



Fragmented Ethnic Enclave and Declining Cohesion of Ethnic Return Migrants in South Korea

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Abstract

Immigration scholarship agrees that ethnic enclaves that arise from the concentrated settlement of immigrants provide opportunities for cooperation that fortify members against the host society's hostility. However, the scholarly image of cohesive enclaves often ignores the larger context that may influence the internal dynamics of the community. Drawing upon in-depth interview data from 58 Korean-Chinese immigrants in Korea, this study examines how the ethnic community experienced by coethnic immigrants is susceptible to the policies and social environment governing their presence in the host society. Our findings reveal that the ethnic enclave promotes the exchange of instrumental and expressive resources among immigrants. Yet, the Korean government's selective inclusion politics lead Korean-Chinese immigrants to duplicate the negative attitudes toward their community common among South Korean natives, resulting in the degeneration of cohesion. These findings suggest that a host society's sociopolitical practices strongly influence the interpersonal dynamics within enclaves, which are seemingly marked by unobstructed solidarity.

Keywords: Korean Chinese, immigrant enclave, immigrant cohesion, immigrant ties, ethnic return migration, coethnicity

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Introduction

Strolling along a street in the southwestern end of South Korea's capital, a visitor may come across an area that looks much like Chinatowns elsewhere, with a collage of store signs in Chinese and Korean. Conversations in Mandarin Chinese are easily heard, but the residents bringing the Chinese flavor to the area are ethnic Koreans from China. Ethnic Koreans in China have been returning to their country of origin since the early 1990s, and they now constitute the largest immigrant population in contemporary South Korea (hereafter, Korea). Of the approximately 800,000 Korean Chinese in Korea, one-third reside in Seoul, and most of them are concentrated in the southwestern region (Jun et al. 2013). Referred to as Daerim, this neighborhood and vicinity is now home to Korean-Chinese immigrants. Both incoming and settled Korean Chinese participate in economic, social, and cultural activities, and the place is seemingly a flourishing immigrant enclave,¹ supported by mutual trust and cooperation.

Studies of immigrant enclaves generally present rosy pictures. They highlight the positive effect of the dense ethnic networks and economic opportunities within enclaves (Wilson and Portes 1980). Ethnic cohesion is ascribed as the principle source of prosperity within enclaves, as well as a buffer against discrimination by the mainstream population (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993). A cursory examination of the dynamics surrounding Daerim, too, seems to indicate that social cohesion born out of exclusion propels communal prosperity within this Korean-Chinese enclave.

Despite shared ethnicity, language, culture, and phenotype with native Koreans, Korean-Chinese immigrants are treated as a distinct ethnic minority group in Korea (Seol and Skrentny 2009). Since the normalization of diplomatic relations with China in 1992, Cold War legacies have shaped the Korean government's immigration policies on "Koreans abroad." Instead

1. The term "enclave" formally refers to an ethnic market or ethnic economy, whereas "ethnic community" denotes a residentially concentrated region (Logan, et al. 2002). However, many studies use the term enclave discursively to designate social, cultural, and economic domains of immigrant communities, and thus, this study follows suit.

of fully opening doors to long-lost ethnic kin from a formerly communist country (J. Kim 2009), the state created legal barriers excluding Korean Chinese from full economic opportunities and citizenship privileges, redefining them as de facto “foreign” laborers (J. Kim 2016). In most cases, their legal status confines them to the low-paying, secondary labor market, thus encouraging native Koreans to perceive them as “racialized ethnics” (Grosfoguel 2004) inferior to and unassimilable with Koreans. The stereotypes associated with Korean Chinese have been naturally extended to their enclave, and native Koreans consider Daerim to be Seoul’s dirty, dangerous, and degraded Chinatown.² Therefore, this study asks, under the unreceptive sociopolitical and local contexts wherein the Korean-Chinese immigrants—and their enclaves—are racialized as ethnic others, does their enclave of Daerim continue to maintain ethnic cohesion? If not, how does the socially imposed prejudice affect the internal dynamics within the enclave?

Treating in-group ethnic ties as static, the prevailing view portrays segregated enclaves as an opportunity to develop cohesive ethnic networks (Menjívar 2000). However, such depiction precludes the understanding that trust and interdependence within enclaves may be susceptible to external influences from host societies. Thus, this study examines the impact of immigration policy and widespread prejudice on shaping the elements of belonging and social interactions within the ethnic enclave. In its sociological examination of the contextual dependency of social interactions, this study draws upon in-depth interview data from 58 Korean-Chinese immigrants in Korea to explore how they perceive the enclave and their relationship with community members in relation to the reception context that governs their presence in the ethnic homeland. We expect that while the enclave promotes the exchange of instrumental and expressive resources among immigrants, Daerim in Korea is porous to the influences of selective coethnic politics and widespread social hostility. The resulting “*reluctant embrace*” (J. Kim 2016) of Korean-Chinese immigrants by Korean

2. In contrast, a Chinatown in a city bordering Seoul is mostly occupied by ethnic Chinese, and it is one of the popular go-to spots for native Koreans.

society obstructs the maintenance of communal solidarity and leaves the immigrant community fragmented. The findings of this study will demonstrate how contextual and historical influences determine the manifestation of social cohesion among immigrants by shaping immigrant perceptions.

