



Sojourning Korean Expatriate Families and the Ethnic Enclave in Hanoi

K. C. HO,* Hae Young YUN,** and Jeehun KIM*

Abstract

Vietnam's new manufacturing status is driven in part by South Korean investments. This paper examines two groups of expatriate Koreans in Hanoi—skilled/managerial workers and the Korean small-business workers. The high concentration of expatriate workers in Hanoi has given rise to the Korean ethnic enclave of My Dinh, many of whose establishments are owned, managed, and serviced by Koreans. The easy availability of services offered by these businesses enables a culture-based support of Korean expatriates in a new city, and the reproduction of Korean life through consumption. Our paper contributes to the literature on the ethnic economy by identifying the nature of customer support for Korean ethnic enterprises. By highlighting the Korean-owned-and-managed small business character of the urban ethnic economy, we demonstrate the importance of consumption in allowing Korean ways of life to be maintained in a new city. We extend our analysis to Vietnamese consumers of Korean businesses and argue that such enterprises create new opportunities for the growing Vietnamese middle class to develop new consumption practices in a growing cosmopolitan city.

Keywords: Korean diaspora, Vietnam, ethnic enclave, Korean small businesses, Korean expatriates, migration in Asia, ethnic economy, Korean Wave, Koreatown

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Introduction

An ethnic enclave is defined by Zhou (2013) as a settlement that has a strong ethnic concentration and where businesses are typically owned and staffed by members of the same ethnic group. In the urban studies literature, the ethnic enclave economy has played an important role in the integration of immigrant and minority groups. Not only is the enclave able to provide jobs (Portes and Manning 2012; A. Kim 2015), but also social support, contributing to a sense of identity and belonging to members of the spatial community (Bae and Montello 2018; Bacchus 2020).

Yet, studies of ethnic enclaves have also highlighted the diversity of such settlements. In the North American literature, many of the enclaves described are found in its inner cities and are products of earlier waves of immigration. As the next generation (the children of the original immigrants) grows up, their identification and affiliation with the enclaves of their parents weakens considerably, prompting them to move away from these overcrowded enclaves to better quality housing. As a result, the ethnic enclave declines, as in the case of Little Syria in New York City (Shibley 2018). In other cases, older enclaves gain reputations as ethnic commercial hubs. Such is the case of Koreatown, Manhattan, where the enclave becomes an essential commercial hub for ethnic businesses largely associated with consumption, leisure, and entertainment (J. Kim 2018). The Chinatowns in the inner cities of Toronto and London have likewise become better known for their restaurants and grocery shops (Lo 2006; Sales et al. 2009), as businesses become symbols and indicators of ethnic place identity.

However, the diversity of ethnic enclaves means that they are not simply found in urban areas. Researchers have also noted that ethnic enclaves have followed residential movements into the suburbs, as the case of Chinese and Korean businesses in suburban Toronto (Qadeer and Kumar 2006; Fong et al. 2007). As suburban neighborhoods are typically low-density, Fong et al. (2007, 123) suggest that ethnic businesses are clustered in neighborhoods with a higher ethnic concentration to draw on support and market information.

The diversity of ethnic enclaves makes it imperative that conducted

research specifies one, the factors that contribute to the growth of an immigrant population that supports the enclave; two, the dynamics of consumption for the services in the ethnic enclave; and three, the enclave's location in the city. Accordingly, this paper takes, as context, the growing Korean foreign direct investments in Hanoi and the accompanying growth of a Korean corporate expatriate sojourning population as the impetus behind the growth of a Korean enclave economy. We build on H. Kim's (2020) term "enclave of liveability." While H. Kim (2020) points to the emergence of an enclave of residences and ethnic Korean commercial businesses, we take this analysis a step further by drawing on interviews with Korean merchants¹ (the self-expatriated migrant group) to understand how these businesses provide a service to support the liveability concerns of Korean sojourners. We achieve this through interviews with merchants, who provided us a description of their business activities, as well as interviews with expatriate spouses,² who formed an important customer perspective in showing how such goods and services were of important value to Koreans living in Hanoi. We also draw from interviews with Korean expatriate spouses and Korean managers stationed in Hanoi³ to discuss the limited opportunities for relationships between Korean expatriates and their Vietnamese hosts. These limited opportunities further reinforce the dependence Korean expatriate sojourners have on the Korean enclave.

This paper aims to use these three sources of interviews and observations to construct a cultural and economic logic to the existence of

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1. The interviews with merchants were conducted by the first and second authors in 2019 and comprised the 19 shops in the My Dinh area, another 2 real estate companies in the Lotte area, and 4 shops in the adjacent Truong Hoa area, which used to have a stronger Korean residential presence before the new establishment of the My Dinh area.
 2. The interviews with expatriate spouses were conducted by the second author in 2019 and comprised a total of 40 interviews: 20 interviews with spouses in Calidas and another 20 in Lotte.
 3. The third author also interviewed residents of Calidas and Lotte, covering a total of nine families. Additionally, he conducted 12 expert interviews with senior and mid-managers (working for a real estate agency, developers, and construction companies) and 4 Korean government and agency officers (Korean Embassy, Korea International Cooperation Agency [KOICA], and the Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency [KOTRA]).

the Korean ethnic economy and the way these businesses support consumption-based sojourner identities in Hanoi. We do this by looking at the consumption of expatriate Korean families in their everyday lives, and analyzing how these businesses are critical to the identities of Koreans as they make their lives in a new city. We also explain how the high-rise, high-density suburban Korean enclave in Hanoi comes about and how this location shapes the nature of the enclave and its businesses. Lastly, we focus our attention on understanding the increasing patronage of the Vietnamese middle class of some of these ethnic businesses in the wake of the popularity of the Korean Wave. Our conceptual contribution to the literature on the ethnic economy demonstrates the role of cultural consumption in reinforcing the cultural identities of Korean expatriates and the emerging consumption identities of the rising Vietnamese middle class in a rapidly developing city in the Global South.

