Community-Building of 1.5-Generation Korean-Canadian Immigrants in Toronto, Canada

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Introduction

In his book, *The Sociology of Community Connections*, John G. Bruhn provides a comprehensive definition of the term "community," which has been widely used and discussed in numerous studies in the domain of sociology. He argues that "community" generally refers to relationships which exist between members of a group who share "some common goals, values, and perhaps a way of life that reinforce each other, create positive feelings, and result in a degree of mutual commitment and responsibility" (12). Canada is often cited as one of the most popular countries for immigration, which has welcomed over six million immigrants since 1990 (*Immigration, Refugees* 7). According to the 2016 Census, more than one in five people in Canada is foreign-born (*Immigration and Ethnocultural* 1), representing more than 250 ethnic origins or ancestries amongst the Canadian population (6). In this context, the term "ethnic community" becomes salient in the discussion of the Canadian multicultural mosaic.

This article will engage in close reference to the definition of community that Bruhn provides in order to examine the community-building of Korean immigrants in Toronto.[1] When compared with other ethnic groups that are present in North America, there have not yet been many studies focusing on the lives of Korean-Canadian immigrants, especially on the immigrant youths. Therefore, the aim of this article will be to shed light on a number of key aspects of community-building of 1.5-generation Korean-Canadian youths,[2] which include the maintenance of the heritage language, cultural practices, and especially co-ethnic peer networking of this group within the domains of school, church, and the Internet.

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[1] Immigrants originating from South Korea, but hereafter referred to simply as Korean immigrants.

[2] 1.5 generation is a term widely used in immigration studies to refer to foreign-born youths who immigrated before or during their early teenage years to the host country. The term is used with the aim of distinguishing them from those with foreign-born parents who were born in the host country (second generation). Mary Yu Danico argues that 1.5 generation is a "heterogeneous group shaped by their experiences." Although their acculturative experiences may vary depending on gender, class, sexuality, and geography, the defining traits of this group are that they immigrated as children and adolescents, have memories of Korea, and identify themselves as bilingual and bicultural.

According to Bruhn, community-making is easiest when there are predecessors to join, as the basic element of community-building, networks, is established by predecessors (56). In this regard, community-building becomes relatively easy for Korean immigrants in Toronto, which is known to be one of the world's most multicultural cities. The Korean immigrant group is considered to be one of the fastest-growing immigrant groups in Canada, whose immigration, especially to Toronto, began in the late 1960s. According to the 2016 Census, the Korean community in Toronto census metropolitan area[3] consists of 73,385 people (*Census Profile*). Thus, Toronto provides an ideal location which presents Korean immigrants ample opportunities and occasions to engage with one another and invest in social capital.

Ethnic cliques in Schools

As long as there are other Korean peers in school, 1.5-generation Korean youths often demonstrate the tendency to stick together with Korean peers or other Asian students throughout their schooling years. In Mary Yu Danico's book, *The 1.5 Generation: Becoming Korean American in Hawaii*, the author states that 1.5-generation Korean Americans who attend private schools where there are few Korean Americans interact with local Asian Americans, and that those who attend public schools are more exposed to other Korean Americans and "pidginspeaking locals" (140). The participants in the study conducted by Christine Yeh et al of the process of cultural adjustment of Korean immigrant youths in America also "reported feeling close to and comfortable with Korean friends and friends who are Asian" (177). Moreover, this tendency is mirrored in Kyong Yoon's findings of the study on 1.5-generation Korean Canadians, which showed that the majority of the participants had "a relatively small number of non-Asian friends" ("Multicultural Digital" 156).

For many, this tendency to stick together is initiated as soon as they are enrolled in the *English as a Second Language* (*ESL*) program. Acquiring a second language is never just about learning the language; but rather, it involves critical issues for immigrant youths, such as the construction of social identities in school through interpersonal relationships that they develop with peers. Notably, the pull-out method, which obliges ESL students to attend classes in certain courses such as English in a separate classroom with other ESL peers, naturally forms cliques. Hee Kyoung T. Pyon's interviews of eleven Korean American immigrant youths provides an example of the

[3] A census metropolitan area (CMA) represents one or more adjacent municipalities surrounding the population centre, and is defined and used by Statistics Canada. The CMA of Toronto comprises the City of Toronto, Mississauga, Brampton, and Markham, among others, and its population was approximately 5.9 million, according to the Census 2016 (*Census Profile*).

tendency: the participants expressed the fact that the sheltered aspect of the ESL program was comforting, but "resulted in separation between the ESL students and the mainstream peers in school" (103). Often, the co-ethnic socialization continues beyond the time that 1.5-generation Korean youths take to complete the ESL program. The youths grow more and more comfortable adjusting to the new school environment while interacting with peers who speak the same heritage language.

