Diasporic Return, Homeland, Hierarchy, and Identity: Experiences of Korean Diasporic Returnees in South Korea*

Changzoo Song**
Tsunoda Takeshi***

I. INTRODUCTION: DIASPORIC RETURN

The late 1980s began to see a substantial number of ‘ethnic return migrants’ (or ‘diasporic return migrants’ as they might be called) in many parts of the world. Ethnic return migrants are those who return-migrate to their ethnic homelands after having lived for more than one or more generations overseas (Sheffer 2003; Tsuda 2003). This is rather an unusual form of international migration as diasporic groups tend to be settled well in their host societies after a few generations while keeping their ethno-cultural identities in ‘home abroad’, and generally there is no further migration, especially back to their ancestral homelands (Sheffer 2003). Though most of these ethnic returnees had never set foot in their ‘homeland’, they were ‘returning’ to the countries where their ancestors were originally from. Increasing globalisation, nevertheless, has been allowing diasporic peoples to reconnect with their ancestral homelands, and one of the ways to do so is through migration (Clifford 1994: 304).

Ethnic return migration occurred in Europe in the late 1980s when the Cold War was easing and also when the Soviet Union collapsed in the end of 1991. The German Aussiedler started returning from the former communist countries of Eastern Europe (including Poland and Romania) to Germany in the late 1980s. Soon, a larger number of ethnic Germans returned to Germany from the former Soviet Union republics such as Kazakhstan, and by the early 2000s nearly 3 million of them resettled in Germany. Meanwhile, in the early and mid-1990s almost 5 million ethnic Russians also returned to Russia from the newly independent republics of Central Asia and other Eastern European countries such as Ukraine. This was due to the rising nationalisms in these countries as well as the declining economic and political situations in these countries after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Over 1.5 million Jewish people also migrated from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union to Israel since the 1980s (cf. Münz &

* This work was supported by the Academy of Korean Studies Grant funded by the Korean Government (MEST) (AKS-2012-BAA-2101).
** University of Auckland
*** Kansai University
Ohliger 2003; Remnnik 1998).

In addition, the economic downturns of Latin America in the 1980s also pushed many ethnic Spaniards, Italians, and Portuguese, whose ancestors had migrated to this continent many generations ago, to return-migrate to their ancestral homelands in Europe. A part of this outmigration from the Latin American continent were ethnic Japanese (Nikkeijin) who returned to their ancestral homeland of Japan since the late 1980s. Almost 300,000 Nikkeijin from Brazil and Peru return-migrated to Japan until recently (cf. Tsuda 2003, 2009).

South Korea is no exception. Beginning in the late-1980s, tens of thousands of ethnic Koreans have return migrated to South Korea, both on a temporary and permanent basis. The influx of nearly 600,000 ethnic Koreans from China (Chosŏnjok or Chaoxianzu as they are called) to South Korea in the last two and half decades is ethnic return migration, which occurred in the similar context (Song 2009). China also saw a surge of ethnic return migration after the 1980s as the country emerged as an economic powerhouse with new open and reform policies. A large number of overseas Chinese have return-migrated to China, particularly from Southeast Asia and North America since the late 1980s, and they have been contributing greatly to the development of the country’s economy.

As seen above, ethnic return migration has been occurring in many parts of the world, involving millions of people. Then, what are the causes of such ethnic return migrations in the last few decades? In some cases, as implied above, ethnic return migrations happened because of political reasons. For example, the case of the Russian ethnic return migrants, who returned to Russia from Central Asia after the 1990s, was due to political reasons. The rise of local nationalisms in the newly independent Central Asian countries such as Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan in the late 1980s pushed ethnic Russians to return to their homeland. Similarly, many Russians in Ukraine were also pushed to go back to Russia by nationalistic Ukrainians after the collapse of the Soviet Union. This is because Russians were seen as ‘colonisers’ in these countries since their ancestors came there with the expansion of the Russian Empire and later the Soviet Union. There are some political factors behind the Jewish ethnic return migrations to Israel from the former Soviet Union and also the ethnic German return migrations from Eastern European countries and the from Soviet Union after the collapse of the communist regimes in the region in the 1980s.

Nevertheless, most of ethnic return migrations are caused by economic reasons (Tsuda 2009). For example, the German Aussiedler migrants from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union was for economic reasons as well as political reasons. The ethnic return migrations of the European descendants of Latin America in the 1990s to their ancestral homelands of Spain, Portugal and Italy in Europe were also due to the economic stagnation of their natal homeland and the prosperity of their ethnic homeland. The ethnic return migration of Nikkeijin from Brazil and other Latin American countries to Japan in the last three decades were also very much due to economic reasons. The stagnating economies of Latin America pushed the Nikkeijin out of Latin America and at the same time Japan’s labour shortage after the
1980s pulled them to Japan. The high employment opportunities and much higher wages in Japan attracted the *Nikkeijin* migrants to Japan. This is also true for the *Chosŏnjok* migrants from China to South Korea since the early 1990s. The gaps in employment opportunities and wage differentials between China and South Korea were the main cause of their ethnic return migration to their ancestral homeland.

Importantly, these diasporic returns do not happen spontaneously. There are both underlying and explicit processes and factors that make diasporic return possible. Among the numerous factors, state policy—and more specifically diaspora engagement policy—is one of the most salient. In fact, immigration policies of the receiving countries contributed greatly to the rising ethnic return migrations in the last three decades. The humanitarian migration policies of the democratic countries of Western Europe such as Germany, for example, allowed both German and non-German *Aussiedler* to migrate to Germany (Münz & Ohliger 2003; Skrentny et al 2007). Israel’s policy to accept Jewish people from overseas encouraged Jews to return to their ancestral homeland. In particular, this policy is backed by the country’s Law of Return, which not only allows Jews to return home, but also to oblige the Israeli state to promote such migration and offer support to the ethnic return migrants (Münz & Ohliger 2003; Remnnick 1998; Joppke 2005). In fact, the law also allowed the spouses and children of Jewish people to migrate to Israel. In East Asia countries such as Japan, South Korea, and China all have pursued ethnicity-oriented immigration policies, which also promoted the ethnic return migrations. These three countries attracted migrants of their own ethnic groups when they need the labour and/or investments of the latter (Skrentny et al 2007).

