

Korean Return Migrants from Brazil: *Ethnic and Economic Aspects*

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Abstract

The return migration of Korean Brazilians has been closely related to the economic transformation of Korean community in Brazil and the history of Korean immigration into Brazil since 1963. Most Koreans decided to stay in São Paulo, where they could seek out profitable businesses and build a strong ethnic community in the city.

Since the late 1980s, the economic situations of Koreans in Brazil have slowly deteriorated. Many successful Koreans who accumulated sufficient wealth abandoned Brazil to look for economic opportunities elsewhere. Some non-affluent Koreans who failed to adjust to Brazilian society also did not find bright futures in Brazil. Some Korean immigrants in Brazil decided to return to their homeland, the economy of which has grown much faster than Brazil's since the 1980s.

The early Korean immigrants who migrated as family units maintained strong ethnic consciousness. Thus, they were able to adapt to Korean society relatively easily when they returned to Korea. Young Korean Brazilians who completed basic Korean education in Korea before moving to Brazil also did not encounter any difficulty in maintaining their Korean identity while living in Brazil thanks to the flexibility of Brazilian ethnic relations. However, second-generation Korean Brazilians did not develop clear ethnic identities in Brazil and had to work hard to be integrated into Korean society.

Keywords: return migration, Korea, Brazil, Korean immigrants, ethnic Korean community, Korean Brazilians, ethnicity, adaptation

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Introduction

In this rapidly changing world, many people looking for better economic opportunities and trying to avoid social and political instability have decided to leave their home countries in the hopes of finding comfortable lives elsewhere. As more and more people participate in this global phenomenon, international migration has become an important feature of contemporary society. In some cases, international migrants who have lived abroad eventually or temporarily return to their countries of origin. On this point, we need to carefully examine the entire process by which people move, through the use of relevant perspectives to understand this contemporary social trend. Here, return migrants are defined as those who returned to their home countries with the intent to live permanently or reside for a certain period of time after living abroad as migrant workers.

In spite of the considerable academic interest in international labor migration so far, little attention has been paid to the movement of migrants after they leave their places of origin. Of course, some migrants wish to settle permanently upon arriving at their new destination. But instead of staying in one particular place, many remain in search of better places that can fulfill their economic and sociocultural desires. In addition to moving within the same destination country, a number of enterprising migrants move to other countries in pursuit of brighter futures. Still, for those who are not satisfied with life in foreign lands, return migration can be a feasible alternative.

After all, we should not presume that international migration is a one-time-only process or event (Pérez 2005, 51; Sowell 1996, 25; Trager 2005, 11); rather, it is an ongoing social process. Therefore, we need to develop a theoretical framework to explain the continuous patterns of circular, seasonal, or return migration to better our understanding of the nature of international labor migration. Especially in regards to the impacts and roles of international migrants in their places of origin and destination, return migration should be thoroughly investigated with concomitant interest.

Korea is no exception in the arena of international labor migra-

tion and return migration. Due to the instable and unfavorable economic and political situation immediately following the Korean War, many Koreans joined the process of international migration. However, thanks to the unprecedented success of economic development in the latter part of the twentieth century, some Korean immigrants living in other countries began to return to Korea. Remigration has been much more frequent among Korean immigrants in Brazil than among those in other countries because of incessant economic downturns in Brazil over the past two decades. Accordingly, the study of the return migration of Korean immigrants in Brazil will provide new insight into the process of sociocultural changes in contemporary Korean society. The return migration of Koreans from Brazil has been closely related to the economic transformation of the Korean community in Brazil and the history of Korean immigration into Brazil since the early 1960s. In this article, I try to analyze the role of ethnicity and economy in the process of the adaptation of Korean return migrants from São Paulo, Brazil. Considering the fact that "migration would be reflected in social organization in different ways depending on the nature of the sociocultural system" (Brettell 2000, 99), we have to examine the meanings and characteristics of their return migration in the given Korean sociocultural system.