Theoretical Framework

Immigrant Community and Ethnic Cohesion

Concentrated settlements of immigrants in host societies often lead to the establishment of a flourishing economic and social community where members are connected to and cooperate with each other. Ethnic cohesion is repeatedly cited as a key aspect of immigrant enclaves in enabling immigrants to deal with disadvantaged positions and persistent discrimination (Sanders 2002). A majority of previous research considers the segregated community to be a stepping-stone toward social mobility by means of ethnic support networks and ethnic organizations (Logan et al. 2002) and has paid particular attention to enduring—and often prosperous—immigrant enclaves (Light and Bonacich 1988; Portes and Rumbaut 1990; Wilson and Portes 1980; Zhou 1992). Although negative consequences of spatial segregation in terms of decreased earnings (Xie and Gough 2011) and involvement in criminal activities (Miller and Gibson 2011) are also scrutinized, dominant perspectives on enclaves deem ethnicity to be an ontological category subject to solidarity, trust, and support, leading to the development of the thriving immigrant community and ethnic economy (Portes and Bach 1985; Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993).

By contrast, a handful of empirical studies suggest that in-group trust and cohesion are not a feature of all immigrant enclaves (D. Kim 1999; Mahler 1995; Pessar 1995). They point out within-group division and conflict as a fundamental source of group dynamics, which contradicts the assumed homogeneity in enclaves (Pessar 1995; Yoon 1997). These studies

reveal that the sociodemographic composition is often more heterogeneous than other studies acknowledge. Complex migration contexts of both home and host countries lead to within-group fragmentation along the lines of class, nationality, subethnicity, and/or time of arrival, hindering the development of mutual trust and support within immigrant groups (Alberts 2005; Light et al. 1993; Mahler 1995; Menjívar 2000; Pessar 1995; Waldinger 1995).

In addition to sociodemographic differences, factors that seem exogenous to enclave dynamics spur within-group division and conflicts. Research identifies transformation of larger regional economies (Pessar 1995), legal and social marginalization of immigrants (Mahler 1995), labor segmentation in the enclave economy (D. Kim 1999; Hill 2017), and transnational relations among immigrants (Guarnizo et al. 1999; Shin 2018) as causes of disintegration. Pessar (1995), for instance, illustrates that transformations of the larger regional economy have enhanced class divisions among Latino immigrants in the greater Washington, D.C. area and led to the erosion of group cohesion. The findings suggest that both endogenous and exogenous elements are involved in determining group dynamics of immigrant enclaves, and immigrant social cohesion is contingent upon higher forms of social, economic, and political context that enclose the enclaves.

Few empirical studies explore how immigrants themselves perceive and experience their intragroup relationships (Alberts 2009). Much research provides indirect measures of ethnic cohesion through the examination of the kinds of within-group ties among immigrants, the forms of ethnic business, or the level of ethnic identity with which individuals identify (for instance, Sanders et al. 2002; Sanders and Nee 1987). However, it is still unclear whether resource exchanges through network ties or ethnic identification create a cohesive enclave and therefore a buffer against biased social arrangements. To understand how immigrants in ethnic enclaves experience their communities, it is crucial to first explore how immigrants contextualize their ethnic communities and interactions within them with respect to the host societies.

In summary, the literature on immigrant enclaves suggests that ethnic

cohesion is a group reaction against the social hostility of the host society. In the meantime, critical literature finds that ethnic cohesion grounded in mutual trust and cooperation must be conditioned by institutional, systematic, or organizational factors encompassing immigrant groups. The core implication of these findings is that social and political factors shape the level of within-group trust and support, and thus, the construction of ethnic cohesion is bound to the larger contextual factors in which immigrants are embedded. By examining how Korean-Chinese immigrants in Korea perceive their community and in-group interactions, this study examines the intersection between reception context, perceived community, and group cohesion among coethnic immigrants.

Coethnic Migrant Policies and Contested Membership of Korean Chinese in Korea

Korean Chinese are the largest group of overseas Koreans, comprising approximately 2.6 million ethnic Koreans who are citizens of the People's Republic of China and continue to live there. They are the descendants of migrants who began to leave Korea for China in the late 19th century when impoverished farmers left the congested Korean Peninsula. The exodus continued into the early 20th century during the Japanese colonization period and lasted until the rise of the communist regime in China in 1949. The Chinese government granted Chinese citizenship to colonial settlers, officially recognized their minority ethnicity status, and accorded Korean Chinese their own autonomous region in Northeast China. Within the area, the colonial-era migrants and their descendants preserved their language and ethnocultural practices, and they regarded themselves as Chinese nationals of Korean ethnicity. Then, as the Korean government re-established diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union and China in the early 1990s, the shift in political milieu prompted many Korean Chinese to return to their long-estranged home state to seek economic opportunities.

In the meantime, Cold War legacies continue to shape the Korean government's immigration policies on "Koreans abroad," reflecting an ambivalent embrace of ethnic Koreans from a socialist state (J. Kim 2009).