Understanding the Context of Korean Migration to Global South Countries

While Koreans have a long history of migration (Yoon 2012), a significant source of recent Korean movements to Global South countries is tied to Korean foreign direct investments. Korean companies have been driven by the appreciation of the Korean *won* as well as increased domestic labor costs to move production operations to Southeast Asia (S. Park 1995, 160; Byun and Walsh 1998, 101). Vietnam, with its successful economic reforms in the 1980s, its proximity to Korea, and its attractive conditions for industrial production (low-wage skilled workers, cheap land, and a stable political environment), has become a major recipient destination of Korean investments (Byun and Walsh 1998; H. Kim 2019; 2020). Between 2014 and 2019, Korea was one of the countries with the highest total accumulated foreign direct investments (FDI), followed by Japan, Singapore, and Taiwan (KOTRA 2020). From a Korean perspective, in 2017, 61 percent of the country's FDI in the manufacturing sector within Asia went to Vietnam (B. Park 2018, 12), and the latest figures for January 2021 show that Vietnam is

Korea's third-largest export destination.⁴ Both Vietnam and Korea have increasingly relied on each other over the past two decades in terms of global production chains, exports and imports, as well as the exchange of people from both sides (J. Kim et al. 2022, 8–18).

The estimates of such investments by Korean companies in Vietnam by KOTRA (2020) and B. Park (2018) point not only to the recency but also to the scale of the Korean economic presence in manufacturing. Earlier in the 1990s and 2000s, FDI from Korea to Vietnam was mostly located in southern Vietnam (in particular, Ho Chi Minh City and its environs), and centered on labor-intensive industries such as the garment industry. From the 2010s onward, following the development strategies of the Vietnamese government, FDI in electronic industries was instead concentrated in Hanoi and its vicinity.

The flow of FDI has thus resulted in the creation of overseas subsidiaries that are supported by a class of workers that are expatriate, skilled, managerial, and technical. The tendency to staff senior positions of overseas subsidiaries with home country nationals needs further explanation. While the literature on expatriate staffing of overseas subsidiaries mentions the need for communication and coordination (Delios and Bjorkman 2000; Gaur et al. 2007; Widmier et al. 2008; Kühlmann and Hutchings 2010; Kang and Shen 2017), the strategic importance of sending co-nationals abroad as expatriates are more important for Korea and Japan because of the language and communication necessary between the headquarters and subsidiaries. Beamish and Inkpen (1998, 37) point out that in the case of Japan, the years of socialization through education and training in a homogeneous culture increase the preference for expatriate Japanese over local nationals. Kang and Shen's (2017, 64) interviews with managers of Korean companies in China report essentially similar reasons. As a result of this tendency, the population of Koreans in the greater Hanoi area, according to figures from the Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has grown from 11,000 in 2013 to 80,120 in 2019 (MOFA 2019). The rapid growth of Koreans in Hanoi provides an important

4. KITA (Korea International Trade Association), <https://stat.kita.net/stat/kts/ctr/CtrTotalImpExpList.screen> (accessed February 26, 2021).

consumer base for the formation of the enclave economy in Hanoi.

The impermanent stay of Korean sojourners keeps them socially and culturally focused on their home country, which they will eventually return to. This, therefore, influences their daily life and consumption patterns in their temporary home in Hanoi. Furthermore, owing to their enhanced expatriate salaries in a Global South country, the consumption patterns of expatriate Koreans and their families take on a particularly affluent and privileged character. Secondly, unlike the central locations of Chinatowns and Koreatowns in other cities, My Dinh, as a newer development, is located some distance away from the Hanoi city center. As such, and verified through our interviews with shop operators, My Dinh's clientele is mainly Koreans with some local Vietnamese. Importantly, My Dinh does not cater to tourists and visitors to the city, unlike other older enclaves, creating a more authentic Korean experience for consumers. Thirdly, My Dinh is also distinctive because a significant number of businesses in this area are operated by self-expatriated Korean migrants in Hanoi.

The presence of these two distinct clienteles—Koreans and Vietnamese—enables us to build two arguments based on the concept of cultural consumption and its impact on social relations. First, Korean sojourners to a new city engage in cultural consumption as a way of stabilizing their everyday lives and identities by ensuring a cultural continuity through access to essentials that are distinctly Korean. Consumption thus acts as a bridge between Hanoi and Korea, and is also the rationale for Korean enterprises in My Dinh.