Return Migration: Influences and Problems

Research on return migration is still limited, and theoretical debate has not been fully developed yet. What is more, most studies of return migration are narrowly focused on the economic and sociocultural impacts of return migrants on their home country rather than the process of adaptation for returnees and the concomitant identity changes among themselves. In terms of economic impacts, scholars agree on the fact that return migrants play a significant role in stimulating the local economy and generating new impetus for economic development with the money, skill, and entrepreneurial vigor they bring (Burrell 2005, 12; Sowell 1996, 21-22). According to these

scholars, local economic situations may become more vibrant and dynamic than ever before with the sufficient influx of return migrants. Return migrants, who have been involved in different ways of life and customs compared to local residents, consciously or unconsciously, exert influence in sociocultural spheres too. For example, they bring new attitudes, ideas, and energy and are innovative in terms of accelerating social changes with the knowledge and experiences they acquired abroad (Gmelch 1992, 302; Martin et al 2006, 75). By oversimplifying the economic and sociocultural impacts of return migration, scholars inadvertently overlook unexpected economic and ethnic problems that returnees face in their new environments.

Transnational networks activated by return migrants who have been exposed to different cultural systems distinct from their own are another source of change in the countries of origin. By connecting human resources to international labor migration, local people in the migrants' homelands can take advantage of transnational linkages to pursue their interests that facilitate the transformation of local socioeconomic structures. Major research topics regarding the transnational networks developed by return migrants include "the varying forms they take, how they are used by those involved, the ways in which they form part of migration strategies, and how they vary with material and cultural contexts" (Trager 2005, 20). We cannot deny the importance of transnational networks for return migrants. However, overemphasizing the existence of networks may lead to the incorrect conclusion that returnees are smoothly accepted by local people without any serious conflicts.

In short, most research on the impact of return migration is heavily focused on the positive roles of return migrants in terms of the development of their societies of origin. Since the issue of return migration has not yet attracted critical academic interest, the emphasis on the functional roles of return migration expedited by return migrants may yield very productive results for analyzing the path of contemporary socioeconomic transformation. However, current research regarding return migration is limited in explaining the

worldwide process of return migration, which cannot be easily ignored. First of all, they usually study cases of poor migrants from relatively poor countries. In order to highlight the importance of material or non-material resources that are made available by return migration for the countries of origin, scholars frequently use examples of migrants from poor families in less developed countries where international labor migration becomes critical for the maintenance of the local economy. Consequently, the roles of return migration can be inadvertently simplified due to the limited research areas. To understand the diverse patterns of return migration, we need to include the regions, which were once poverty-stricken but are now more or less affluent societies, to which migrants decide to return. Those scholars frequently believe that return migrants are pretty much integrated into the home society without significant difficulties as a whole. Accordingly, it is necessary to investigate the role and impact of return migrants after careful examination of the causes and processes of return migration, which will broaden our understanding of its effects. Especially, researches on the adaptive process of return migrants have been hard to find until now. Since international labor migration is strategically practiced by households, which aim to increase their economic wealth and diversify risks (Massey et al 2006, 39-40; Mooney 2004, 47; Sana and Massey 2004, 12), each household or individual may go through different paths of return migration based on their historical experiences and socioeconomic status. It is quite natural that we should pay attention to the various adaptive mechanisms designed by return migrants themselves. Finally, cultural factors in the decision-making processes of return migrants and their patterns of adaptation to their home countries should be examined. While assuming that the primary reason for leaving their countries as international labor migrants is to find reasonable income-generating activities, researchers tend to place excessive emphasis on economic factors when dealing with their return. But many return migrants do so for reasons other than economic factors (Gmelch 1980), and they also may have to face many unexpected cultural problems when reestablishing their lives in their home

countries. In this sense, discourse on the redefinition of ethnic identities among return migrants should be analyzed properly. For example, considering the fact that the problem of ethnic identity can sometimes emerge as a serious threat to the adaptation of return migrants, we need to elaborate upon the role of ethnic identity in the adaptation of return migrants.

Korean Immigrants in Brazil

Government-sponsored migration from Korea to Brazil began in 1963. Most Korean immigrants, who sought to leave Korea to avoid the political instability and economic difficulties that followed the Korean War in the late 1950s and early 1960s, were mainly well-educated and middle-class. According to Chun (1992, 47-48), the first phase of emigration to Brazil consisted of the official government-sponsored migration program and family migration. This had a tremendous impact on the development of the Korean ethnic community in Brazil and their concomitant socioeconomic activities.