The Act on Immigration and Legal Status of Overseas Koreans was enacted in the late 1990s in an attempt to reconnect overseas Koreans to South Korea (Park and Chang 2005). The original act, however, excluded Korean Chinese from applying for the overseas-Korean visa (F-4), which gives quasi-citizenship privileges and the right to apply for permanent residency and citizenship. Following the exponential increase in returning Korean Chinese as laborers and marriage migrants, the Korean government was compelled to amend the Act in 2004 to include Korean Chinese as qualifying coethnics. Despite the amendment, manifesting its continued discomfort toward coethnics from China, the policy effectively excludes the majority of Korean Chinese from returning to Korea with citizenship rights granted to select returning coethnics, such as Korean Americans (Seol and Skrentny 2009). By making proof of previous South Korean nationality a condition to acquire F-4 status, more than half of Korean Chinese—who left the Korean Peninsula before the establishment of the Republic of Korea (now, South Korea)—are unable to confirm their ties to the state (J. Kim 2016).

The government's exclusionary attitude toward Korean Chinese is further supported through its treatment of Korean-Chinese workers seeking employment in the Korean labor market. In 2007, the short-term work permit visa (H-2) was established to allow returning coethnics from China to work in low-wage sectors. By reserving a separate and substantial quota strictly for coethnics from China, the initiative acknowledged its proclivity toward Korean Chinese over culturally distinct non-coethnic migrants (Seol and Skrentny 2009). However, what appears as an ethnic privilege is, in effect, an ethnic bigotry against Korean Chinese that the work permit only allows them to seek employment in low-wage, non-professional jobs.

Marginalized yet preferred, the Korean state considers Korean Chinese as Korean-speaking alien laborers. Reflecting ambivalent coethnic policies, Korean society more broadly embraces Korean Chinese ambivalently. Employers show a pattern of exploitation of Korean-Chinese employees, withholding wages, for example, often indefinitely (Seol and Skrentny 2009). Moreover, the dominant culture has come to see Korean Chinese as an inferior *race*, and subtle differences in dialect, cultural expression, and behavioral patterns became markers of inferiority. The media portrayal of

Korean Chinese as illegal immigrants, sexual offenders, and outlaws has intensified antagonistic attitudes toward them.³ Negative racial stereotypes of Korean Chinese became common, making them subjects of fear and loathing (H. Kim 2017; Seo 2014). Empirical studies revealed that native Koreans felt closer social affinity to Americans than coethnic Koreans from China (Lee et al. 2010; Seol and Seo 2014). The challenges Korean Chinese have faced are not unique when compared with the experiences of other foreign laborers in Korea. However, the injustices Korean Chinese have felt have been more confusing and intolerable because their experiences have betrayed their initial expectations and entitlements toward their motherland and ethnic comrades (Hyejin Kim 2010).

Prejudice did not deter Korean Chinese from migrating in search of economic opportunity in a free market economy, and they are now the largest immigrant population in the country. As of 2018, about 43 percent of the 1.7 million legal foreign residents in Korea, excluding naturalized citizens, are Korean Chinese. Of the 220,000 Korean Chinese in Seoul, about 60 percent live in or near Daerim. In conjunction with the ever-expanding ethnic community, socioeconomic differentiation is a recent phenomenon observed among Korean-Chinese immigrants in Korea (Seol and Moon 2020). Some first-generation immigrants have been able to accumulate wealth and start small businesses, and a class of entrepreneurs, who accumulated wealth through activities in the enclave or brokering trade between China and Korea, emerged (Park 2020). Yet, according to Lee (2012), the majority of Korean Chinese are still employed in non-professional sectors, and the perceptible class differences between entrepreneurs and non-entrepreneurs are not significant, leading to a strong sense of affective attachments among Korean Chinese in Korea. Internal fragmentation, however, is still taking place within the Korean-Chinese community as a result of the diversified adaptation experiences in Korea and interactions with the natives (Son and Shin 2020). That is, Korean-Chinese immigrants' marginalized experiences in the host society—than individual

3. The conviction of an illegal Korean-Chinese migrant in a brutal rape and murder case in 2012 stoked this prejudice.

social differentiation—are contributing to the declining cohesion within the Korean-Chinese community (Lee 2012).

Chain migration and the growth of economic and cultural infrastructures have maintained the growth of the Korean-Chinese enclave in Korea (Hyun-sun Kim 2010). Furthermore, Daerim offers convenient access to public transportation, affordable rent, and ethnic goods and services (Lee and Kim 2014). The Korean-Chinese enclave has come to offer social, cultural, and economic resources, and the enclave embodies lived experiences and struggles between state, neighborhood, and social interactions of coethnic migrants. Hence, Daerim provides an ideal setting to investigate the impact of institutionalized prejudice on social interactions within the boundaries of an enclave.

Data and Methods

From December 2015 to April 2016, we carried out 58 in-depth interviews with Korean-Chinese adults who live in the Seoul metropolitan area. As Table 1 reflects, the sample varied by age and socioeconomic status. We interviewed 39 women and 19 men, ranging in age from 26 to 67. Their time of settlement in Korea varied from four to 25 years.

All interviewees maintained regular ties to Daerim in Seoul. They either lived or worked there or made regular visits for social occasions. About half of our sample worked in low-prestige occupations that employ many Korean Chinese in Seoul—housemaid, nanny, and waitress for women and construction worker for men. Much of the remainder were self-employed business owners, and they revealed in interviews that they had also worked in manufacturing or unskilled sectors when they first migrated to Korea. As we had attempted to ensure diversity in the living situations of the participants, our sample included immigrants with white-collar jobs, such as a Chinese-language instructor, a real estate agent, an insurance salesperson, and a business owner in the cross-border trade. Many participants attended community college after some years in Korea, such that 39.7 percent of our sample had a bachelor's degree.