Furthermore, members of a clique are likely to engage in continuous interaction patterns with one another: they tend to engage in academic assignments, co-curricular and extracurricular activities, as well as spending free time together (Hallinan and Smith 898). According to Kandel, through close and frequent peer interactions, clique members influence attitudes and behaviour of one another (quoted in Hallinan and Smith 899). Therefore, 1.5-generation Korean youths' interests, behaviour, and attitudes often remain based on the heritage culture, as it becomes an important aspect of social interaction in schools. For example, having knowledge about the latest news in Korean popular culture and media is consistently a common interest of these youths in their daily interaction with one another. [4]

Meanwhile, a sense of loyalty that 1.5-generation Korean immigrant youths feel towards their Korean-speaking group of friends in school tends to grow throughout their schooling years. For instance, Jean Kim and Patricia A. Duff's case study of 1.5-generation Korean-Canadian university students examined the language socialization and identity negotiations of the participants throughout their high school and university years, and one of their findings showed that speaking English was "perceived as an act of betrayal or lack of allegiance to one's Koreanness" (89) amongst Korean-speaking students. Thus, one's choice of language can be considered as an important indicator of one's identification within his or her ethnic group, and the social group he or she adheres to may often reflect the ethnic group of Korean-speaking peers in school.

[4] Yoon conducted interviews of 1.5 and second generation Korean Canadian immigrants to examine their engagement with the recent South Korean pop music (K-pop) phenomenon in their acculturative process. The findings demonstrated that K-pop was "an integral component of the diasporic Koreans' management and exploration of ethnic sociality" (8). One of the participants in his study, Ethan, expressed that K-pop was "always a nice topic of intro[duction]" (8). Another participant in the study, Victoria, stated that listening and dancing to K-pop, as well as singing along were what her friends and she always did in their spare time at school (10). The author concludes that K-pop can be understood as a "diasporic youth cultural practice" (1).

Ethnic Church

Outside of the domain of school, religious institutions have become an important site of community-building for ethnic groups. As Bruhn explains, religion is a valuable "source of social capital," which "brings people together in networks and creates interest in each other's welfare" (185). He also describes church as "the only social institution that teaches, advocates for, and models moral values across the lifespan" (191), thus highlighting its importance as a site that fosters community-building. In the case of the Korean Canadian community, Statistics Canada reported that the majority of Canadians of Korean origin are Protestant or Catholic (*The Korean Community* 11).

Therefore, Korean churches are a prevalent site for both religious and cultural practices of Korean immigrants. According to Guilsung Kwak and Daniel Lai, the Korean church has the biggest impact on shaping the Korean community (216). In the Greater Toronto Area (GTA),[5] there are over 150 Korean churches, for example. The prominence of Korean churches in the GTA stands as a solid proof that the Korean community has a vibrant presence: my own current work on Korean immigrants in Toronto, confirms that the immigrants demonstrate a high level of affiliation with the ethnic church, either through the past or ongoing experiences of attending Korean churches.[6]

Many Koreans in Canada attend ethnic churches for, not only religious practices, but also various types of support that accommodate their lives as immigrants (Noh 27). Indeed, beyond providing fellowship, the Korean church offers various occasions for the members to engage in cultural practices. In Pyong Gap Min's study, which is based on the interviews of 131 Korean head pastors in New York City, the author provided examples of the bilingual and bicultural context that Korean churches provide for Korean immigrant youths. Firstly, what is especially significant is the bilingual context that the Korean church provides in the form of Korean and English Ministry, as well as the Korean Sunday school. Secondly, the author also found that most of the Korean churches that were surveyed provided cultural contexts by celebrating religious and traditional holidays ("The Structure" 1381-1382, 1384). These findings appear to be consistent with the interviews of Korean Protestant immigrants that Min conducted in another study, where the

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[5] The Greater Toronto Area (GTA) is an administrative area of the province, which consists of the city of Toronto and regional municipalities surrounding it, such as Durham, Halton, Peel, and York.