Korean immigrants in Brazil too took advantage of the relatively advanced Korean textile and clothing industry to make clothes for the Brazilian market in 1969. Selling garments was very lucrative for Korean immigrants due to the poor quality of Brazilian clothing at that time. The garment business flourished until the late 1980s, which proved to be very beneficial for strengthening Korean ethnic consciousness based on economic prosperity. The peculiar pattern of clustered living and economic activities among Koreans facilitated the homogeneity of their ethnic enclave, and Korean language and customs were preserved without too much difficulty. The economic prosperity of Korean immigrants in Brazil slowly began to deteriorate in the 1990s due to a severe economic crisis in Brazil. As a result, only a few Koreans are willing to migrate to Brazil nowadays, and many Korean immigrants in Brazil have left either temporarily or permanently to find favorable economic opportunities elsewhere.

As of 2005, 50,296 Koreans were registered in Brazil by the Kore-

an Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Among them, 48,746 Koreans were residing in São Paulo, where Korean socioeconomic activities are conspicuous. São Paulo, the largest city in Brazil with a population of eighteen million people, is the center of commerce, industry, and finance, which would entice the Korean immigrants from the beginning.

Remigration of Korean Immigrants in Brazil

Some Korean immigrants in Brazil remigrated to other countries, while others have returned from Korea to Brazil. Some early Korean immigrants had planned, even before leaving Korea, to leave Brazil as soon as possible because the final destination of their course of migration was not Brazil. This kind of stage migration was not unique to Korean immigrants, as many East Asians also use Latin America as a transitory step in immigration along a trajectory leading to the United States or Canada (Wilson 2004, 11). Many Koreans who remain in Brazil still do not know whether they will stay permanently there or re migrate to another country (Park 1999, 682). Some Koreans define the frequent movement of Korean immigrants as gypsy-ish migration.

Remigration of Korean immigrants to the United States began in the 1970s, but the bulk of this migration to the United States has taken place during just the past two decades. The United States, in particular, has been the preferred destination for remigration because migrants can depend on the network of ethnic Koreans who are already well-organized in many parts of the United States. Moreover, Korean remigrants from Brazil can take advantage of the garment industry in major U.S. cities in which many Koreans are deeply involved. Naturally, the majority of Koreans from Brazil find work in the U.S. garment sector. Park (1999, 669) found that about half of the five to six hundred manufacturers/wholesalers in the Korean Garment Wholesalers Association in the United States are operated by Koreans from Brazil.

Soon after earning a fair amount of money in Brazil, Korean immigrants are typically ready to move to the United States. It is said that Korean emigrants from Brazil to the United States have sometimes outnumbered immigrants from Korea who remain in Brazil. One young Korean immigrant mentioned that eight out of ten Korean friends from high school had remigrated to the United States, mostly during the 1980s. Since the 1990s, as the early Korean immigrants reached old age and Korea became a more advanced country than Brazil economically, return migration to Korea gradually grew. For elderly Korean immigrants, uncertainty about their increasing old age upon retirement was the main reason in determining their remigration.

Chronic cyclical hyperinflation, concomitant economic instability, and homesickness resulted in the massive exodus of Korean immigrants to the United States, other English-speaking countries, and Korea. Most Korean immigrants complained that they had a hard time planning their future business owing to the unpredictable Brazilian economy since the 1990s. Kim (1991, 238) summarized the main reasons for their remigration to the United States: preference for English-speaking countries; desire to make their children citizens of advanced countries; confidence that they would repeat their economic success in the United States; and wish to abandon Brazil, where they failed to secure local affection. People who became affluent as well as those who fell into poverty because of business failures participated in remigration. The small size of the ethnic Korean community made it disadvantageous for people who sought to expand their businesses as well as for those whose business failed completely. In particular, people suffering from the disastrous economic circumstances in Brazil thought about leaving the place to start again in different countries. Taken together, the economy was a decisive factor in determining whether remigration was a success or a failure.

For some Korean immigrants non-economic factors should not be ignored in remigration. For example, from an educational point of view, Brazil is not a good country for properly raising children due to the poor educational system and infrastructure. Thus, when their

sons or daughters are ready to go to high school, parents often consider moving to the United States, Canada, or Australia for better schools. Still others remigrate in order to reunite the family. Usually, successful remigrants in other countries invite remaining family members or relatives in Brazil to join them.