Secondly, consumption also has a Vietnamese audience developed through popular media. The strength of the Korean wave is reflected in its popular media products and its demonstrative effects on cultural consumption worldwide. As Dutch (2019) notes, fans develop an imagination from K-dramas and act on this through the consumption of Korean products. Huh and Wu's (2017) analysis using panel data of Korean exports supplements Dutch's findings, showing a positive link between the growth of Korean Wave exports and consumer goods. In Vietnam, Lee, Chae, and Lew's (2020) study has shown how Korean dramas have resulted in a positive image of Korea among the Vietnamese, with an influence on purchasing

intent, particularly cosmetics. Beyond Vietnam, the spread and popularity of Korean popular culture overseas has had a strong influence on food, fashion, and tourism, and is supported by case studies in Taiwan (Huang 2011), Singapore (Lim 2019) and a media report on India (Ramesh 2020).

This link between popular culture and cultural consumption suggests My Dinh's important role in contributing to a more vibrant cosmopolitan culture by disseminating a Korean aesthetic (a contemporary and commercialized sense of beauty and adornment) and taste to the local population. We also argue that the absence of the tourism factor in My Dinh, along with Korean businesses catering to Koreans, create for the Vietnamese a more authentic Korean cultural experience without a conscious accommodation to local tastes and preferences, as well as a local consumer experience that is more exploratory and less scripted. Moreover, the majority of the businesses we interviewed are operated by Korean owners. This is significant because owner-operators become stable fixtures in the neighborhood, working harder to establish relations with customers as part of efforts to develop a stable clientele. This has the effect of strengthening relationships between merchants and customers. Thus, it is the interplay of these elements that builds the cosmopolitan nature of the consumption experience, and adds to the cultural character of the urban experience in Global South cities.

Introducing My Dinh: Cultural Consumption and Settling in of Korean Sojourners

Flanked by Keongnam Complex as well as the Manor, which contains the shops that are the focus of our study, My Dinh represents a mix-used suburban enclave which consists of sojourners rather than settlers, and a localized set of Korean-owned businesses and services catering to a localized demand rather than to tourists. My Dinh itself is located in one of the new urban cores further away from the Old City center,⁵ and is a reflection of the

5. About 11 km from the Old City, or 30 minutes by car.

changes in Hanoi as it undergoes a relatively recent shift to become a more global city. As part of such efforts, Vietnam, led by Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, has more recently undergone land acquisition processes as part of urban and economic development (Han and Vu 2008). What has emerged in the transitional process is the presence of multiple actors engaged in speculative real estate activities and larger plot size developments further out of the city where land assembly is easier to accomplish (Nguyen et al. 2018; Potter and Labbé 2021).

There are several developments in My Dinh that ultimately resulted in the creation of the enclave. The Manor, a mixed-use development, was completed in 2006 (see Fig. 1 below). This particular development was significant as it tested the operation of new land laws, introduced in the 1990s to early 2000 period, that dealt with acquisition and compensation (Han and Vu 2008). The Manor's large 42,407 square meter site represented an important outcome of the new laws for they facilitated the combination of fragmented lots into a large site (Han and Vu 2008, 1107, 1109). In 2011, the completion of the 72-storey mixed-use complex Keongnam Landmark Towers (ranked the 5th in the world in terms of floor area at the time of opening) added significant density to the My Dinh area. The Keongnam complex includes Calidas, a residential-cum-hotel tower, as well as the InterContinental Hotel in the adjoining tower.⁶ The fact that Landmark Towers was developed by the Korean firm Keongnam Enterprises was a significant factor in the clustering of Korean sojourners in the My Dinh neighborhood, and the development of a commercial and service set of activities to cater to this important clientele.

In *Ethnicity and Everyday Life*, Karner (2007) highlights how because ethnicity is tied to our biographies, ethnicity is associated with sentiments and emotions. Skey (2013) notes that performing everyday practices and routines that are collectively valued allows the practitioner a sense of well-

6. The Korean manager of Calidas-serviced apartments interviewed by the third author indicated that she is one of two Koreans working there, with about 300 Vietnamese employees. In addition, there is a separate maintenance company that covers the entire Keongnam complex that has 3 Koreans—the director, electrical manager, and facilities manager—along with about 100 Vietnamese employees.

being and belonging among the community of co-practitioners. Drawing on Skey (2013), we argue in this paper that Korean sojourners—more than settlers—need to engage in cultural performance and consumption away from home as a way to manage comfort, security, and belonging in their everyday lives in their new city. For this group, the cultural consumption in the new city is necessary to create an essential bridge to their eventual return to their home country.

The five case studies (Fig. 1) we will introduce illustrate the key arguments developed in this paper:

- (a) Cultural consumption and its importance among Korean sojourners. The first two cases (Blue Ocean Pharmacy and Seoul Butcher Market) reflect the different ways aspects of cultural consumption are organized in everyday life in My Dinh.
- (b) Cultural consumption and the social support networks among nationals in the host city. AZ Café demonstrates the importance of social support relations among co-nationals reflecting the meal and drink culture in Korea.
- (c) The diffusion of Korean taste and aesthetics within a rapidly developing