Ethnic return migrations, despite the unusual character of the phenomenon, have not been well studied yet. There have been a small number of works that focus on the causes of such form of international migration (cf. Münz & Ohliger 2003; Tsuda 1999; Remnnick 1998; Fox 2003; Song 2009, 2015; Fox 2003; Tsuda 2010, 2009, 2003, 1999; Joppke 2005; Skrentny et al 2007; Song 2009). Some researchers also have studied the adaptation patterns of the ethnic return migrants in their ethnic homelands (Remnnick 1998; Tsuda 1999; Fox 2003; Song 2009, 2015). Others paid attention to the identity issues of the ethnic return migrations (Tsuda 1999; Fox 2003; Remnnick 1998; Song 2009, 2015). In fact, one of the most interesting and important issues that the ethnic return migrations have intrigued researchers are the changes in identity among ethnic return migrants in their ethnic homelands. They unveiled that depending on the migration experiences of the ethnic return migrants in their ethnic homelands, the ethnic and national identities of the ethnic return migrants can become weaker or stronger. They observed the hierarchical relationship between the ethnic return migrants and their co-ethnics in the host societies, which tends to be determined according to the existing global hierarchy of the sending and receiving countries (cf. Tsuda 1999a,b; Remnnick 1998; Lemish 2000; Seol & Skrentny 2009). These issues need to be studied further if we want to understand the complicated, fluid, and flexible identities of contemporary diasporic peoples of the world.

Considering all these intriguing issues related to ethnic return migrations and migrants, this paper is
to explore the Korean ethnic return migrations with a particular attention to the migration and settlement experiences of the ethnic return migrants. In so doing, it will also observe the changes in ethnic and national identities (as well as the changing notions of ‘homelands’) among some of the Korean ethnic return migrants in their ethnic homeland. In another word, this paper explores the relationship between the identity changes and the settlement experiences and the notions of homelands among the Korean diasporic people who have return migrated to South Korea. In so doing, this paper will compare the three cases of Korean ethnic return migrations: Korean Chinese, Soviet Koreans, and Korean American ethnic return migrants who migrated to and settled in South Korea after the 1990s.

II. HOMELAND AND IDENTITY FOR DIASPORIC RETURNEES

As stated above, ethnic return migration raises many intriguing issues for study. One of the most prominent questions is how ethnic return migrations impact on the ethnic and national identities of the diasporic migrants in their ethnic homelands. Would they be the same people after the ethnic return migration experiences? In addition, other related questions also follow: if ethnic return migrations actually have impacts on the changes of identities of the migrants, then, exactly why and how such changes do take place?; are there any variances among different ethnic return migrants in their migration experiences and identity changes? These are important questions that only a few scholars have dealt with.

Ethnic return migrants normally have clear ethnic identity in their natal homelands, where they are often classified as ethnic minorities regardless of the length of their settlements in the countries. For example, Asian Americans tend to be identified as ‘Asian’ or ethnic minority by the mainstream European society even when these ‘Asians’ have lived in the country for a few generations or even longer than their contemporary European counterparts. This makes these ethnic minorities remember their ethnic origins regardless of the long time they have lived in the ‘host’ societies. For example, the Nikkeijin in Brazil, who have been living in Brazil over three or four generations are still called ‘Japonês’ by other Brazilians, who might have migrated to the country later than Japanese. In addition to their self-awareness of their cultural differences from the other Brazilians, they also are reminded of their ethnicity in daily life in this manner. This gives a very clear identity to the ethnic Japanese in Brazil as ‘Japanese’. It is same in countries like Australia and New Zealand, and the old Chinese migrants, whose ancestors settled in the countries already more than 150 years are still recognised as ‘Chinese’.¹

¹ I have met a middle-aged Chinese lady in Auckland several years ago and she told me a similar story on her being called as a ‘Chinese’. She was born in Wellington and her great-great-grand father came to New Zealand in the 1860s. Naturally, she does not speak any Chinese and English is her mother tongue. In one occasion, a Croatian-born hair-stylist (who migrated to the country about ten years ago) asked the ethnic Chinese lady how she could speak English so ‘fluently’. This is an evidence that even those European migrants, who came to New Zealand later than older migrants of Asian origin, tend to consider themselves as the mainstream society while those descendants of the
Nevertheless, such clearly defined ethnic identities can go through serious changes in their ethnic homelands. For example, the Japanese Brazilian ethnic return migrants to Japan in the post-1980s era went through serious changes in their identity. In the 1980s when the Japanese economy, which has been growing continuously in the previous decades, faced labour shortage in domestic market, especially for the manual workers. As a solution for the labour shortage, the Japanese government decided to bring in *Nikkeijin* workers from Brazil and a few other Latin American countries. The Japanese government issued Japanese Brazilians privileged visas with which the latter could work and settle in Japan. Behind this decision was ethno-centric belief that the *Nikkeijin* workers, as they are the same ‘Japanese’, would not disturb the homogeneity of the Japanese society too much. As a result, some 300,000 *Nikkeijin* workers were imported to Japan by the mid-2000. From the *Nikkeijin* perspective, Japan is undoubtedly their ancestral homeland and they were ‘coming home’ with high expectations and even excitement (Tsuda 1999).

Nevertheless, soon it proved that their expectations were not realistic at all. Soon after they arrived in Japan and started to work, mostly in factories in industrial towns, they started to experience subtle discrimination and social alienation. The work they had to do was so-called ‘3K’ jobs (*kitsu*, *kitanai*, and *kikken*), with smaller payments than their co-ethnic local workers. In many cases, the *Nikkeijin* workers wore different uniforms from their co-ethnics as the former normally were hired by outsourced labour companies which supply workforce to the manufacturing sector. In addition, the *Nikkeijin* workers also felt that their co-ethnic colleagues at work do not seem to want to socially associate with them. Tsuda’s observation tells us that the regular Japanese workers and *Nikkeijin* workers would not mingle well at workplaces (Tsuda 2003). The two groups would not even sit together during lunch breaks and they would eat at separate tables. From Japanese perspective, these *Nikkeijin* workers do not speak Japanese language and their behaviour is different from ordinary Japanese people. In a sense, these Japanese Brazilians were too much like ‘Latin-Americans’ in their eating habits, fashion, and social manners and they were like ‘foreigners’ (Tsuda 2003).