To summarize, since the late 1980s, due to the continuous economic downturn in Brazil along with political instability, the economic situations of Korean immigrants in Brazil have slowly deteriorated. In addition, economic polarization among Koreans in Brazil emerged in the late 1980s. Until then, anybody who worked hard could partake in the affluence of the Korean garment sector, and the gap between the rich and the poor was not that severe among Koreans. Many successful Koreans who accumulated sufficient wealth abandoned Brazil to look for economic opportunities elsewhere. Some non-affluent Koreans who failed to adjust to Brazilian society also did not succeed. Some Korean emigrants from Brazil headed to English-speaking countries for their children's secondary education. However, some Koreans decided to return to their homeland for economic or sociocultural reasons. Since the 1980s, the Korean economy has grown much faster than Brazil's, and trade between Korea and Brazil has multiplied, providing new economic opportunities for Koreans in Brazil.

Return Migration to Korea

Among the many Korean remigrants from Brazil, some eventually returned to Korea. It is very hard to determine the actual number of return migrants from Brazil in Korea, however, it is estimated at approximately three thousand, based on anecdotal evidence. Even though the number of return migrants to Korea is rather small compared to remigrants to the United States or Canada, their impact on the Korean community in Brazil and contemporary Korean society cannot be ignored. In some sense, Korean society may experience new changes due to the return migration of Koreans from Brazil who

left Korea less than forty-five years ago and who retained their culture and customs more than any other parts of the Korean diaspora.

The return migration from Brazil to Korea did not become widespread until the 1990s. Many Koreans in Brazil thought their dignity would be impaired if they returned home too soon after their initial departure. Nevertheless, the economic decline in Brazil and contrasting economic growth in Korea influenced many people to move to Korea. Immediately after the 1998 economic crisis in Brazil, many Korean immigrants packed their bags for Korea. Since then, return migration to Korea has occurred continuously in the Korean community. Brettell (2003, 59) asserted, "return migration is affected not only by the way the host society receives and accepts migrants but also by the way they views both their own society and the host society." If interaction between the immigrants in Brazil and Korean society is harmoniously arranged, return migration can take place smoothly.

In many aspects, the causes of return migration to Korea are similar to those of remigration to the United States. For example, the economy can exert a significant influence on the decision-making process. It is said that, in many cases, return migrants to Korea are generally less successful economically than remigrants to the United States. Older Korean immigrants in Brazil who left Korea during the 1960s and 1970s are unable to become completely immersed in Brazilian culture because of the language barrier and tend to feel uncomfortable as they age. In particular, they miss the traditional Korean custom of respect for the aged. For this reason, some older parents return to Korea where they can rely on their families, relatives, or friends while leaving their children in Brazil who may experience culture shock in Korea. Occasionally, young people who find marital partners in Korea have to return to Korea because of the maladaptation of their spouses to the Brazilian way of life. Following are some case studies of return migrants from Brazil:

To get away from the economic problems in Brazil, our family moved to Seattle in the United States in 2000. My father was invit-

ed by a relative and friend who were doing business there. I stayed in Seattle for four years with my family. While in Seattle, I became interested in Korea and visited Seoul four times. Finally I decided to come to Korea in November, 2004. One of my uncles who was working for a major Korean conglomerate persuaded me to go into business with him. Even in Brazil, I often thought about living in Korea. Currently, I am working for an agent who supplies soccer players from Brazil to Korea. Since the demand for people fluent in Portuguese is recently emerging in Korea, I will look for work in the field of Korean-Brazilian relations. My parents, who struggle with English, will join me as soon as I become firmly established here (Kim Min-gu, age 34).

I visited Korea when I was working for a broadcasting company in the ethnic Korean community. While working for the Korean community, I noted that young Koreans in Brazil had no definite goals or plans for their future. Parents had to teach their children Korean language and culture. Along with their distinctive physical appearance, if they could not understand Korean and only spoke Portuguese, they would risk perhaps losing what was most important. Parents have to support their children. If parents cannot communicate well with their children, they will always have trouble understanding each other. As time goes by, this problem will only worsen. I arrived in Korea in 2002. The older I get, the more I want to spend the rest of my life in my home country. I came to Korea with my daughter, and she attended college in Korea. She always wanted to study in Korean. She loved Korean culture very much, even while living in Brazil. My married son is still living in São Paulo. He said he had trouble living in Korea. When I returned to Korea, I did not experience any serious problems because my brothers and relatives in Korea were eager to help me. I do not want to go back to Brazil again (Yi Mi-jeong, age 57).

When I was a student at the University of São Paulo, my father had a stroke. He was unable to continue in the clothing business. My mother asked me to temporarily withdraw from school and help him. Once I started working, I was too busy to do other things. A doctor told us that my father would not have much longer to live.