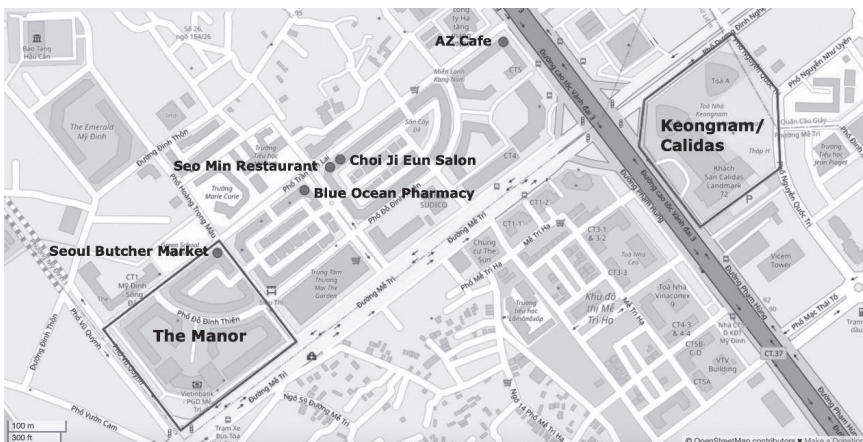


Figure 1. Map of My Dinh

Source: <https://www.openstreetmap.org/#map=16/21.0079/105.7890&layers=T>.

and globalizing city. Drawing on the cases of Seo Min Restaurant and Choi Ji Eun Salon, we show these shops represent and share Korean taste and aesthetics with an increasingly curious and sophisticated local urban population in Hanoi. Collectively, these five cases provide a layered view of the Korean ethnic enclave and economy in Hanoi, a rapidly developing city in the Global South.

Case 1: Blue Ocean Pharmacy (Fig. 2)

The Korean manager-cum-pharmacist initially agreed to the interview, but later had to back out because there was a steady stream of Korean customers coming through the front door. Subsequently, he designated a Vietnamese staff member to meet with the research team. The interview was conducted in the back room, which also doubled up as a storeroom full of Korean medicines. The backroom also allowed a view of the storefront and the conversational interactions between the Korean pharmacist and his customers. The two sets of observations—the Korean medicines in the storage room and the steady stream of Korean customers conversing in the home language—allowed the team to infer that when Korean sojourners become unwell, they turned to tried-and-true remedies from their home country. These medicines are not alternative medicines, but international medicines manufactured and/or sold in Korea. Customers continue to patronize the Korean pharmacy for when they are sick they need to communicate their condition in their native language. Furthermore, a Korean pharmacist will be able to prescribe medication that is both familiar to Koreans and works well for them, and these familiar Korean-style prescriptions and medication often provide comfort to customers. Thus, such services also relieve the anxiety of being sick in a foreign country. Of the cases presented, this is the most powerful example that conveys sources of cultural anxiety and comfort and illustrates how the presence of such establishments managed by co-nationals is critical for the security and comfort of a sojourning population in a new city and culture. In addition to the pharmacy, there is also a Korean medical clinic in Hanoi. A Korean mother interviewed mentioned that her child could not take the medication



Figure 2. Blue Ocean Pharmacy

Source: Author.

from the local clinic and consequently, she had turned to this Korean clinic for help.⁷

Case 2: Seoul Butcher/Market (Fig. 3)

As shown in Fig. 3, the small sign in the photo says in Korean, “First Korean fresh meat butcher shop in Hanoi.” Seoul Butcher/Market is a Korean fresh meat delivery business that covers not just municipal Hanoi, but also districts located further away. This shop uses chillers to keep its meat fresh, making it an attractive alternative to Vietnamese fresh markets. Several Korean women living in Lotte mentioned in interviews that they worried that meat from markets might not be fresh because there are no chillers to

7. Lotte interviewee, Ms. Kim (Informant 20), interview by second author, Lotte Residence, Hanoi, October 25, 2019.

compensate for the hot weather.⁸ Additionally, while the local supermarkets sell fresh meat, they do not cut the meat the Korean way, another point of difference between Korean and Vietnamese butchers. Local butchers cut meat with knives so bone bits can often be found in the meat. Seoul Butcher/Market, on the other hand, has invested in meat cutting machines, resulting in cleaner cuts. These machines are also able to make finer meat cuts to fit Korean food habits. Take, for example, the Korean pork belly used for Korean barbecue. Usually cut in 5mm thick slices by Korean butchers, this type of cut is hard to find in local markets.



Figure 3. Seoul Butcher/Market

Source: Author.

8. Lotte interviewee, Ms. Yun (Informant 5), interview by second author, Lotte Residence, Hanoi, August 19, 2019; Lotte interviewee, Ms. Noh (Informant 10), interview by second author, Lotte Residence, Hanoi, August 23, 2019.

Aside from the products offered, Seoul Butcher/Market offers a more convenient transaction process for its regular customers. The store takes orders in Korean over the phone or via group chat. The customers, who are often familiar with the products, are aware of what kind of processed meat is sold in the store, and how it can be used in making different types of Korean food. All these factors make it easy for customers to place their orders according to their needs.

Case 3: AZ Café (Fig. 4)

Located at a corner at the start of “Korean street,” AZ Café was the first restaurant we visited in My Dinh. Due to its accessible location, AZ Café also gets a fair share of walk-in customers from different demographics, including Westerners. Thus, to meet the needs of its diverse customer base, AZ Café undergoes transformations throughout the day—a major reason for why we included the restaurant in our paper.

AZ Café has two owners—one Vietnamese and one Korean—which take different shifts to cater to different clienteles. The Vietnamese owner takes the day shift from morning to 5pm, operating as a noodle store with outside seating (see Fig. 4, left side).



Figure 4. AZ Café during the day (left) and at night (right).

Source: Author.