After the work, they would be also separated. As migrant workers the *Nikkeijin* typically live in neighbourhood where rent is cheaper and for this reason they would form their own enclaves around many industrial towns. Conflicts also occurred in residential communities as the *Nikkeijin* workers and their families would not be familiar with the well-governed and traditional life-styles of Japanese communities. For example, recycling was a common issue in many communities where *Nikkeijin* resided. Japan’s sophisticated recycling system is difficult to be followed by many foreigners, especially for the *Nikkeijin* who come from less developed Latin American countries. These differences made the *Nikkeijin* from Brazil and other Latin American countries suffer prejudice and discrimination from their co-ethnics. Despite their Japanese appearance, *Nikkeijin* from Brazil are culturally Brazilians, normally speaking only Portuguese, and they are seen as foreigners by other Japanese.

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old Chinese migrants are assumed to be new-comers.
In any case, when the Japanese economy suffered from the global economic downturn of 2007-2008, Japanese government paid Nikkeijin workers to leave the country. With the economic depression and the increasing unemployment rate in domestic labour market, Japan did not need those Nikkeijin workers any more. The government paid Nikkeijin workers, whom it had brought with special and privileged visa scheme, about 300,000 Japanese yen each to encourage them to leave Japan and return to Latin America. This revealed the non-ethnic perspective of Japanese society and government, which do not value the ethnic ties between Japan and Nikkeijin. With such a policy, many Japanese Brazilians started to leave Japan, and the Nikkeijin communities through Japan shrunk.

With the development of the events and the discrimination they experience in Japan, the Nikkeijin workers quickly realises that they are very different from their co-ethnics in Japan, which also made them question their genuine identity. If we are not Japanese, then, who are we? This fundamental question emerged among the Nikkeijin from Brazil and other Latin American countries, and most of the Nikkeijin from Brazil chose Brazil for their identity-basis. Japanese Brazilians, in fact, started to express their being Brazilianness in Japanese festivals as well as in their private life. Tsuda reports that they started to dance Brazilian samba at local matsuri even though they normally do not practise such performances in Brazil (1999b). The reason why they “chose to be Brazilians” is because, as a large and multicultural country, Brazil carries numerous positive characters (Tsuda 1999b).

By bringing denial of Nikkeijin as proper ‘Japanese’ by the Japanese in Japan, the ethnic return migration of Nikkeijin from Latin America actually creates ethnic hierarchy among the Japanese people: between Japanese in Japan and Nikkeijin. The former is definitely more Japanese and they occupy higher position in the ethnic hierarchy. This is not all, however, and other researchers insist that ethnic return migration actually brings hierarchical relationship even among the Nikkeijin migrants. Takenaka sees such a hierarchy between the Nikkeijin from Brazil and Peru (Takenaka 1999). Unlike Brazil, Peru does not carry much positive meanings and those Nikkeijin Peru tend to distance themselves from Peru and Peruvian migrants in Japan. They do not choose a nation-state like Peru for the basis of their identity, and they rather consider themselves ‘overseas Japanese’ or tend to choose nikkei nikkei identity (Takenaka 2009).

While the Nikkeijin cases are more apparent in showing the complexities of ethnic return migration and migrants’ ethnic identities, other ethnic return migration cases also show similar changes of identities and hierarchical relationships among same ethnic groups who come to their ancestral homelands from different host countries. There definitely are hierarchical relationships among ethnic return migrants and also in their relationship with their co-ethnics in host societies. Another example would be the case of German Aussiedler from the former Soviet Union. Not being able to speak German, they also face discrimination, alienation, and marginalisation and this further weakens their German identity no matter how feeble it might be (cf. Münz & Ohliger 2003). The Jewish return migrants from the former Soviet Union, in comparison with the other Jews from more developed western countries, have similar experience of prejudice and discrimination in their ethnic homeland (cf. Lemish 2000; Remnnick 1998).
Such an ethnic hierarchy does not necessarily produces prejudice and discrimination. It also creates respect and privilege for those who return from more developed western countries. For example, ethnic return migrants from wealthy western countries tend to take more professional jobs in their ethnic homelands and also they tend to be more respected by the locals than their co-ethnics who are from poorer countries. Japanese American ethnic return migrants surely fetch more respectable jobs in Japan, particularly because of their English capability and professional qualifications. Naturally, there exists a huge gap between Japanese American and Japanese Brazilian ethnic return migrants. In China, similarly, those ethnic Chinese returning from developed western European and North American countries enjoy more privileges than locals and those who return from poorer countries such as Vietnam and Indonesia.

Related to such identity changes after ethnic return migration is the notion of ‘homelands’ among the diaspora. The notion of homeland implies emotional affinities to certain geographical areas and lands. For diasporic people the notion of homelands can be different from general population, and this is due to their migration and settlement experiences (among those whom they consider foreigners), which often accompanies discrimination and hostility. For them homeland can also be situational and contextual. For diasporic people who have migrated from one country to another continuously, their homeland would be multiple. Like identities, people might choose one particular ‘homeland’ out of many depending on their situation. In particular, diasporic people are subject to forced classification by the dominant groups, they tend to use their identity and homeland strategically. By choosing a meaningful identity and homeland out of the multiple identities and homelands available to them, diasporic people make a sense for themselves and their life. This principle applies well to the ethnic return migrants.

In the following section we will explore the ethnic identity changes, flexibilities of homelands, and ethnic hierarchy in regard to ethnic return migrations by looking at the three cases of Korean diasporic return groups of Korean Chinese (Chosŏnjok), Soviet Koreans (Koryŏ saram), and Korean Americans.