Table 1. Sample Characteristics (N=58)

Characteristics	N	%
<i>Age</i>		
20–29	3	5.2
30–39	21	36.2
40–49	14	24.1
50+	20	34.5
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	19	32.8
Female	39	67.2
<i>Years in Korea</i>		
<10	19	32.8
10+	39	67.2
<i>Education</i>		
High school or less	35	60.3
BA or some college	20	34.5
MA and higher	3	5.2

We used several recruiting strategies to find study participants of varying socioeconomic backgrounds and migration histories. Using snowball sampling, we recruited people from various occupations and different residential areas within the metropolitan area of Seoul. Additionally, we sought diversified referrals through governmental organizations, local Korean-Chinese organizations, and personal contacts. All interviews took place in public places selected by the participants, and all interviews were conducted in Korean⁴ by the principal investigator, who is a native Korean. The tape-recorded interviews were transcribed by researchers and a professional transcription service. Each interview lasted from 1 to 2.5 hours.

The interviews proceeded according to a semi-structured interview protocol. This approach permits researchers to focus on a set of topics and allows unexpected patterns to surface. The interview questions explored the participants' experiences with visiting, living, or working in the enclave;

4. Most Korean Chinese are fluent in both Korean and Mandarin.

motives for migration; immigration experiences; ethnic identity; and their daily lives in Korea, including employment, personal relationships, and family life. The interview transcripts were entered into a qualitative data management software, NVivo, which was used for our data management and analysis. This paper focuses on interviewees' statements about their spatial and sociocontextual experiences as coethnic immigrants.

The interview data were analyzed using grounded theory analysis (Charmaz 2006). The first phase involved open coding of interview transcripts. In the initial coding, we identified meaningful words and patterns within the data based upon existing theories regarding immigrant experiences, while remaining open to an array of theoretical possibilities. In the second phase of analysis, axial coding, we derived linkages among structural limitations, intragroup attachment, and other emergent variables (Glaser 1978). In the final phase of theoretical coding, the selected patterns in the data concerned fragmenting in-group trust and how immigrants' life situations in Korea shaped the emerged detachment. In the results section, we present our findings on ways limited inclusion and sociopolitical marginalization in Korea influence Korean-Chinese immigrants' in-group cooperation, attachment, and trust.

Results

As native Korean researchers, we were delighted at first to learn of the sheer size and vibrancy of the Korean-Chinese enclave in Seoul. The wider society marginalizes and ethnicizes Korean Chinese, but within the bounded region, they are the majority, and they are the primary vehicles of the local economy. Based on our prior understanding of immigrant enclaves, we first perceived Daerim as a promised land, where coethnic migrants could fulfill their cultural needs and seek socioeconomic mobility through intragroup cooperation and support. However, our anticipation of unearthing a vibrant ethnic community was shattered once Korean-Chinese interviewees described the area as “filthy,” “undesirable,” and most unexpectedly, “hopeless.”

Study participants endorse Daerim as an ethnic center, but at the same time, they disparage it as degraded. Their ambivalence toward Daerim extends to the Korean-Chinese community, and the overwhelming majority of the participants express fragmenting attachments to intragroup members and their community. While most interviewees physically stay linked to the enclave and its benefits by engaging in coethnic connections, their perceptions of the community contradict the scholarly image of the supportive enclave (Wilson and Portes 1980).

The discourse of fragmenting ties among immigrants is not new (Menjívar 2000; Dinesen and Hooghe 2010). For our participants, however, internal divisions are pervasive and are occurring regardless of factors internal to the immigrant group, such as gender, socioeconomic status, generation, and acculturation. According to their statements, the declining cohesion results from the larger context in which Korean Chinese are positioned in Korean society. By highlighting that immigrant communities do not exist in a social vacuum, we demonstrate how Korean-Chinese immigrants have internalized contextually imposed prejudice against the group. The findings suggest that immigrant dynamics—which are seemingly impervious to external influences—are shaped by the sociopolitical realities and life chances encountered by immigrants.

The Immigrant Enclave as Paradoxical Community

1) Daerim as Ethnic Center

Moon-Chul⁵ is a 62-year-old man who came to Daerim from Yanbian⁶ in the late 2000s. He works as a reporter for an ethnic newspaper in the neighborhood. When asked about how he decided to reside in the Daerim area, he replied:

5. All names of interviewees in this study are pseudonyms.

6. Yanbian is the most urbanized region in northeast China, and over 60 percent of the population in Yanbian are ethnic Koreans.

A majority of Korean Chinese still prefer to live in the Daerim area. I chose to settle here because it's close to my work and because Korean Chinese are concentrated in the area. There are numerous Korean Chinese organizations in the neighborhood, and it's very convenient to live and work here. *I can't even imagine me living in Gangnam.*⁷ The rent in Gangnam is way too expensive, and cheap rental units are nonexistent, there. [...] I have some friends who live in Gangnam. Most of us live in places that are less than one million won [about US\$900], and the quality of these houses are hard to imagine for most Koreans. Still, it is convenient for us to live here in Daerim. The living expenses are cheaper, and there is Chinese cuisine everywhere. I still can't drink Korean soju.⁸ I only eat Chinese food. So the neighborhood suits me well.⁹

Moon-Chul chose to reside in Daerim not just because of its proximity to his office, but also because it provides access to affordable housing, ethnic organizations, intragroup networks, and authentic Chinese restaurants. Our interviewees unanimously describe Daerim and its vicinity as the largest ethnic neighborhoods for Korean Chinese, and most of them agree that Daerim is one of the best options for them to settle down, or at least start a business and find a job.