My father wanted to return to Korea before he dies, but my brother and I wanted to continue living in Brazil. We studied and had jobs there. When my parents asked me to return to Korea, I had to follow them because I am the oldest son. My brother got married and still lives in São Paulo (Yun Hyeong-gi, age 34).

Generally, older Korean immigrants in Brazil experience few difficulties in returning to Korea. Since the first official wave of Korean migration to Brazil took place in 1963, thanks to the short migration history to Brazil, they have maintained connections with their relatives and friends in Korea (Joo 2006, 185). Several garment manufacturers have had economic transactions with textile or cloth producers in Korea. The culturally homogeneous nature of the ethnic Korean community, as promoted by early immigrants who were economically affluent and politically conservative, has played a functional role in reducing cultural conflicts when they returned to Korea.

In spite of the importance of the return migration of Korean immigrants in Brazil, they are quite invisible in Korean society. There are three reasons for this. First, since the 1990s, some return migrants decided to come back to Korea after experiencing economic difficulties in Brazil. This group typically tries to hide within Korean society and hesitates to reveal how they suffered in Brazil. Many of them do not announce their departure from Brazil in the Korean community at all. One informant told me that he met many people in Korea who had lived in Brazil, but suddenly disappeared without notice. Second, most return migrants have family members, relatives, and friends who are eager to assist them. Therefore, they do not feel the need to form their own organizations to aid each other as they did in Brazil. Since they are not discriminated against in Korea based on their migration experiences in South America, it is not difficult for them to re adapt to Korean society. Third, in stark contrast to the Korean community in Brazil, the physical distance between their residences in Korea prevented them from coming together.

Return Migrants from Brazil and Their Adaptation to Korea

Korean immigrants in Brazil have developed various transnational networks to maintain contact with Korean society. For example, most of them read Korean newspapers published in São Paulo and watch Korean television programs everyday. Nowadays, they can share their opinions with other Koreans instantly by means of the Internet. Naturally, any important political or economic events in Korea can provoke serious debate in the Korean community. Therefore, the return migrants from Brazil have not experienced any serious confusion since they returned to life in Korea. Nevertheless, it does not mean that they are perfectly accepted into Korean society without a single problem. Problems that return migrants experience differ according to their age, proficiency in Korean language, migration history, viewpoints, lifestyle in Brazil, and so on. Among them, proficiency in Korean is closely related to the year of migration, age at the time of migration, and the use of Korean at home. In terms of age, young people have more difficulties in overcoming cultural differences. In Brazil, younger, second-generation Koreans frequently criticize traditional Korean culture, which they presume to be inappropriate in Brazil. For example, they strongly believe that *kimchi* (*gimchi*) should only be eaten at home as they find the pungent smell embarrassing. Young Koreans also sometimes argue with their parents over their habit of eating *kimchi* in their stores. They do not like the conservative, traditional customs and ways of thinking. Following are some examples of the cultural differences experienced by some return migrants:

At first, I could not immediately adapt to the Korean way of life. Brazilians are hot-blooded and noisy, but they do not disregard public order. For instance, if they come across a car in the street with a flat tire, they are eager to help the driver fix it. In Korea, people are always pressed for time. As soon as I got off the plane in Korea, it seemed like everybody was ready to fight. The most difficult thing is eating in restaurants. In Brazil, I could take my time

and eat slowly. That is not the case in Korea. Everybody tries to eat as fast as possible. Taking a taxi is a hassle, because I'm afraid I won't reach the destination without any trouble. One day, I stumbled over my words while giving directions in a taxi, because I first had to translate my thoughts from Portuguese to Korean. The driver got impatient and angry. I was really confused. In the past years since I returned from Brazil, I've thought constantly about going back. When I visited Korea four years after migrating to Brazil, I was under constant stress. At that time, I decided never to return to Korea. Brazilians trust that other people tell the truth. But in Korea, people only form relationships based on their needs (Choe Han-suk, age 58).

Whenever I meet someone more than once, I gladly exchange greetings as I did in Brazil. For example, if I go to a specific restaurant frequently, I say hello to the female employees. When that happens, my friends tease me saying that I'm attracted to them. Koreans do not care much about people they bump into everyday. At Korean expressway tollgates, if I say thanks when paying the toll, only four out of ten toll-keepers will reply with a smile, and the other six will stare at me in surprise. In department stores, when the employees bow or say something to attract attention, Koreans do not respond at all. If that happens to me, I answer their questions. Another thing is that Brazilians take more care of the insides of their homes than the outsides. So they usually have many valuable paintings and decorations at home. Conversely, Koreans are more interested in the size of their houses or apartments. I plan to live in Korea for now, but eventually, I would like to go to Brazil so I can be comfortable in my old age. In Brazil, a man who earns three hundred thousand won a month can still enjoy a bottle of beer and a kebab (Yu Chang-gi, age 37).