The Korean owner takes over in the evening, from 5pm until midnight. The night photo of the café (Fig. 4, right side) shows the noodle store closed, with the customers, the majority of whom are Korean, now seated inside the restaurant. The restaurant has an ambience of an unpretentious Korean neighborhood restaurant where Korean customers can eat and drink in a culturally appropriate after-work setting, thus reproducing the ambience of such establishments in small streets and alleyways of any Korean city.

These three cases—the pharmacy, the butcher, and the restaurant—work in their own ways to reduce the anxiety and increase the cultural comfort of Korean sojourners in a new city. All sojourners have a need to engage in consumption in ways that are similar to their experiences in their home city. The high density of Korean sojourners in the My Dinh area, plus their enhanced income status, combine to make such cultural consumption possible. By reproducing the home country's ways of life, these shops make it possible for a Korean way of life to be reproduced in Hanoi. The pharmacy reduces the anxieties that accompany getting sick, the butcher produces cuts done in the Korean way, and the restaurant enables the after-work sociability among Korean workers to be met in a culturally homogeneous environment.

These three examples highlight the commercial exchanges between Korean expatriates who, because they are on company overseas contracts, can afford a privileged lifestyle overseas, and the self-expatriated Korean business owners who have the cultural capital to provide goods and services catering to this co-national clientele. As these services are located overseas in Hanoi, the selection of Korean services is likely to be restricted compared to the home country. The result is a stronger regularity of Korean patrons. As shown in the example of the meat shop, these Korean businesses not only serve the immediate residents in the Manor, Calidas, and Keongnam Landmark Towers, but also cover the wider Hanoi metropolitan area. The regularity of a commercial relationship connects patrons and shop owners on a more intimate basis and the co-national character of such relations makes settling in and adapting to a foreign city easier as conversations go beyond a narrow commercial exchange. Sojourning company expatriates are more likely to engage in this form of cultural consumption because their impermanent stay and the anticipation of going home make them continue

in a cultural consumption mode rather than adapting to the more local consumption mode of settler migrants.

Sharing My Dinh: Experiencing the Korean Taste and Aesthetic

Consumption, particularly sojourner ethnic consumption in a foreign city, has an audience beyond its immediate customers. In the previous section, we analyzed ethnic consumption by Korean sojourners in terms of the comfort and security such consumption provides Koreans settling in. In this section, we argue that the presence of a commercial enclave creates new opportunities for ethnic businesses. By attracting the set-up of more ethnic businesses, the commercial enclave thus creates opportunities for the host population to engage in cosmopolitan consumption. While this aspect has been treated in urban studies, we argue that cosmopolitan consumption of the type engaged in in Hanoi has special characteristics due to the characteristics of the My Dinh establishments.

Firstly, the Korean-owned-and-managed shops catering primarily to Koreans are very different from Korean food chains and franchises like Paris Baguette, Red Mango, and Kyochon Chicken, or cosmetics shops like The Face Shop (J. Kim 2018). The presence of these shops in place of owner-managed stores creates a *McDonaldization*, a standardized set of goods and services. Although this standardization maintains an acceptable level of quality, it lacks the variety or idiosyncrasies that often create memorable experiences. Additionally, owner-managed enterprises, as compared to shop employees, often try harder to build relationships with their customers, with owners striving to maintain loyal and repeat customers. Such efforts are often more effective in meeting the expectations of Korean customers.

The second difference is a contrast between My Dinh and other ethnic enclaves that survive by “connecting ethnicity to tourism” (J. Kim 2018, 281). Like chain and franchised stores, a tourism-based enclave results in a similar neighborhood experience. Shircliff (2020, 229) reports the opinions of two Australian tourists who said they were unlikely to visit the Singapore Chinatown because, in their opinion, the Sydney and Melbourne

Chinatowns are not very different from the Singapore version in delivering the same experience. The Chinatowns described in these examples resemble more themed attractions for visitors than enclaves offering an authentic experience. These places make it difficult for a visitor to experience the spirit and sense of the place culture that arise from the everyday lives and practices of the residents and the history of the neighborhood.

We argue that the establishments in the My Dinh neighborhood, by reflecting the authentic culture of the neighborhood, contribute to building a cosmopolitan city culture that contributes to the learning of and appreciation of diversity and we present two cases to illustrate this.

Case 4: Seo Min Korean BBQ Restaurant

H. Kim (2021) argues that the ethnic enclaves of the type in My Dinh have their roots in foreign direct investment flows because these bring with them company expatriate workers. We extend Kim's analysis to look not just at the Korean owners and their products, but also at how these appeal to the locals. The significant residential concentration of Koreans and Korean shops in My Dinh provides opportunities for Korean-Vietnamese encounters, and food presents a low-risk, everyday engagement with a foreign culture.

Seo Min Korean BBQ Restaurant has a Korean manager stationed on the ground floor to lead customers to the restaurant on the second floor. The Korean manager said that the clientele has become increasingly Vietnamese ever since a visit from Uncle Park (Park Hang-seo), the current head coach of the Vietnamese national soccer team, and a founder of Papa Park Saves Children, an association for children with heart disease in Vietnam. A photo of Uncle Park's visit soon became an advertisement for the eatery (Fig. 5). Indeed, the reservation order on the cork board next to the stairs showed ten reservations all with Vietnamese names (Fig. 6). We interviewed the restaurant manager at about 11:30 am, just before the lunchtime crowd descended on the restaurant.