III. THE CHOSŎNJOK DIASPORIC RETURNEES

Migration History

The two-million strong ethnic Koreans in China’s three north-eastern provinces of Jilin, Heilongjiang, and Liaoning (formerly called ‘Manchuria’) today are the descendants of those Koreans who migrated to Manchuria (the Three North-eastern Provinces of China today) from the Korean Peninsula in the late 19th century. The Chosŏn Dynasty was in political, economic and social turmoil through the 19th century and by the mid-19th century there were rebellions, droughts, and famines, which pushed people particularly from the northern parts of the Korean peninsula to Manchuria. Manchuria is the homeland of the powerful Manchus, who established the Qing Dynasty in the 17th century, and they did not allow Han Chinese or Koreans to enter into the land. This policy left entire Manchuria very sparsely populated. The policy eased later, and to defend Manchuria from the encroaching Russians, the Manchus allowed Han
Chinese and Koreans to migrate to Manchuria in 1885 (McKweon 2004). Koreans migrated to Manchuria in different time periods from different parts of Korea. Earlier migrants were poverty-stricken peasants from the northernmost part of the Korean peninsula and they settled in Kando (Jiandao in Chinese) of southern Manchuria right across the Tuman River, which marked the border between Korea and China. A larger number of Koreans migrated to Manchuria in the early twentieth century as Korea was colonised by Japan, and these migrants included both impoverished and politically motivated Koreans. After Japan’s invasion of Manchuria and the consequent establishment of Manchukuo in 1932, peasants from southern parts of the Korean peninsula were semi-forced by the Japanese authorities to migrate to northern parts of Manchuria to develop the lands and the abundant resources there.

**Ethnic/National Identity**

From the early days of their migration to Manchuria, Korean Chinese had a clear ethnic/national identity as ‘Koreans’ and as peoples with a long pre-colonial history and shared cultures, both Koreans and Chinese had a sense of ‘proto-nationalism’ as Hobsbawm suggests (Hobsbawm 1997 [1990]). In addition, Koreans’ having their own newspapers and journals as well as their own educational system also helped reinforcing their national identity. As Anderson emphasises, the role of print capitalism is very important for the development of national identity (Anderson 1983). Later, through their struggling Japanese colonialism, and participating in building the New China, these Koreans came to have cherished political identity as ‘Chinese’ citizens (Chŏng, 1996). Thus, Korean Chinese came to have dual identities both as ethnic Koreans (*Chosŏnjok* in Korean and *Chaoxianzu* in Chinese) and as Chinese citizens (Kang, 2008).

When the People’s Republic of China was established in 1949, the new government recognised Koreans in Manchuria as its citizens and in 1952 the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture was established. This helped Korean Chinese to keep their culture, language and identity especially because as autonomous prefecture, the Yanbian Korean community could use Korean language and establish Korean schools. Almost all Koreans attended their own ethnic schools and, therefore, Korean identity and culture were well maintained.

During the Cold War China recognized North Korea as the only legitimate Korean state while it considered South Korea as an illegitimate political entity. In this circumstance, the Korean Chinese could maintain contact only with North Koreans while they were totally disconnected from South Koreans. This changed only in the 1980s when the Cold War eased and when China opened itself to the outside world. By the mid-1980s Korean Chinese came to have a more realistic view of South Korea, particularly its

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2) The migrations of Han Chinese and Koreans to Manchuria and of Russians to Siberia comprised important elements of the global migration in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, they have been neglected by migration historians (McKeown, 2004).
economic prosperity in contrast to the poverty and ideological rigidity of North Korea. This changed the formerly negative perceptions of Korean Chinese toward South Korea and in the late-1980s they began to visit South Korea and many of them stayed there as migrant workers. After the establishment of formal diplomatic relations between South Korea and China in 1992 more Korean Chinese migrated to South Korea. Familiar with both Chinese and Korean cultures, they could easily function in South Korea and many of them led a transnational life style, moving back and forth between China and South Korea.

**Ethnic Return Migration**

This ethnic return migration of Korean Chinese to South Korea was facilitated by the macro-economic and socio-political conditions of China and South Korea in the last two decades. The relative economic backwardness in peripheral northeast China, where ethnic Koreans are concentrated, made Korean Chinese turn to the employment opportunities in South Korea, where there was a demand for unskilled workers. South Koreans, out of nostalgic notions toward their co-ethnics in China whom they could not meet for several decades, initially viewed them with curiosity even though they considered Korean Chinese as poor migrant workers.

Korean Chinese did not know much about South Korea before the mid-1980s. If they knew, their knowledge was influenced by the Cold War propaganda of China and North Korea. It was after the 1986 Asian Games and the 1988 Summer Olympic Games – both held in South Korea – when Korean Chinese were positively impressed at the economic prosperity of their ancestral homeland. Many of them were eager to visit their relatives in South Korea, but travelling overseas was not easy in China at that time. Korean Chinese also needed invitations from their South Korean relatives to obtain entry permission to South Korea, which was not easy as they had been disconnected from their relatives already for many decades. It was not until the establishment of a formal diplomatic relationship between South Korea and China in 1992 when a large number of Korean Chinese were able to visit South Korea. They came as trainees, migrant workers, students, tourists, and spouses of South Koreans. Once in South Korea, most of Korean Chinese tried to find work regardless of their visa status as they could earn as much as twenty times more there than in China. Korean Chinese quickly became the largest group among all foreign workers in South Korea, exceeding 100,000 by the mid-1990s and reaching nearly 240,000 by 2006.

Behind such a larger scale migration of Korean Chinese to South Korea is certainly the economic opportunity in South Korea, but there are also socio-economic changes of their community in post-Reform China. Many of Korean Chinese experienced their economic status declining in post-reform China in regard to their Han Chinese neighbours (Chŏng, 2000, p.93). The economic status decline has been accompanied by gradual political alienation of Korean Chinese within the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture and in many other Korean villages, where ethnic Koreans lost the majority status due to increasing number of Han Chinese migrants.