Interviewees agree that Daerim offers access to valuable resources necessary for survival and allows them to stay involved in ethnic networks (Min and Bozorgmehr 2000). As an adaptive response to the structural barriers, active exchanges of ethnic resources in Daerim offer a fallback, leading to the success of immigrant businesses. Some interviewees utilized their in-group acquaintances to find a job; others work in or start new businesses that target Korean Chinese. Sun-Hwa is a 54-year-old woman who immigrated ten years ago. At first, she worked as a waitress at a restaurant owned by a Korean. A few years later, she started her own karaoke and later a bar for Korean-Chinese customers in Daerim. As she explained:

7. Meaning *south of Han River*, this district within Seoul is an emblem of sophistication and affluence.

8. A clear, distilled rice liquor popular with Koreans.

9. Moon-Chul, interview by the first author, Seoul, November, 30, 2015.

If we want to start our own business, we have to deal with Korean-Chinese clientele. There's a risk in doing business for Koreans, and the probability of failure goes way up. And doing business for Korean Chinese is not only convenient, but also, it's very unlikely that we'll fail.¹⁰

Sun-Hwa acknowledged that Korean Chinese have a restricted set of occupational options, such as manual labor for men or waitressing for women. Starting ethnic businesses in Daerim is a way to limit the impact of occupational barriers, lower labor wages, and discriminatory treatment by Korean employers.

In addition to the material benefits, the dense ethnic networks in Daerim provide immigrants with alternative means to expressive resources. Many participants agree that they stay close to the ethnic area to seek comfort from Korean-Chinese friends, ethnic food, and the familiar environment. As they put it, Daerim is *little Yanbian* in Korea. A 50-year-old woman, Sook-Ja immigrated 22 years ago. She lives in Daerim and runs an employment agency for Korean Chinese seeking jobs. Sook-Ja said she is willing to pay higher rent to live in Daerim than she might pay elsewhere because she prefers to stay close to other Korean-Chinese acquaintances:

See, Korea is a foreign land for us. It's normal to feel isolated if you're an alien, and people are willing to travel miles to share a drink or two with friends and drive away loneliness. So people stay close enough to Daerim and save themselves the cab fare. There can be other places that offer cheaper housing, but we stay here because we have many, many friends here. And that is what's good about Daerim.¹¹

In short, just as past research suggests, Daerim supplies marginalized immigrants with indispensable instrumental and expressive resources for their survival in an unreceptive *foreign* land away from home.

10. Sun-Hwa, interview by the first author, Seoul, January, 7, 2016.

11. Sook-Ja, interview by the first author, Seoul, March, 22, 2016.

2) Daerim as a Marginalized Community

Almost all interviewees are well aware that Korean society and the Korean state ethnicize them as a distinct and inferior *foreign* ethnic group, despite the fact that they share the *same roots* as native Koreans and consider themselves to be Koreans by ethnicity (Seol and Skrentny 2009). Ock-Ryun is a 44-year-old housewife and is a naturalized citizen, the wife of a Korean man. She emphasized she had met her husband while working as a waitress and that she had lived in Korea for 20 years. During her interview, she said:

Koreans describe coethnic Chinese as “What are they? They are neither Koreans nor Chinese, and so, what are they?” Even after we become naturalized citizens, we still are not Koreans and that fact will never change. I am now a citizen of South Korea, but once a coethnic alien, I will be eternally perceived as Korean Chinese. But then, when I come to think about it objectively; I’ve lived long enough in Korea, but still, there are so many things about Korea that I do not know. So it’s quite logical that I’m discriminated against by other Koreans. I often interact with other Koreans and talk this and that with them. When a topic on early childhood [in Korea] surfaces, for an instance, I have no idea about that generation or what happened thereafter. There clearly is a gap between Koreans and coethnic Koreans, and I’m very much certain about that.¹²

Ock-Ryun feels that Koreans have only marginally accepted her, and she justifies the prejudice associated with Korean Chinese since they possess a restricted set of cultural repertoires as Koreans. Ock-Ryun and other interviewees agree that neither ancestral ties nor naturalization will lead to full acceptance and belonging as Koreans (Choi 2006) and that they will be perpetually described as dirty, deceiving, and trouble-making.

The perceived social image of Korean Chinese shapes interviewees’ perception of Daerim. They use similar words to describe Daerim and Korean-Chinese immigrants. They describe their community as troubled by filth and outlaws, in line with stereotypes of their group. Soon-Jung, a

12. Ock-Ryun, interview by the first author, Seoul, January, 25, 2016.

37-year-old woman and a waitress, recently purchased a home in Daerim with her husband, who is also Korean Chinese. When asked how safe she feels in her new home, she stated:

There are many foreigners here, and that I think is the cause behind many crimes and troubles in the area. And also, a lot of things have changed, and it's unlike the old times. Our time today is much more dangerous than the past and misfortunes happen for no specific reason. But still, I think this area is much more unsafe because there are more foreigners than natives here.¹³

Although Soon-Jung chose to settle in Daerim because of the concentration of coethnic immigrants, she also feels “foreigners,” including Korean-Chinese immigrants, make it unsafe. She and her husband hope to move out to “calmer and safer” regions in Seoul when they accumulate enough money. Other interviewees made similar statements about Daerim. While they live, work, or make frequent visits to the ethnic region because of the concentration of Korean Chinese, they also blame Korean Chinese for what they perceive as a distasteful environment.