[6] The work referred to is a part of a PhD dissertation currently being prepared by the author: *The Hyphenated Identity of Korean Immigrants in Canada and the Imagined Qualities of Canadianness* (Université Bordeaux Montaigne).

results showed that most Korean Protestant immigrants celebrate both religious and traditional holidays at church (*Preserving Ethnicity* 120). Korean pastors also use sermons to remind church members of the homeland: Korean national holidays such as Independence Day and other historically and politically important events which take place in Korea are mentioned in sermons (Min, "The Structure" 1384). Through these efforts, 1.5-generation Korean immigrant youths stay up to date with the current political and social affairs in the country of origin and become accustomed to Korean traditions and cultural practices.

Providing new Korean immigrants with fellowship and various services associated with adaptation to the host society may essentially have been major practical functions of Korean churches. Nowadays, offering Korean language and cultural education for immigrant offspring generations has become an increasingly important matter for Korean parents and Korean churches. In the case of Korean immigrant parents in Toronto, the vast majority believe that it is important for their children to speak Korean, for them to be able to communicate with family members and to maintain their identity. Moreover, numerous participants in Min's study reported that teaching their children Korean culture was one of the main reasons for Korean parents' regular attendance in church (*Preserving Ethnicity* 115). Thus, it is not surprising that Korean ethnic churches seek to further promote the bilingual and bicultural environment that would attract new members.

In contrast to the growing interest, Pyong Gap Min and Dae Young Kim's study on the subject of transmission of religion and cultural traditions through Korean English-language congregations in the United States revealed that there was a disassociation between English-language congregations and Korean culture and traditions. While Korean Protestants were successful in transmitting the religion to their offspring generations, they appeared to have failed to transmit Korean culture and traditions through religion. For example, two-thirds of 1.5-generation and second-generation Korean American adult participants in the survey who attended church during their childhood responded that they continued to attend church into their adulthood. However, Korean English-language congregations for 1.5- and second-generation Korean Protestants were found to "have almost entirely eliminated Korean cultural components from worship services and other socio-cultural activities" (263). The results of this study should therefore be kept in mind in order to avoid the assumption that linguistic or cultural retention is the key function that the Korean church plays within an ethnic community. Rather, Korean churches appear to be successfully retaining the community over generations by engaging its members through religion.

Min's study of Korean Protestants and Indian Hindus in America furthermore demonstrates that co-ethnic fellowship is important for Korean Protestant immigrants, as they wish to be a part of

the Korean community by maintaining co-ethnic networks. The vast majority of the Korean participants in this study stated that they spent one to two hours after the Sunday service socializing with friends at the church.[7] Even those who used to be atheists or Buddhists in South Korea stated that they became Protestants upon immigrating to the United States in order to "learn about the Korean community" (*Preserving Ethnicity* 112, 113). The Korean church therefore provides a valuable and highly sought-after site for networking amongst Korean immigrants.

Ethnic interaction and networking online

Compared to a dwindling number of subscribers to cable and satellite television services in Canada (Evans), the Internet appears to be taking an increasingly important place over the years in Canadians' daily life. The low cost of Internet services appears to be contributing greatly to the continuous popularity of the Internet; moreover, low-cost digital media makes up a significant part of transnational experiences of migrants (Yoon, "Multicultural Digital" 148).

Kyong Yoon conducted a study on full-time working Korean migrants in Vancouver and Kelowna in Canada and their use of the Internet to investigate the Internet's influence on the sociocultural connections that the migrants build with their homeland, their diasporic community, and the host society. In this study, the author found that newer immigrant groups are "increasingly equipped with various forms of emerging media technologies," and that their use of the Internet even "surpasses that of the host country's majority population" ("Korean Migrants" 2). As the Korean immigrant group represents a recent immigrant population, they are no exception to this trend: the migrants in Yoon's study demonstrated a tendency to be highly engaged in daily Internet use, especially to access the homeland media online and to transnationally or locally communicate with other Koreans ("Korean Migrants" 6).

Indeed, the Internet provides an extremely useful space for community-building online, regardless of age, gender, class, or religion. Bruhn points out a number of significant aspects of the Internet within the context of community-building: firstly, he describes the Internet as "a mosaic of communities," through which the fundamental principle of communities is no longer based on places but rather on people who share common interests and goals (231); secondly, social support and companionship, as well as getting information, are the key functions of the Internet that more and more people are seeking by going online (233).