From the early days of migration to Manchuria, Korean and Chinese settlers often formed separate
communities because of their different agricultural backgrounds. Being used to wet-rice cultivation, Korean migrants settled mostly in lowlands, along rivers (Chŏn, 1991, p.80). Chinese settlers, meanwhile, most of whom came from impoverished Shandong Province, chose higher lands as they were used to dry-land crops such as wheat and sorghum. As rice is a higher-value crop in northeast China, Koreans used to enjoy a better life than their Chinese neighbours (To, 1992, p.169; Chŏng, 2000; Kim, 2003, p.110) with the highest educational level among all ethnic groups in China (Lee, 1986; Hoffmann, 1986; Chŏng, 2000). By the mid-1980s, however, Korean Chinese began to feel that their socio-economic status was declining in comparison with that of Han Chinese. The speed of economic development of Yanbian was slower than other regions of China. In large part, this was because of the unbalanced development of China between urban and rural areas since the 1980s. In addition, the economic status of Korean Chinese declined in rural northeast China in relation to that of Han Chinese due to the former’s sticking to rice-growing while the latter diversified their economic activities by growing commercial crops and running small businesses (Chŏng, 2000, p.93).

In addition, through the 1980s and 90s Korean Chinese also felt that their political status within their own communities weakened. Though they enjoyed equal rights with the dominant Han Chinese, politically they were totally dominated by Han Chinese. This was particularly true during the 1960s and 1970s when ethnic minorities suffered greatly under the ultra leftist movements such as the Great Leap Forward Movement and the Cultural Revolution. Recently Korean Chinese intellectuals showed a growing longing for historical consciousness and a search for the roots of Korean Chinese (Lee, 2005, p.111).

Nostalgia tends to get stronger especially when one is in hardship outside of one’s homeland yet knows of the existence of a well-to-do motherland. By the late 1980s many Korean Chinese were ready to pursue the employment opportunities in South Korea even by illegal means. The numerous success stories of Korean Chinese who returned home from South Korea with big sums of money provoked the ‘Korean Dream’ among others.

In the late 1980s when Korean Chinese began to visit their South Korean relatives, many of them made a good fortune by selling the herbal medicine they brought with them from China. They would sell the medicine on the street, and curious and sympathetic South Koreans bought them. The success stories of the herbal medicine selling spread out into China’s ethnic Korean community, which encouraged more Korean Chinese to come to South Korea. Many of them found employment in South Korea as they could earn at least ten to twenty times more than in China (Im, 2003, p.293). In addition, as many South Korean manufacturers relocated their factories to China, they also provided employment opportunities for Korean Chinese who knew both Korean and Chinese. This experience further motivated them to go to South Korea in search of better opportunities. In South Korea employers preferred Korean Chinese workers over other foreigners because Korean Chinese speak the Korean language.
Homeland, Hierarchy, and Identity

While Korean Chinese developed a nostalgic affiliation to their ancestral homeland before their return migration to South Korea, South Koreans also cultivated romantic feelings toward their co-ethnics in China. First of all, Koreans have an essentialist/primordialist notion of the Korean nation and they define Koreans on the basis of Korean ‘blood’ (Shin 2006). Koreans do not tend to make distinction between ethnic and national identities with relatively high expectations of all ethnic Koreans being loyal only to the Korean state (Jeon 2005: 129). Therefore, in their ethnonational discourse Korean diaspora are considered an important part of the nation. In particular, South Koreans favourably evaluated the fact that Korean Chinese kept Korean language and many old Korean traditions. The nationalist historiography of South Korea also recognizes Korean Chinese for their heroic anti-Japanese struggles during the colonial period. Many South Korean intellectuals and activists even maintained that Korean Chinese would play an important role for unification of the nation. These positive views and expectations, however, were seriously challenged when South Koreans encountered a large scale Korean Chinese return migrants in the 1990s.

After the initial expectations, curiosity, and sympathy on their ‘brothers’ from China, many South Koreans developed an ambivalent attitude towards them as they encountered a larger number of Korean Chinese migrants in South Korea. Negative reports on Korean Chinese in South Korean media increased through the early 1990s. There were also growing criticisms of South Korean employers about their Korean Chinese employees. General remarks were that Korean Chinese, coming from a socialist regime, were not able to meet the high demands of labour production in a capitalist society such as South Korea, and they have ‘weak work ethic’, ‘only care about money,’ and are ‘not trustworthy’ (U & Han, 2002; Yu, 2002). Such criticisms on the ‘untrustworthy’ behaviour of Korean Chinese are also shared by South Korean employers in China. Korean Chinese are also criticised for their being overly ‘Sinicised’ not only in their attitude but also in their national identity. Koreans assume that Koreanness is not only racial but also cultural, and they strongly assume that ‘Koreans’ should speak Korean language and have a clear identity as Koreans.

If South Koreans cannot imagine Korean Chinese as same ‘Koreans’ as themselves, what should the Korean Chinese be? Once arrived in South Korea, Korean Chinese experience adaptation problems and many of them undergo status degeneration. In South Korea, however, they had to engage in manual labour such as construction, factory work or household chores, which are normally shunned by locals. Though wages in South Korea are much higher than in China, Korean Chinese workers found themselves economically marginalized and their general living conditions in South Korea are dismal. Such harsh conditions make them feel that they were leading much more humane life in China even though wages were lower there.

The more difficult challenges for Korean Chinese in South Korea are the prejudice and discrimination they experience from their South Korean co-ethnics. Korean Chinese particularly feel frustrated as South
Koreans discriminate them against other overseas Koreans, the ones from wealthy countries such as the US and Japan. With such negative experiences in South Korea, Korean Chinese developed critical feelings toward South Korea. These critical feelings were widely spread out in the Korean Chinese community in China by the mid-1990s, Korean Chinese reflected on their identity and their relationship with their two different homelands: Korea as their ethnic homeland and China as natal homeland.