This brief description of our visit to Seo Min illustrates that unlike the case of AZ Café, which serves predominantly Koreans in the evenings, Seo Min is being transformed from a Korean space to an increasingly



Figure 5. FaceBook post of Seo Min Restaurant showing the visit by Uncle Park.

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/SEO-MIN-Restaurant-1210016799059031/photos/a.1713446482049391/1713446452049394>.

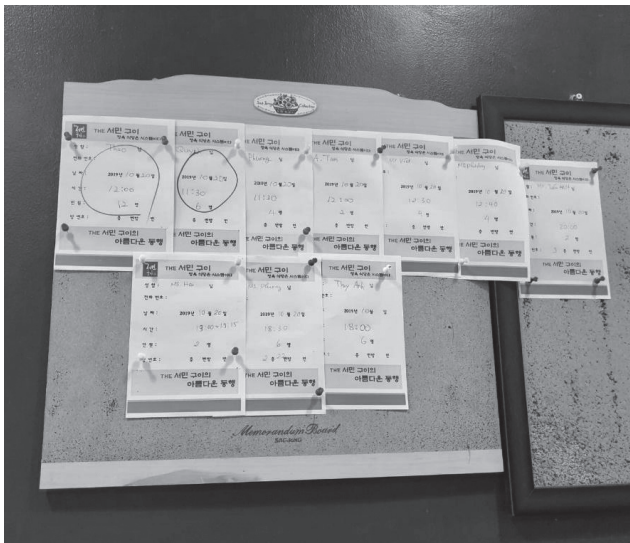


Figure 6. Reservation board of Seo Min Restaurant

Source: Author.

Vietnamese one. The reason for this transformation is quite interesting. The Vietnamese national soccer team has achieved significant success and soccer-crazy Vietnam has embraced Uncle Park warmly. Thus, he serves as an informal ambassador and a bridge between Korea and Vietnam. There are other supporting factors. The Vietnamese have come to positively view Korean conglomerates like Samsung and LG, which operate large industrial sites in Bac Ninh, Thai Nguyen, and Haiphong, as leading innovative brands that create good jobs for locals. The Korean Wave has also led to familiarity with and curiosity about Korean cuisine, fashion, and lifestyles. Consequently, when Uncle Park visited Seo Min and this visit appeared on Facebook, Vietnamese interest followed.

Case 5: Choi Ji Eun Hair Salon

The Korean Wave brought to the world a Korean aesthetic that is illustrated by a hair salon in My Dinh (Fig. 7). We were fortunate to get five minutes with a young female Korean hairdresser. In our attempts to engage with the phenomenon, we started with the question, by asking a seemingly naïve question: “Why does the business of hairdressing need a Korean stylist?” We turned our focus to two differing aspects. The first is the matter of style. In what ways is the Korean technique different from the Vietnamese technique? The second question is a matter of sociality—whether a good conversation is as important a part of a visit to a hairstylist as the haircut. A customer may not want to talk, but if they do, can the stylist oblige? What kinds of pleasant conversations ensue?

In Choi Ji Eun Hair Salon, the local Vietnamese employees do the washing while Koreans do the cutting and styling. The Korean wave has evidently had an impact on a systematic understanding of style and aesthetics among the local Vietnamese audience of the Korean Wave programs, and Choi Ji Eun Hair Salon is happy to serve both Korean and local customers. However, it is more than just a matter of style; a visit to the hairdressers can take up to four hours if the job involves cutting, styling, and dyeing. Within this time, a conversational window is opened between the Korean stylist and her local customer. Thus, both the aesthetic experience as



Figure 7. Choi Ji Eun Hair Salon

Source: Author.

well as a potential conversational relationship between stylist and customer create real potential for a deeper understanding of both cultures, leading to everyday cosmopolitan encounters that shape openness and the embrace of different cultures.

Korean interviewees from Calidas who use Choi Ji Eun Salon mentioned the lower standards in Vietnamese salons and the difficulty of negotiating prices, adding that they found Choi Ji Eun through word of mouth and stayed with the salon because they are satisfied with the quality of the hair services provided, and trusted the staff there.⁹

In summary, our five cases of Korean expatriate businesses in My Dinh contribute significantly to the operation of My Dinh as an ethnic enclave with a vibrant ethnic economy. These services thrive because they enable the

9. Lotte interviewee, Ms. Kim (Informant 20), interview by second author, Lotte Residence, Hanoi, October 25, 2019.

large Korean sojourner population living nearby to engage in cultural consumption, while at the same time enabling a leisure space for social support among co-nationals. Located away from the tourist areas, these Korean-owned shops offer a more authentic range of products, without watering themselves down to cater to tourists. At the same time, the owners, being self-expatriated Koreans, are more likely to develop stronger relations with local regular customers and this creates some potential for local-Korean interactions. Shops specializing in care products and services (e.g., hair and nail salons) also allow Vietnamese customers access to the latest Korean styles and accessories.

Broadening the Analysis

The analysis thus far has focused on the role of the ethnic commercial outlets in My Dinh, and how the products of these Korean establishments enable the cultural consumption of Korean expatriates. Additionally, we have also examined how some of the Korean shops in My Dinh provide a service for cosmopolitan consumption by enabling Vietnamese to enjoy the tastes and aesthetics of Korea.