[7] There are also numerous other occasions for the youths to engage in co-ethnic peer interaction and religious practice, such as the Bible school classes and religious missions abroad that are organized systematically.

Yoon's interviews conducted on twenty-two 1.5-generation Korean immigrants in Toronto and their digital media practices revealed that the Internet was considered as a cultural resource which was available to the participants, potentially allowing them to code-switch between the mainstream and ethnic culture and language ("Multicultural Digital"). In the context of the Korean immigrants' engagement in ethnic digital media, the participants in this study appeared to be regularly engaged in ethnic media and peer interaction with other Koreans via the Internet. For instance, consistent among their responses were their active use of social media and messaging platforms online—including both Korean-based and mainstream social networking applications and sites to engage with other Koreans—and their habitual transnational access to homeland media via the Internet through streaming TV sites.

The Internet has changed the notion of community and broadened the users' social networks, thus contributing to social capital. As a result, the users engage in a variety of everyday tasks, such as socialization, seeking information, advice, and resources, by exploring different online communities according to their needs. Communication technologies offer immigrant youths the kinds of community free from parental control and social discrimination they may feel through the "cultural and linguistic diversity, interactivity, anonymity, and accessibility" that the Internet provides (Ndengeyingoma 112).

Conclusion

A community is created by the choice that its members make to invest in social capital and to connect with one another. The choices that 1.5-generation Korean immigrants are faced with during their acculturative experiences may be numerous or sometimes limited depending on numerous factors, including the availability of social resources. For example, if there are no other Korean-speaking peers in school, Korean immigrant youths may choose to become friends with other peers of different origin or to seclude themselves, void of peer relationships and interaction. They may also choose to connect with the ethnic community by attending Korean churches or turning to the Internet to connect with other Koreans.

It is easy to assume that ethnic communities are only present in the form of ethnic neighbourhoods that are often found in big cities. However, this assumption leaves the understanding of the notion of community restricted and limited to boundaries of ethnic enclaves. Therefore, it becomes imperative to clearly distinguish the notions of neighbourhood and community. Barry Wellman and Milena Gulia argue that neighbourhoods can be perceived as a place, bound by their geographical locations, while the notion of community involves networks of personal relationships

in which members of a group develop and invest (qtd. in Bruhn 239). In the context of ethnic communities in Toronto, numerous ethnic neighbourhoods are present within the city. However, the actual force that drives ethnic communities is not necessarily limited to the boundaries of each ethnic neighbourhood; but it is rooted in networking amongst the members that takes place in different domains, as described in this article. Through the interpersonal relationships that they develop, Korean immigrants are brought closer together and they stay connected with one another within the Korean community.

Critics of multiculturalism argue that diversity hinders social cohesion and only promotes separation between different ethnic groups. However, while ethnic segregation and marginalization within the mainstream society may indeed result from an individual's strong sense of ethnic attachment among other influencing factors, Won Moo Hurh and Kwang Chung Kim (1984) concluded that sociocultural integration of the Korean immigrants in the United States can take place in an additive or adhesive manner. In other words, certain aspects of the mainstream culture, as well as social networks, are added to the Korean immigrants' heritage culture and co-ethnic networks throughout their adaptation process. Therefore, it would be unjust to assume that the co-ethnic socialization and networking tendencies that contribute to the community-building of the 1.5-generation Korean immigrants are representative of the marginalized, secluded position within the society. Understanding the interplay between ethnic and national attachment in the case of the sociocultural adaptation of the Korean immigrants in Canada requires further investigation.

In the meantime, it cannot be denied that the prosperity of ethnic communities brings numerous advantages to the host society as a whole by fulfilling a wide variety of economic, cultural, social, and political functions related to the needs of the immigrants in the new country. Not only does networking within the community foster a sense of bonding amongst the members, it also allows an exchange of social and economic support and capital for one another. Therefore, it constitutes a valuable resource for immigrants as they deal with a new culture. 1.5-generation youths find comfort in co-ethnic relationships during their acculturative experiences and continue to invest in them. It is through the ethnic community that immigrants, especially Canada's more recent, non-European immigrant groups like Koreans, are helped to overcome many barriers that they may face in the host society, such as racial discrimination in housing, employment, and other spheres of life. Ethnic communities in this regard give voice and presence to the members within the host society.

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