The experiences of discrimination, alienation and many shattered ‘Korean Dream’ in South Korea not only made Korean Chinese return migrants critical about South Korea, but it also provided them with opportunities to reflect on the meaning of ‘homeland’ and their being ‘Korean.’ Such reflections on ethnic and natal homeland identity were intense in the mid-1990s when several books and articles on the issues were published by Korean Chinese both in China and in South Korea. In most of the discussions on their ‘homeland’ Korean Chinese distinguished the ethnic homeland of Korea, where their ethnic group originated, and the adopted homeland of China where they were ‘raised/parented’. Between these two homelands, Korean Chinese prioritized the Chinese ‘parenting/adopted’ homeland after their disappointing experience in South Korea.

IV. The Koryŏ saram Diasporic Returnees

Migration History

The early Korean migration to the Russian Far East had many similarities with that of the Korean migration to Manchuria. The migrants were mostly from the north-eastern tip of the Korean Peninsula (North Hamgyŏng Province), which is separated from Manchuria and the Russian Far East by the River Yalu. While in the Korean side there were political, social and economic disasters through the 19th century, the other side of the river there were huge fertile lands that were very sparsely populated. There were Korean seasonal famers, who cultivated the lands across the river and returned to the Korean side after harvest season regardless of the Qing government policy that prohibited any settlements by Koreans and Han Chinese until the 1880s. By the time when the Russian Empire gained the Russian Far East from Qing in 1860 through the Treaty of Beijing, there were already numerous Korean families residing there. Then, the drought in the northern parts of the Korean peninsula pushed more Koreans to migrate to the lands. For those impoverished Korean peasants, the land in the Russian Far East was a great attraction as it was suitable for agricultural activities including rice cultivation. The migration of Korean peasants to the region continued and there were already over 54,000 Koreans settling there by 1910 when Japan occupied the Korean peninsula. Korean farmers successfully cultivated rice and though the immigration policy of the Russian Empire in the region sometimes discouraged Koreans migration to the newly gained territory, Korean farmers were generally welcome for the development of the region.

After the establishment of the Soviet Union the number of Koreans grew continuously until 1937 when the Stalinist government decided to force the Koreans in the Far East to relocate to Central Asia.

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This was done in a very sudden and inhumane way, which eventually caused some 10% of the Korean population to perish in the process. There were political (not to let the Koreans to provoke Japan with their anti-Japanese activities) and economic (to develop Central Asia’s agriculture in preparation for the imminent war with Hitler’s Germany) motivations behind the forced migration. However, in the process the Koreans were named as an “enemy nation”, with which they were stripped of their rights as the citizens of the Soviet Union. This experience of the forced relocation and the stigma of being labelled as an “enemy nation” left permanent scar in the collective minds of the Soviet Koreans. This harsh treatment of Koreans in the Soviet Union distinguish the migration history of the Soviet Korean diaspora from those of other Korean diasporic groups in China, Japan, and the USA.

The Soviet Koreans had to rebuild their life anew in the wild fields of southern Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, where they were virtually ‘dumped’. Not having any freedom to move or travel to other areas or cities, they concentrated on agricultural activities, which they eventually became rather successful. They built numerous collective farms there and many of them became the most successful farms in the Soviet Union. Korean collective farms such as Politodel near Tashkent became famous as the wealthiest farms in the Soviet Union, and Soviet Koreans were praised for their agricultural success. Soviet Koreans regained their rights as the citizens of the Soviet Union after the death of Stalin in 1953. From this time Soviet Korean students could attend schools outside of their regions and this made the Korean population spread out throughout the Soviet Union, particularly to the large cities such as Moscow. With this the social status of the Soviet Koreans continued to rise in general and they produced many professionals including scientists, academics, engineers, athletes, bureaucrats, and some leaders in government and the Party.

Another major turn in their fate, however, came when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1992. As the Central Asian republics gained independence, there rose local nationalism and those who do not speak the vernacular language would not be allowed to keep their professional positions, particularly in public sector including education. Most of them lost their elite positions and experienced serious status degeneration. Many of them moved to private business sector, particularly truck farming, which many Soviet Koreans were engaged already in the 1970s. 3) As stated above, Russian population began to return to Russia as ethnic return migrants. Russians were not the only people who left these newly independent republics of Central Asia. Ethnic Germans returned to their homeland as Aussiedler, and so did other

3) Truck farming (or market gardening) is a large scale commercial form of farming, and it was uniquely Soviet Korean agricultural business during the Soviet era. Soviet Koreans call this work ‘kobongjil,’ and they would form an agricultural work group among themselves and grow commercial crops such as onion, cucumber, rice, or watermelon on the land, which they rent out from collective farms. After paying the rent, they would sell those products in big cities including Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, Minsk and so on. Such a ‘capitalist’ agribusiness was not entirely legal in the socialist economy of the Soviet Union, but many Soviet Koreans were involved in this business and many of them made great wealth.
Ethnic/National Identity

From the early days of their migration to the Russian Far East, Koryŏ saram considered Russians as civilized Christians, from whom they could learn the developed western culture. Already in early stage of their migration most of the Koreans converted themselves to Orthodox Christianity, following the Russians (even though sometimes such a conversion was a precondition for the Koreans to gain residency in the Russian Far East). In any regards, Russians were the new lord of the land where the Koreans migrated to live. Such a view continued in their minds. During the Soviet Union, the identity of the Soviet Koreans was formed in a more complicated manner. Unlike their co-ethnic in China, where they formed their own ethnic community as autonomous prefecture in Yanbian, the Soviet Koreans did not have such a luxury. Instead, they had the tragic forced relocation from their homeland, the Russian Far East, by the state power. This experience of the traumatic forced migration from their homeland in the Russian Far East to Central Asia in 1937 under the Stalinist regime gave them a particular sense of ethnic minority. This made them work hard in Central Asia not only for their daily economic life but also for their collective survival in the Stalinist regime. Especially because they had been dishonoured by the state as an “enemy nation” at the time of the forced relocation, Soviet Koreans had to prove their loyalty and worth in Central Asia. Then, soon, they regained their fame as a model minority through their agricultural success in Central Asia.