Older people are relatively easily accepted in Korean society. But young people who are heavily immersed in Brazilian culture may have trouble. One of my friends from Brazil got into a fight with a person two years older while drinking in Korea. According to him, the other person kept demanding that he do whatever he said

because he was older. Drinking customs in Korea are hard to understand. In Brazil, people drink and talk while having a good time. But here, it is totally different. People drink like they want to drink themselves to death. What's more, they drink when they need to say something difficult or solve a specific problem. These kinds of conflicts may slowly disappear with time. But some people might not overcome the cultural differences in the end (Jo Jae-geun, age 37).

Most return migrants from Brazil agree that discrimination towards them is not severe in Korea. This is partly due to the fact that Koreans do not care much about Brazil and that Brazilian culture does not mean much in Korean society. They know that many Koreans assume that return migrants from the United States are ill-mannered and arrogant, but this stereotype does not apply to them. One young female college student tell me her story: "When I go to college in Korea, I am a little bit afraid that they may ignore me simply because I am from Brazil. But at least they do not despise me. On the contrary, they are curious about Brazil and ask a lot of questions. Also, owing to the globalization of Korean society, people who are accustomed to foreign cultures are sometime welcomed." When the return migrants meet other Koreans over business, ordinary Koreans cannot easily tell that they are dealing with return migrants from Brazil. Even when their migration history is disclosed, many return migrants added, there are still no serious problems. Generally speaking, Korean perceptions of return migrants in recent years have changed tremendously compared to the past several decades. One businessman who worked in São Paulo about forty years ago recalled his bad experiences after returning from Brazil:

I graduated from college in 1968 and started working at a company. The company sent me to São Paulo to improve trade in 1972. After living in Brazil for about ten years, I returned to Korea in 1981 to get married. Although I was quite a successful businessman, I was declined by many prospective brides. They thought I was living with uncivilized people in an underdeveloped country (Ha Su-

yeong, age 61).

Problems in process of readaptation commonly take place at work. Most older returnees are retired and do not actively seek employment. Some older people start small businesses using their capital and experiences obtained in Brazil. As a result, they do not need to change themselves extensively to make a living in Korea. One thing they do complain about, though, is that they cannot use their amassed knowledge and experience in the garment industry, as the labor costs in Korea are too high. For the most part, young people find jobs in overseas trade and embassies in Korea.

Young returnees resort to diverse ways to reduce conflicts and be fully accepted into Korean society when living in Korea. One such method is education. Koreans do not know anything about the Brazilian educational system and underestimate the quality of degrees granted in Brazil. In this situation, many who graduated from Brazilian universities have to repeat their college education in Korea. People attended Korean universities often say that college was helpful to their careers because they made friends and broadened their social relationships. Also, they were able to prove their level of Korean language proficiency while in college, which helped them get jobs after graduation. Young Koreans in Brazil generally have no problems reading Korean, but their writing ability tends to be very poor due to the extremely limited opportunities to write in Korean. Return migrants who speak Korean with foreign accents may be disadvantaged in many respects, even though Korean immigrants in Brazil speak and understand Korean much better than those in the United States or Europe. That is why some of them major in Portuguese or Spanish in college, which are very easy subjects for them. Many native Korean students complain that it is unfair for the return migrants to study the languages that they are familiar with. But the return migrants argue that they also have a hard time because it is more difficult for them to translate Spanish or Portuguese into Korean with their limited Korean language ability. Therefore, they do not ordinarily excel in college.

Another important factor is military service. In Korea, where military service is obligatory, people tend to be suspicious of return migrants as it is believed that they left Korea and secured foreign citizenship while young in order to avoid military duty. Thus, completing their military service after returning to Korea can mean that they are completely accepted as legitimate Koreans. One return migrant who began his military service at twenty-eight when he returned from Brazil talked about his experience: "Business associates often assume that I didn't serve in the military. But when they find out that I did, especially near the DMZ (demilitarized zone), they look at me again and regard me as a real Korean."