Also in line with stereotypes, interviewees describe Daerim as culturally lagging behind the rest of Korean society and its occupants as “unassimilable.” Many interviewees resonate the stereotype generated by the dominant society and understand the enclave as the physical manifestation of their marginalized status as *othered* coethnic foreigners. These interviewees see Daerim as “fenced” or culturally impenetrable, suggesting that community members remain unacculturated and subaltern to native Koreans.

Hong-Joo lives with his mother in Korea in a part of Seoul that is about an hour from Daerim by taxi. A professional in a multinational firm, he makes almost daily visits to Daerim after work to assuage his loneliness with old friends and has seriously contemplated moving there. But he recognizes that there would be a price to pay:

13. Soon-Jung, interview by authors, Seoul, January, 6, 2016.

If you live like that [in Daerim] it's like living in a distant land away from Korean society. You don't experience Korean society at all, and you continue to live as Korean Chinese, just in a different country. I think it doesn't do you any good at all. It doesn't really matter if you plan to settle permanently in Daerim and live as one of the Korean Chinese. But I think living like that [among other Korean Chinese] doesn't benefit you in any way. When you do your hobbies, for instance, you have to mingle with other Koreans, so you learn the language as fast as possible and transform the way you conduct business or behave into the Korean way. But if you stay in this neighborhood and stay among Korean Chinese, you don't change at all. It's really hard to change how you think and act if you stay here.¹⁴

Hong-Joo feels that living in Daerim prevents Korean Chinese from adapting to the mainstream society. He sees the Korean language as “sophisticated,” calling Korean-Chinese accents “distasteful” and describes Korean culture as “superior.” Although Hong-Joo cherishes the emotional comfort he receives from Daerim, he believes the social costs associated with immersing himself in the core of the Korean-Chinese community are too high.

Interviewees' ambivalent understanding of the enclave complicates its role in providing a buffer against a society that marginalizes them. Seeing it both as an ethnic cultural center and as a culturally degraded ghetto presents contradictory images of the enclave that echo mainstream Korean society's perceptions and arrangements toward the community and its constituents. These results demonstrate that participants are socially embedded actors who respond to structural constraints, and their perceptions respond as much to the social, political, and economic arrangements within the larger society than the community in which they are routinely involved.

14. Hong-Joo, interview by the first author, Seoul, February, 4, 2016.

Fragmented Cohesion within the Immigrant Enclave

All interviewees consider Daerim as an ethnic locus where intragroup resources are actively exchanged and promoted. Yet, they reproduce the societal bias associated with the enclave by acknowledging it as degraded and segregated. This susceptibility of the immigrant subjectivities to the larger sociocultural order, based on their consciousness of the barriers Korean society places on Korean Chinese, affects their relationships with other in-group members.

Interviewees consistently report detachment from other Korean Chinese and dissolution of community represented by collective consciousness. A significant number of participants agreed that it is difficult—if not impossible—to forge meaningful ties with other coethnics in Korea. Gil-Ho is a 40-year-old man from Heilongjiang province who works at a factory in Korea. He lives in the ethnic neighborhood with his family, and his wife works at a rice cake shop in the Daerim area. He retains close ties with old friends from his hometown in China, but he felt that there was little cohesion among Korean Chinese in Korea. He acknowledges his own role in fragmentation, saying he refrained from becoming “too close” with new acquaintances:

Korean Chinese in China act together as a group. They bond together. Even though the other person is not from one's own hometown and is from somewhere else in China, Korean Chinese instantaneously act as one. But it's not like that in Korea. There are many Korean Chinese in Korea now, but if the other person isn't one of your old acquaintances from back home in China, it's really hard to unify as a whole. See, I'm from Heilongjiang province in China, but when I go to Jilin province and meet other coethnics, we just naturally cooperate as a group. We are minorities in China, and Han Chinese are the majority, so we come together in solidarity. No one person has to lead the way to bring people together. It just happens in China. But it's not like that for us here [in Korea].¹⁵

15. Gil-Ho, interview by the first author, Seoul, January, 31, 2016.

The Korean government's arbitrary bureaucratic practices seemingly play a role in declining cohesion among Korean-Chinese immigrants. Notably, the Korean-Chinese community is partitioned according to their region of origin in China (J. Kim 2009). The Korean government requires Korean Chinese to prove their ancestral ties through colonial era family registration documents to gain entry into the country, and this practice favors those from certain regions in Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture, who were more likely to be registered in the colonial system (J. Kim 2016). This advantage that southerners gained over northerners in venturing into Korean society contributed to within-group conflicts among the immigrants in Korea based on their region of origin.

Interviewees suggest that fragmentation largely relates to the regional divide within the Korean-Chinese community. Those from the southern province take pride in their linguistic and cultural compatibility with South Koreans, suggesting that northerners in Yanbian have a closer affinity to North Korea. They claim that this pattern explains inequality in hiring, saying that Korean employers prefer migrants from Heilongjiang because they are "like Koreans." They suggest that the bad behavior of northerners explains detrimental stereotypes of Korean Chinese. Similarly, those from Yanbian blame unsophisticated country peasants down south for ravaging the collective representation of the Korean-Chinese community and emphasize that unrefined behaviors exhibited by those peasants are not representative of *all* Korean Chinese.

