

First, in general, the first-generation Korean immigrant parents are selective in their adaptation of the American culture. When their insistence on the hierarchical order between parents and children comes in conflict with the egalitarian claims of their American-born children, they are forced to soften their demand, but they are not ready to give it up entirely. When the Confucian tenet of the primacy of a family over its individual member comes in conflict with that of Western individualism, they are willing to adjust so that their children are treated as an individual, but at the same time, the importance of family relationships are somehow maintained, although somewhat compromised. Some have expressed their struggle with the clash of cultures as a positive learning experience. The uncompromising rigidity used to be a badge of honor to many Koreans who held on to their "pure" Confucian tradition tenaciously. But the findings of this research reveal that "flexibility" has replaced "rigidity" as a badge of honor

for the Korean immigrant parents.

Second, in general, first-generation Korean Christian immigrant parents are not willing to give up the conservative Christian belief system although they come under an increasing pressure by the secular forces of the American society to do so. The ethno-centric tendency is observed in all new immigrant communities. But the ethno-centricism of the Korean-American community is underscored by the very nature of conservatism of Korean Christianity. They do their best to preserve and pass on their faith tradition to their children. They find themselves as both a religious minority because they carry on a nineteenth century Protestant tradition, and an ethnic minority in mainstream America because they are Asian. But theirs is the unique opportunity to bring in a fresh, almost an exotic, air to the American Protestantism that has experienced a significant decline in the last half of the 20th century. Historically, it has been as a minority rather than as a majority that Christianity maintained its spiritual vigor.

Third, in general, first-generation Korean immigrant parents want their children to maintain their Korean-American identity, although with different shades of emphasis between two distinct identities. They are fully aware of the disadvantages that are associated with the minority status. But they do not wish their children to

trade their Korean-ness for acceptance into the mainstream White society. They are as fully aware of the practical impossibility of such an idea. What kind of Korean-American identity will emerge needs to be seen in the future in the lives of the second-generation. But the parents know that it will not be a simple addition of two differing peculiarities; it will be something that has been modified in the course of the merging process.

Fourth, in general, first-generation Christian Korean immigrant parents do not experience any significant differences between their Christian life in Korea and that in the U.S. This conclusion is most unexpected. It may be due to the fact that the Korean Christians can find their brand of Christian tradition with which they can identify among the diverse Christian traditions in existence in America. Or it may be due to the fact that Christianity is primarily a faith in the person and work of Jesus, rather than a propositional creed or a ritual pouched in its tradition. Whatever the reason may be, the first-generation Christian Korean immigrant parents are the energy source for their children's Christian faith, who are expected to make a meaningful contribution to the multicultural and multireligious American society.

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INTERVIEWS

[All the interviews were conducted by the researcher during the three months' period between January and March of 1995. Each interview was tape recorded in its entirety. The length of each interview depended on various circumstances. The longest one lasted 5 hours, and the shortest one lasted an hour and a half. The average length of the interviews was 3 hours and 12 minutes. The interview numbers are in chronological order, and the names are pseudonyms. All interviewees reside in the Metropolitan Chicago area.]

<u>Interview Number & Name</u>	<u>Interview Location</u>	<u>Interview Date</u>
1. Abraham & Agnes Kim	Buffalo Grove	1-5-1995
2. Bernard & Betty Lee	Arlington Heights	1-23-1995
3. Christopher & Caroline Kang	Oak Brook	2-1-1995
4. Donald & Doris Chung	Skokie	2-7-1995
5. Edith Kwon	Glenview	2-11-1995
6. Florence Yu	Glenview	2-11-1995
7. Grace Paik	Glenview	2-11-1995
8. Helen Sohn	Glenview	2-11-1995
9. Irene Oh	Chicago	2-24-1995
10. Jane Park	Chicago	3-10-1995
11. Edward & Emily Choi	Chicago	3-10-1995
12. Fred Jun	Chicago	3-12-1995
13. Lucy Yang	Elk Grove Village	3-16-1995
14. Martin & Margaret Koh	Skokie	3-27-1995

VITA

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The final copies have been examined by the director of the dissertation and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the dissertation is now given final approval by the Committee with reference to content and form.

The dissertation is, therefore, accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

25 March 1996
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