In short, Korean return migrants from Brazil have experienced relatively smooth adaptation in Korea without distinct ethnic discrimination. However, there exist slight differences between first- and second-generation return migrants from Brazil in terms of their homeland experiences. Compared to the older first-generation return migrants who have continuously maintained ties to the Korean homeland via relatively homogeneous ethnic enclaves in Brazil, younger second-generation return migrants, who were much more accustomed to Brazilian culture than their parents, might face some problems in Korea. Therefore, younger return migrants who are not fluent in Korean have to work harder to be accepted as soon as they return to Korea. But, sometimes, the difference in experiences between first- and second-generation Korean return migrants are not always clear-cut, and the younger, second-generation return migrants might not share the same experiences in their processes of adaptation in Korea. This means that some younger return migrants might not experience significant difficulty in adapting to Korean society.

Redefining Ethnic Identities in Korea

In Brazil, Korean immigrants do not discuss their ethnic identities in public. Even though members of the community may not agree on this point, everyone is entitled to their own opinion about it. On the

whole, first-generation Korean immigrants have maintained strong ethnic consciousness. Second-generation Korean immigrants born and raised in Brazil may have somewhat inconsistent identities depending upon their sociocultural situations. But when they decide to live in Korea, they are constantly required to redefine their ethnic identities. Many young return migrants complain that people unceasingly ask them about their ethnicity. Three informants expressed their opinions in the following terms:

I do not have any problems in my relationships with family members and relatives. Generally, adults do not question their Korean identity and maintain it wherever they live. After returning to Korea, I sometimes think about Brazil, but I do not intentionally look for Brazilian culture here. When I was in Brazil, young people pointed out my poor Portuguese, so I asked them, "Why can't you speak Korean well?" Anyway, young return migrants might have some problems (Bak Mi-seon, age 55).

Wherever we go, we are Koreans. In Brazil, I tried to learn Portuguese as quickly as possible. But I always think of myself as Korean, even though I have Brazilian citizenship now. In Korea, people do not recognize me as a Brazilian citizen. I plan to regain my Korean citizenship soon (Kim Han-su, age 32).

I have lived in Korea for four years. But I am not sure that I am a complete Korean. I still feel alienated from society. I understand Korean people, but I cannot totally agree with what they are saying. For example, in the office, we have to accept everything our superiors say. Koreans are changing, but still they have a long way to go. Three months after returning from Brazil, my uncle and I went to Busan to meet a customer and drank together. At one o'clock in the morning, the customer offered me a drink from his own cup. I refused it because I thought that was unhygienic. When I did that, he became flushed with anger and cursed me. Fortunately, my uncle explained to him that I had lived in a foreign country for a long time (Kang Jong-jin, age 35).

Many return migrants say that sometimes they are not sure whether they belong with Koreans or Brazilians. They often feel that they belong to neither. In Brazil, thanks to the concept of so-called "racial democracy" in a society with numerous racial mixes, including whites, mulattoes, blacks, indigenous people, Asians, and so on, Korean immigrants do not experience overt racial discrimination, though we cannot completely deny the existence of racist behavior in Brazil. In other words, racism against people of color is less severe in Brazil than in the United States or Europe. Hence, young Korean immigrants do not need to develop a definite concept of ethnicity while living in Brazil, because everybody is Brazilian by virtue of living there. Instead, young returnees often feel the importance of ethnicity in Korea. For instance, they get confused when they are asked by other Koreans whether they are overseas Koreans or not.

Return migrants from Brazil are not lower-class manual laborers. Many of them have college diplomas and are economically stable. They tend to be open-minded and self-confident. For this reason, they may feel uncomfortable when they have to redefine their ethnic identity in Korea to maintain harmonious relationships with people. But even young returnees who hold negative views of Korean culture to some degree think that they eventually have to change their ideas in order to live in Korea. The degree of Korean identity varies with the age of migration and their residential circumstances. The following three cases of young returnees clearly demonstrate this: One young returnee who migrated to Brazil at the age of four lived in a small Brazilian city without a Korean school and did not have a chance to learn Korean. So he did not build a strong sense of Korean identity in Brazil. When he returned to Korea, he suffered greatly while trying to rebuild his Korean identity. On the other hand, another young returnee who migrated to Brazil while attending middle school in Korea continued to maintain his Korean identity even though he acquired Brazilian citizenship in order to become a lawyer after finishing law school. When he came to Korea, he declared himself to be a Korean despite his love of Brazilian culture. Another informant who migrated to Brazil at the age of ten said that he shares

the feelings of both people.