In this section, we further examine our interview material to determine a broader context for friendships, especially between Koreans and non-Koreans. Two particular contexts emerged as potential bridges to friendships. If Korean expatriates send their children to international schools or for English lessons at local English-learning centers (as opposed to Korean-managed English centers), then their children become a potential avenue for the parents to make local connections: through school-based activities, as well as social gatherings among parents. This is an account of a Korean spouse sending her child to a local English learning center:

There is an English learning center at the end of Linh Lang Market, and I send my kid there. My kid was the only Korean in the center. Korean English-learning centers are very expensive but this local center is very affordable, charging about a third of the prices of the Korean learning

centers. Moreover, the teachers in the center are native English speakers.¹⁰

A second opportunity comes in the form of exercise and other activities organized by the condominium management for the residents, as this particular interviewee reveals:

I get to know people through exercise. Most of the people I've gotten to know in Calidas are through exercise classes, like Zumba and Yoga, with the exception of the mothers of my children's friends. Most of them are Koreans but I have also made a Vietnamese friend through Yoga classes. She's living in Keongnam condo but comes to the exercise place. Through the Yoga classes, we have gotten to know each other and we have invited each other to our homes for lunch.¹¹

These examples aside, however, the relative inability of Korean parents to speak English and Vietnamese is a limiting factor in developing deeper friendships with locals. Additionally, the inability to speak Vietnamese has also led residents to over-depend on Korean-speaking management staff, who have to manage the expectations of Korean residents. This problem is elaborated in an interview with a manager from Lotte Residences:

When Korean residents need customer service, they speak to me directly. This is a foreign country, and though I will try my best to do what they want, the standards they expect in Korea may be difficult to achieve here. Sometimes these situations happen, and I cannot do everything they want. I have to explain this in detail and make them understand these issues.¹²

There is also the question of work relations between Korean expatriate

10. Lotte interviewee, Mrs. Seol (Interviewee 6), interview by second author, Lotte Residence, Hanoi, August 21, 2019.

11. Calidas interviewee, Mrs. Anh (Interviewee 2), interview by second author, Calidas Residence, Hanoi, August 14, 2019.

12. Lotte interviewee Mr. Song (manager), interview by third author, Lotte Residence, Hanoi, October 23, 2019.

managers and their Vietnamese counterparts. The situation of many large Korean companies in Vietnam is that the senior management is mainly staffed by Korean-sponsored expatriates while the more junior positions are filled by Vietnamese. In such a context, Hong-Xoan and Earl (2020, 837) noted that Korean managers tend to expect “formal deferential speech and self-effacing behavior” in the workplace. This difference in seniority makes it difficult for Koreans to develop friendships, especially given the hierarchical nature of Korean culture. This is illustrated by the following observation:

Most expatriates advise against having a meal with local staff since the Vietnamese staff may think that mixing over lunch may suggest that their relationship with their boss is equal. My husband is nice and relates well with his Vietnamese staff but accepts the norm not to have meals with Vietnamese staff, although he sometimes buys some lunch for local staff.¹³

A senior manager with a Korean bank based in Hanoi pointed out that in the workplace, there can be the usual communication issues between Koreans and Vietnamese. In this bank, the higher education levels of the Vietnamese staff mean that English is the default working language, supplemented by Vietnamese and Korean. He notes that only three of the senior Korean staff can speak Vietnamese at a relatively proficient level, and even for these three, they will use English to communicate with local staff. The use of English, a second language to both Vietnamese and Koreans, makes it less of an intimate language and this implies that workplace friendships are likely to be constrained by language barriers.

The literature we referenced earlier in the introduction also suggests that besides the differences in seniority, the inability of local Vietnamese managers to understand the idiosyncrasies and corporate culture of these Korean companies (Astorne-Figari and Lee 2019; Beamish and Inkpen 1998) is also a factor in limiting workplace friendships between Koreans and local Vietnamese workers.

13. Lotte interviewee, Mrs. Bae (Interviewee 1), interview by second author, Lotte Residence, Hanoi, August 17, 2019.

Generally, the overall impression we derive from our interviews suggests that Korean expatriates mainly develop relationships with other Koreans because of language barriers, as well as the demands of work and family. That said, our sample is drawn from company sent-expatriates who tend to be older, more senior, and married with children with less time for socializing. Thus, the social distance between Koreans and locals seems to be large. In contrast with the conviviality, friendships, and support offered by co-nationals, relations with locals, mediated by nationality, ethnicity, and language, as well as by class and age differences, combine to create reservations and misapprehension. That said, there remains some potential for deeper Vietnamese-Korean relationships stemming from regular local clients patronizing shops in the Korean enclave economy.

Discussion

In this paper, we explain how spatial clustering is the result of the cultural anxiety of Korean sojourners settling into a new city (Hanoi) and how businesses in My Dinh, which are owned by Koreans for primarily Korean customers, enable some comfort and stability to be established in the everyday lives of these sojourners. It allows for cultural habits learnt and practiced in the home country to be reproduced in the new city. As we have shown in Section 2 of this paper, ethnic consumption by Korean sojourners not only enhances well-being through the consumption of familiar products (Blue Ocean Pharmacy) but also by rebuilding familiar social spaces of conviviality (AZ Café).