The limited embrace of Korean Chinese by Korean society has also exacerbated the individual struggle for inclusion and intragroup schism along the acculturation continuum. Participants unanimously recognize their collective reputation as unskilled *foreigners* and the ethnic fault line between the natives and Korean Chinese based on subtle sociocultural differences. With the perceived need to assimilate and shirk the collective stereotypes associated with the group, the ethnic stratification delineated by the state has intensified the intragroup hierarchy and fragmentation along the acculturation line within the Korean-Chinese community.

While interviewees exhibit varied responses across assimilative tendencies, those who feel acculturated most actively isolate themselves

from others who seem too *ethnic*. Ryun-Sil is a 49-year-old woman, who exhibits a strong proclivity for Korean values. Despite her active involvement in a nonprofit organization for Korean Chinese, she feels culturally incompatible with other Korean Chinese. As she described:

Those whom I regularly meet are Koreans. Normally, when I want to have a drink or two, I call my Korean friends. [...] There is a substantial gap among Korean Chinese. There is a big gap in “the level.”¹⁶

As a way to describe her intragroup ties, Ryun-Sil notes there is a difference in *the level* among Korean Chinese. While the English loanword is routinely used by Koreans to denote class, rank, and status, Ryun-Sil uses it to describe intragroup hierarchy based on cultural conduct and competence in Korea. It is clear in context that she feels Korean Chinese are inferior to Koreans. She attributes two types of unfavorable behavior to Korean Chinese:

I can't drink [alcohol]. When I go out for a drink with friends and coethnics from China, they insist that I drink even though I cannot consume alcohol. I'm the person who abstains from alcohol as much as possible. But when I have a drink with Koreans, they don't insist that I drink. They're perfectly fine with the fact that I would rather drink water or soda. So there are those sorts of differences among Korean Chinese. [...] Also, there's a kind of person among Korean Chinese who asks if they'll get paid for participating in a voluntary activity, which is a total absurdity.¹⁷

Throughout the interview, Ryun-Sil repeatedly emphasized “cultural difference” and “cultural diversity” among Korean Chinese and that she does not “eat out in restaurants located in the middle of Daerim.” Though she also lives and works in the neighborhood, she describes it as an isolated fortress where unassimilable *others* stay, calling the area “distasteful” to those who are more “civilized and refined.” Ryun-Sil was particularly focused on

16. Ryun-Sil, interview by the first author, Seoul, March, 1, 2016.

17. Ryun-Sil, interview by the first author, Seoul, March, 1, 2016.

distinguishing herself from other Korean Chinese, but in fact almost every interviewee, regardless of occupation, legal status, and time of arrival, found one way or another to distinguish himself or herself from intragroup counterparts, albeit to varying degrees.

The fragmenting ethnic attachment within the community became even more salient when interviewees acknowledged preferences for instrumental relationships with Koreans. Their experiences of ethnicization as foreigners have shaped the way that migrants perceive themselves and their community, and with the apparent belief in their inferiority, they justify instrumental ties with the natives. These interviewees believe working with other Korean Chinese carries risks, in line with the biased arrangement of the Korean government. That is, they perceive Korean employees as cultured natives and Korean-Chinese employees as unsophisticated foreigners. Dong-Wook, a man in his early 30s, runs a pub in Daerim. He said that he prefers to hire native-born Koreans over Korean Chinese. Koreans, he says, are “more organized, self-sufficient, and reliable,” while Korean Chinese lack sophistication and loyalty because they are “unskilled foreigners.”¹⁸ Similarly, Seok-Jin, a 38-year-old man, says his sole employee is Korean because Koreans are more “competent and suitable” for managing paperwork and making transactions with Korean companies.

Seok-Jin also says that since he started his business he does not “hang out with other Korean Chinese,” even though he continues to live and work in Daerim.¹⁹ A number of those interviewed have, in fact, disengaged with intragroup members in personal spheres. They associate with intragroup peers of a comparable or seemingly acceptable acculturation status in relation to themselves and maintain distance from coethnics who seem like *others* from China. Sung-Ran is a 55-year-old real estate agent in Daerim who carries out daily transactions with ethnic clientele. But she stresses that they are nothing more than clients. Moreover, she notes that she maintains her distance from old acquaintances from her hometown because “things have changed” since they came to Korea. She, like Ryun-Sil, uses the English

18. Dong-Wook, interview by the first author, Seoul, January, 23, 2016.

19. Seok-Jin, interview by the first author, Seoul, January, 23, 2016.

loanword “level”:

A lot of my friends are in Korea, so I get to meet them once in a while, but most of them work at construction sites or restaurants or even got themselves into sex work. They're not bad people. But if you do engage in those kinds of jobs, it's only natural that you level yourself down to that environment. At first, I got excited with the anticipation of meeting my old friends, but after actually meeting them, they were not the same people I used to know in school. They used to be good, but now, things have changed. My job isn't that lucrative, but I have my [real estate] license, and I believe I'm better acculturated when compared to those people. [...] I went out a couple of times recently to meet my old friends from school, and it's not as enjoyable as it used to be. There's this difference in the *level*. They've changed while going back and forth [between China and Korea]. We've changed socially. And we don't click as we used to. The *level* is not compatible anymore.²⁰

Like Ryun-Sil, Sung-Ran uses the English loanword when she says, “the level.” Like most interviewees, she describes Korean ways as modern and advanced. The interviewees' comments reflect an internal hierarchy according to perceived degrees of acculturation, suggesting that visible signs of ethnic markers or behavioral patterns that went against Korean norms were backward and degrading. It was common for Korean Chinese to distance themselves from other Korean Chinese as a move toward full cultural assimilation, denigrating other Korean Chinese who retained ethnic traits as untrustworthy *foreigners* from China.