Concerning ethnic identity, there are often explicit differences between the older and younger generations. This kind of generational conflict is also found in the Korean community in Brazil. Generally speaking, more young people tend to be committed to Brazilian society, while the majority of older people are highly committed to Korean society. There, young people always complain that their parents do not want to be heavily involved in Brazilian society. Older people blame their sons and daughters for not understanding Korean culture and language. In Brazil, young people can speak up for themselves, saying that older people should try hard to become members of Brazilian society. But in Korea, the situation is reversed. It is the young people who have to change. After all, young return migrants face more difficulty in re-establishing their identities in Korea.

Younger second-generation Korean return migrants who were relatively more integrated into Brazilian culture than first-generation migrants might have more problems adapting to Korean culture and may experience some identity conflict. Occasionally, when first-generation migrants encounter unexpected or unfamiliar situations in Korea, they may momentarily think that the Brazilian way of life is better. Under these circumstances, they get confused and, accordingly, frequently forced to redefine their ethnic identity. However, most young return migrants from Brazil say that their identity conflict is not that severe, and as time goes by, many come to understand Korean culture with help from close relatives or friends.

In short, despite some minor differences in their definition of ethnic identity in Brazil, return migrants agree on the fact that they have to identify as Korean once they decide to live in Korea. The almost total lack of or negligible discrimination against them can expedite the reconstruction of Korean ethnic identity soon after they return to Korea. This phenomenon is quite different from the case of Japanese Brazilians who return to Japan. Japanese Brazilians, who migrated to Brazil since 1908, have successfully assimilated into Brazilian society and have constructed multiple ethnic identities (Lesser 2002, 50). Unlike their Korean counterparts, Japanese Brazilians, with a popula-

tion of about 1.5 million, did not build a distinct ethnic enclave and strong ethnic consciousness after World War II. Instead, they have been participating in diverse economic activities in Brazil and have tried hard to be fully integrated into Brazilian society. They began returning to Japan as *dekasegi* (temporary migrant workers) in the late 1980s to avoid the economic crisis in Brazil and to take advantage of a shortage of manual workers in Japan. Like the Korean return migrants, they are relatively well educated and belong to the middle class in Brazil. Most planned to return to Brazil after saving up sufficient money (Mori 2002, 248). Japanese Brazilian migrant workers, or *nikkeijin*, who number close to thirty thousand, have faced many problems because of their strong attachment to Brazilian culture and customs and because of their ethnic identities as Japanese Brazilians, despite their indistinguishable physical appearances. In Japan, Japanese Brazilians and their children are frequently discriminated against because they do not communicate well in Japanese (Ninomiya 2002, 253). In many cases, Japanese return migrants from Brazil are portrayed as foreigners and are greeted with hostility (Adachi 2004, 71; Masterson 2004, 260; Tsuda 2003, 293).

Conclusion

The early Korean immigrants in Brazil who migrated as family units maintained strong ethnic consciousness in Brazil by actively participating in diverse sociocultural activities in the Korean community in Brazil. In Brazil, they constantly utilized various transnational networks to maintain their own cultural and ethnic identity. Thus, they were able to adapt to Korean society relatively easily without serious problems when they returned to Korea. Young Koreans who finished basic Korean education in Korea before moving to Brazil also had a relatively easy time maintaining their sense of Korean identity while residing in Brazil thanks to the relatively flexible Brazilian ethnic relations. But second-generation migrants born in Brazil did not develop clear ethnic identities and had to work to be integrated into

Korean society.

In general, so far, these return migrants have rejoined Korean society without severe problems, even though second-generation return migrants who are not fluent in Korean needed more time to understand Korean culture and customs. In ethnic terms, return migrants are not rejected or considered outsiders in Korea. This is attributable to their unique history and patterns of migration to Brazil since the 1960s. But, unlike return migrants to less developed countries, they fail to become active agents in terms of socioeconomic changes. Instead, they remain invisible and occupy a marginal socio-cultural and economic status in Korean society. This means that their contribution to and impact on the socioeconomic structure in the homeland are fairly restricted. Their limited roles in Korea result from the reversed economic conditions between Brazil and Korea since the late 1980s. However, to a limited extent, they may yet offer new insight to Korean society. Likewise, using the transnational networks that exist between Korea and Brazil, they can play a certain role in enriching Korean diasporic culture.

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