In fact, their living in Central Asia among the various peoples of the land including the Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Tajiks, Kirghiz, and other semi-nomadic Turkic peoples, gave Koryŏ saram a unique collective identity. The Central Asians were colonized by the dominant Russians and those Koryŏ saram came to learn Russian attitudes toward the Turkic and other peoples of Central Asia. For Koryŏ saram Russians were the civilized, powerful, “European” race while the peoples of Central Asia were uncivilized and weak races, from whom they could not learn much. Such an attitude of Soviet Koreans was recorded by a few researchers who observed their community in Tashkent and Alma Aty in the 1990s (cf. Yoon 2014). In a sense, the Soviet Koreans accepted a hierarchical view of peoples in Central Asia: Russians and other Europeans such as Germans and Poles at the top; and the semi-nomadic peoples of Central Asia at the bottom. The Koreans would be set in the middle.

No matter how the Soviet Koreans were “Russified”, however, Soviet Koreans maintained their ethnic identity clearly as “Koreans” throughout their life in the Soviet Union. What helped them to maintain their identity as “Koreans” was their racial difference from other people in the Soviet Union, including Russians and other Central Asian peoples. As they are easily recognized as Korean race, they were always called “Koreans” both by Russians and Central Asians. Culturally, however, their Korean identity was rather weak, especially because many of the later generations lost their mother tongue, Korean. There
were many educated Koreans in ethnic Korean collective farms in the areas where Koreans were concentrated, i.e., Kzyl-Orda in southern Kazakhstan and Tashkent in Uzbekistan. These cultural elite, as writers, musicians, and actors, would lead “Korean” culture. For the great majority of the Soviet Koreans, however, being “Koreans” meant only something symbolic as they do not understand their own tradition too much (Yoon 2014).

As they perceive the Central Asian peoples as culturally inferior beings, Soviet Koreans did not try to learn the local languages or the cultural practices of the locals. This became a serious problem when suddenly the newly independent republics on Central Asia started to require proficiency in local languages for any professional employees of the government and other public institutions such as universities. They had to leave their jobs and find new ways for survival, and this (and the unstable economic and political situations in these new countries in Central Asia) pushed them out of the republic.

**Ethnic Return Migration**

As stated, in the early 1990s Soviet Koreans in Central Asia became very anxious as they observed local nationalism rose and the Russians, Germans, and Poles were leaving Central Asia and “return” to their ethnic homelands. For them, however, ethnic return migration to South Korea did not happen immediately. First of all, unlike the short distance between China and South Korea, the distance between Central Asian republics and South Korea is too far. Secondly, in the early and mid-1990s South Korean government did not have any plan to take them as migrant.

The first major migration of the Soviet Koreans in Central Asia, therefore, was the migration to the Russian Far East in the early 1990s. In fact, the Russian Far East was their “homeland”, where their ancestors used to live before the tragic forced migration in 1937. The Far East, especially the city of Vladivostok, is the land where they used to have their own newspapers, schools, theatres, and farms. It is the land where their grandparents were born. Most of all, this is the land, from which they can easily reach their genuine “motherland”, Korea. Soviet Koreans began to migrate to the Far East, and many of them had a thought that life would be better there. Each year a few thousands of Soviet Koreans moved to cities such as Vladivostok and Nahodka as well as countryside around the cities. There was an expectation that the improving relationship between Russia and South Korea, and Japan would give them some employment opportunities if companies from South Korea and Japan invest in the region. However, this did not happen as they expected. Instead, soon, in South Korea there were some activists who wanted to build large farming communities in the Russian Far East for the migrating Soviet Koreans. A few farms and Soviet Korean villages were established here and there in the Russian Far East through the 1990s often with the help of local governments, which wished to see economic benefits. Nevertheless, not many succeeded. In addition, the migrants realised that the climate in the Russian Far East is not as good as in Central Asia, and this made some of them to go back to Central Asia or they chose to re-migrate to
southern parts of Russia and Ukraine where climate was more suitable for agriculture.

Meanwhile, some Soviet Koreans were successful in visiting South Korea from Uzbekistan in the mid-1990s. More people joined them and the number of Soviet Korean returnees in South Korea slowly grew. In particular, there were young women who married South Korean males. As South Koreans preferred ethnic Korean brides rather than non-Korean ones in the early days of international marriages, ethnic Korean brides from Uzbekistan enjoyed popularity. In 1997 a South Korean TV actually made a documentary on the South Korean rural bachelors who married Soviet Korean women from Tashkent.

Like Chosŏnjok, however, their encountering with their ethnic “homeland” was not quite positive. In particular, their lack of Korean language gave the Soviet Koreans hard time in living in South Korea.

**Homeland, Hierarchy, and Identity**

*Koryŏ saram* ethnic return migrants normally take up less paid jobs compared to their counterparts from China. While the early Chosŏnjok ethnic return migrants normally worked at construction sites or at Korean restaurants in South Korea, *Koryŏ saram* could not have such jobs due to their lack of Korean language capacity. They typically would take part-time, irregular jobs, which Koreans call “arŭbaitŭ” (from German word *arbeit*-work, labour). Often *Koryŏ saram*, like many non-Korean labourers from Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and Cambodia, work under the supervision of Chosŏnjok.

*Chosŏnjok* are close relatives of *Koryŏ saram* because most of them are originally from the North Hamgyŏng Province of the Korean peninsula. They share same dialect and originally they shared same culinary culture even though in later stage they became two different peoples, one in China and the other in the Soviet Union. Interestingly, in my interviews of twenty *Koryŏ saram* ethnic return migrants in South Korea, most of them showed some kinds of resentments against their co-ethnics from China (even more than toward South Koreans). The reason might be two-fold: (1) while working under the supervision of Chosŏnjok at factories or construction sites in South Korea, they might grow resentment to Chosŏnjok due to their harsh treatments of *Koryŏ saram*; or (2) it might be due to the negative education on China and Chinese during the time of Soviet Union, where Russians generally resented and feared Chinese due to the ideological and border conflicts between Soviet Union and China.