Despite the critique that assimilation has lost its significance, the processes of assimilation and internal stratification over time remain the long-term trend for most immigrant groups (Alba and Nee 1997). Yet, for ethnic immigrants in Korea, the biased perception is accelerating within-group fragmentation according to the perceived level of acculturation and serves as a kernel of tension and distrust. The reception context has stimulated internal dissonance among immigrants, and shared cultural

20. Sung-Ran, interview by the first author, Seoul, December, 9, 2015.

identity and discriminatory experiences as Korean Chinese have become insufficient to prompt in-group trust and cohesion.

Discussion

This research on coethnic immigrants in the ethnic enclave of Korea's Daerim illustrates the processes by which the state's coethnic immigration politics and society's biases shape immigrants' experiences of community and, ultimately, their intragroup cohesion. Although the Korean-Chinese community in Seoul boasts a flourishing ethnic economy and communal vigor, findings reveal that the state's prejudicial stance toward Korean Chinese as well as that of the majority of Koreans has a negative effect on in-group trust and cohesion. While previous research suggests that class, time of arrival, and legal status give rise to internal division within immigrant groups (Pessar 1995), most of our interviewees do not make such distinctions. Instead, they have internalized negative bias toward their group, and almost all—including those who can benefit more from opportunities in the enclave than participation in the secondary labor market—denigrate their own community and its members. Hence, we find that biased social and political arrangements take on meaningful presence within the Korean-Chinese enclave.

The structural conditions against which ethnic communities are embedded condition the continuity of cohesive enclaves and supportive intragroup relations (Menjívar 2000). Although the solidarity within enclaves arises as a result of common experiences of discrimination and thus, emerging ties within enclaves are context-dependent (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993), we find that some contexts of external discrimination take precedence in shaping immigrant communities. In the case of Korean Chinese in Korea, the political salience of coethnic politics not only guides individual-level interactions; it also hinders Korean-Chinese immigrants from developing intragroup relationships grounded in trust. In the context where formal measures selectively bar mobility, coethnic immigrants develop a constellation of group allegiances in place of strong ethnic

attachment founded in a sense of common fate. The immigrant enclave without collective group attachment in Korea has become a paradoxical terrain, where ethnic migrants are reminded of their marginalized status and experience dissipating in-group ties as a community.

By elaborating on the sociopolitical influence in the perceived community and communal cohesion, this study's findings suggest that collective activities and common experiences do not always lead to the development of trust and cooperation within an ethnic group. In contrast to prior research that suggested immigrant enclaves achieve within-group cohesion, a pervasive distrust characterizes the Korean-Chinese community in Korea, discouraging the formation of in-group cooperation. This suggests that immigrant enclaves may be rather porous to the higher forms of arrangements where immigrants are accommodated, and the socially disenfranchised immigrants in a stigmatized community can be receptive to contextual marginalization, leading to declining trust and cooperation among intragroup peers (Guarnizo et al. 1999; Menjívar 2000). The findings support the idea that immigrant perceptions are embedded in the web of institutions, where immigrants are marginalized, and interactions between the host culture and immigrants shape social ties and cohesion among immigrants (Hill 2017).

Future studies need to explore internal asymmetry beyond apparent solidarity in immigrant communities. The existing literature reports that sociodemographic heterogeneity among immigrants explains the effect of the within-group divide on community dynamics and socioeconomic outcomes (Zhou 1992; Pessar 1995; Min 1996). The Korean-Chinese community in Korea indeed is experiencing internal differentiation according to socioeconomic status (Lee 2012; Park 2020; Seol and Moon 2020). Yet, for the Korean Chinese in our study, a sociopolitical factor, that is, their reception by the mainstream, had more proximate influence in inducing internal boundaries and isolating individuals within the immigrant community. This implies that within-group heterogeneity results not only from predetermined sociodemographic characteristics but that it also emerges after immigration through the politics of the host culture and individual differences in acculturation.

Many historical studies have illustrated the holistic racial forces, including political, economic, and cultural factors that shape dynamics within immigrant communities (Zhou 1992; Loewen 1988). However, as the dominant perspective on immigrant enclaves equates ethnic segregation with mobility and opportunity, the impact of the wider contexts on accessing an immigrant support network and mobilizing ethnic resources has been much neglected. Future research needs to address the interplay between social interactions and contextual arrangements and how group cohesion may take on a different social meaning depending on the reception environment and agencies involved. Moreover, our study is not an affirmation that loosely held community negatively affects immigrant outcomes. We instead propose that less cohesive immigrant enclaves may—or may not—operate more effectively under certain conditions. Thus, future immigrant studies must consider both larger sociopolitical and historical contexts as well as community-specific factors when conceptualizing ethnic neighborhoods as satiated with in-group trust and affinity. Further research on the consequences of ethnic fragmentation within different contexts is needed.

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