Within this ethnic economy, it is important to point out that Blue Ocean Pharmacy and the evening drinking atmosphere of AZ Café are less likely to be porous to Vietnamese patronage. The AZ Café case continues to remain a space of Korean sociability necessitated by the large numbers of Koreans living in the area needing an after-work venue to unwind and chat over food and beverage.

The overall presence of a range of Korean enterprises in My Dinh has an amplification effect by attracting more customers as well as similar

enterprises. The small Korean shopkeepers (rather than chains) meant for Koreans (not tourists) keep goods and services in My Dinh from becoming a recipe to be doled out worldwide. In contrast, consider Koreans and their experience of Korean food in New York. J. Kim (2018, 289) argues that these Korean nationals “generally are satisfied with non-Korean food options in New York; it is only that which should be familiar that they find disappointing.” For Koreans in Hanoi, the opposite is true—the exacting standards of sojourning Koreans with regards to Korean goods and services mean that Vietnamese sampling these products in the Korean enclave economy are likely to get a more authentic experience.

While noting Skey’s (2012) warning about the limits of diverse everyday encounters with others, Glick Schiller and Çağlar (2016) and Wang (2018) point out that amid ethnic differences in the city, there are possibilities of contact: spaces of commonality and conviviality that emerge and which enable deeper relations beyond casual encounters. Having Korean small-business owners operating these enterprises creates the possibility of stronger relations as a strategy to develop a regular clientele (as in the case of Seo Min Korean BBQ Restaurant and Choi Ji Eun Hair Salon). Such ethnic commercial neighborhoods enable these possibilities through regular patronage, deeper conversations (especially in hair salons) and mutual learning. Such a point is supported by Kuppinger’s (2014, 148–150) observations of a hair salon in an immigrant German neighborhood, which suggests the role of a hair salon as a social space for diverse ethnicities to interact, and the role of the owner-operator and her staff in facilitating such spaces by making customers feel welcome and in facilitating conversations.

It is also important to note that there are two classes of Korean sojourners in Hanoi. The first is the privileged class that live in Calidas, sent by their companies and who live in comfort with expatriate packages that include housing and education allowances. The second is the Korean shop owners and Korean service staff we interviewed, who form a self-expatriated lower service class. Their economic and social location makes them potential bridges to Vietnamese customers, and enhances cosmopolitan consumption opportunities, as seen and discussed in Cases 4 and 5, Seo Min Korean BBQ Restaurant and Choi Ji Eun Hair Salon.

It is important to note that we are not claiming that the ethnic enclave in My Dinh is permanent. Historians of the city have noted that ethnic enclaves may not survive the first generation. As the second generation integrates with the host society via education and work, they are also more likely to move away from such enclaves (see for example, Shibley [2018]). One could argue that My Dinh is even more impermanent. The owner-manager in Ssamdak, one of the remaining Korean restaurants in Trung Hoa, confirmed the decline of Korean businesses in the district, once a thriving area with many Korean shops before the emergence of My Dinh. Some of Trung Hoa's businesses are likely to have moved to My Dinh. The reason for such movements is that as the rental buildings age, Korean sojourners move on to newer developments like the Manor, Calidas, and Keongnam. Correspondingly, small Korean businesses follow the migratory patterns where proximity to large residential clusters allows these businesses to thrive. When settlements are based on rental arrangements instead of ownership, new developments may exert a pull away from existing settlements.

That said, the existing mixed commercial and residential ethnic enclave in My Dinh creates a variety of opportunities for learning and sharing. As Korean sojourners settle in Hanoi, their high-income status results in a cluster of small Korean-owned businesses catering to their needs. These clusters, Korean-owned and catering to Koreans, in turn, open opportunities for Korean-local interactions. The mutual learning and relationships built enable a new appreciation and form the basis of understanding in Hanoi, a city which is becoming a global city with new waves of foreign direct investments. We stress that these possibilities exist because of the nature of My Dinh. Unlike Hanoi's old quarter, which has been rapidly transformed into a commercial tourism hub, My Dinh exists very much as a mixed residential commercial quarter. It is in such a "normal" neighborhood that everyday encounters between clients and owners can occur, both in terms of a deeper urban sociability, as well as a learning of other cultures. In this way, Korean settlers and businesses in My Dinh can contribute to a city-building knowledge in the form of Korean ways of consumption. This in turn creates a more cosmopolitan culture in a rapidly developing city like Hanoi.

The My Dinh we experienced during several of our field trips in 2019 was vibrant and attractive to Koreans and locals alike. Newspapers reported how COVID-19 and measures to control the epidemic have significantly dampened the atmosphere of the enclave and affected residents there. A Korean resident staying at Calidas related how Hanoi was locked down from late July to September 2021. Businesses were closed with the exception of grocery stores, and the My Dinh area was barricaded during the time. Dine-in and even delivery services from restaurants were banned during the lockdown period. For Calidas, the common breakfast area was closed, and instead, breakfast takeaway boxes were available for the residents. Visitors were regulated as well.¹⁴

It is an open question of how My Dinh will fare in the aftermath of COVID-19. Whether it can bounce back will very much depend on the key arguments we have made in this paper—the high concentration of Korean sojourners that drive the ethnic economy, the essential services which support cultural consumption and social support among Koreans, and the appeal of these services to an increasingly cosmopolitan local population.

14. Calidas interviewee, Mrs. Anh (Interviewee 2), interview by second author, Kakao Talk, February 19, 2022.

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