In any case, the *Koryŏ saram* returnees seem to understand the hierarchical relationship among the different “Koreans” of South Koreans, Chosŏnjok, and themselves. Rather than accepting or internalising such hierarchical relationship, however, *Koryŏ saram* returnees tend to deny their being “Koreans”. In interviews, *Koryŏ saram* ethnic return migrants tend to say that they are not “ethnic return migrants” in South Korea. They feel so culturally and socially alienated in South Korea, they say they came to South Korea not as “Koreans” but as “foreigners” just like other migrant workers from Indonesia, Cambodia, and the Philippines. Most of them do not seem to consider themselves as “Koreans” at all. When asked about their identity, many of them reply that they are more like “Russians” in their heart and culture. They also do not consider South Korea as their “homeland” and many told me that their homeland is
Uzbekistan or Russia. Some say their homeland is the “Russian Far East.”

As a matter of fact, if one observes not only linguistic life of Koryŏ saram but also their daily culinary life, they are very much “Russian” and “Central Asian.” They seldom eat Korean food such as kimchi, but they always eat salads and bread. There are a few of Koryŏ saram restaurants in Seoul’s Dongdaemun area and typical of them are restaurants like “My Friend” and “Ariran” (which means “Arirang” in South Korean) and their food culture is not something that contemporary Koreans in South Korea (or North Korea) can perceive as Korean. As seen in the photos below, they enjoy carrot salad and seaweed salads instead of kimchi, and they consume bread in every meals. Their food and culture are a mixture of imagined Korean, Russian and Central Asian (Song 2016).
These show how the two Korean diasporic groups of *Chosŏnjok* and *Koryŏ saram*, who originally had come from the same region of north-eastern province of the Korean Peninsula, have gone through drastic changes in their culture and language. These changes even give them totally different identities.

V. KOREAN AMERICAN DIASPORIC RETURNEES

**Migration History**

The early Korean migration to the USA began in 1903 when 101 Koreans arrived in Hawaii to work at sugar cane plantation there. In the following two years more Koreans arrived in Hawaii and there were over 7,000 Koreans by 1905, when Japan stopped Korean migration to Hawaii after it took over Korea’s diplomatic rights. Like many migrant workers in the USA who came from other Asian countries, these Koreans were ‘sojourners’ who wanted to return to their homeland after making a wealth. The great majority of them were single males and soon they brought over 1,000 ‘picture brides’ from Korea. As they formed families, these Koreans became the first Koreans permanently settling in the USA. Some of them later moved to California to earn higher wages by working at railway construction sites or at fruit orchards (Patterson 1976).

A larger immigration to the USA took place after the World War II. American military ruled the southern half of the Korean peninsula from 1945 to 1948. After the Korean War (1950-1953) about 40,000 American troops stationed in South Korea, which promoted marriages between American soldiers and Korean women. Korean brides and war orphans were the major migrants to the USA in those days. More than 100,000 Korean women arrived in the USA as the brides of American soldiers between 1950 and 2000 (Yuh 2002). Higher number of adoptees were brought to the USA from South Korea in the same period. Both the military brides and adoptees were scattered around throughout the country and they could not be connected as an ethnic group. Recently, however, they formed associations and are active in promoting their Korean identity. The South Korean government also has supported them to be organised and to promote their identity as Koreans (Song 2014).

The changes in the American immigration law in 1965 opened door for more Korean immigrants. Korean women who married American soldiers could invite their family members to the US and this increased the base of Korean Americans. Through the 1970s and 80s the number of Korean migrants to the USA rapidly increased, reaching 1 million by the end of the late 1990s. In particular, unlike the previous waves of migrants, Koreans who migrated to the USA in the 1970s and 80s included highly educated middle class. Today there are almost 2 million Korean Americans, but the number of Korean migrants has been steadily decreasing in the 21st century. The great majority of Korean migrants to the USA are in self-employment sectors of the economy such as grocery shops, dry cleaning shops, and restaurants. Due to their limited English language capacity, Koreans cannot take well-paid white colour jobs and they tend to prefer having their own business. Though the media image of Korean immigrants in
the USA tend to be successful self-employers, the income level of Korean Americans is not high. Koreans have higher educational level than other ethnic groups in the USA, but their average income is lower than that of the other Asian American groups such as Chinese, Japanese, Indians and Filipinos.

Regardless of their relatively low income level in the USA, Korean have bene maintaining high level of education, and the second generation tends to be well educated on the basis of the investment and sacrifice of the first generation. Among them are increasing number of professionals and even politicians. About 70% of the Korean Americans are living in big cities such as Los Angeles, New York, Chicago and Atlanta. This is because big cities are better for educational opportunities and small businesses.

**Ethnic Identity**

The identity question of the Korean Americans seems to be simpler than those of their co-ethnics in China, Japan, and the former Soviet Union. This is due to the liberal democratic social and political system of the USA, which allows ethnic minority groups to keep their ethnic and cultural traditions and identities. Unlike in Japan, China or in the former Soviet Union, Koreans in the USA (and other ethnic minority groups) are free in expressing and keeping their culture and tradition, and this makes them feel proud of their being Koreans. For example, in Japan, Koreans normally feel guilty when they abandon their nationality to naturalise and become Japanese citizens. This is because for them ethnicity and nationality are considered the same. In the US, however, ethnic minorities do not feel guilty when they take up US citizenship and give up their nationalities and citizenships because for them ethnicity and nationality are separate matters. Therefore, Korean Americans have healthy and positive identity as “Korean Americans.” In the past, however, Korean Americans also have a sense of inferiority and shame as being Koreans, and this is due to the low status of their nation in the global hierarchy of nations (Kim 2003).

Even in the USA, however, they also are well aware of and do feel the social discriminations in American society. In fact, as US is a country in which white Europeans are the dominant group, Koreans (and other non-white migrants) are constantly defined by their ethnicity regardless of the length of their living in the country. This always reminds them they are “Koreans”. Then, there are big differences in identities among different generations. The first generation Koreans strongly feel that they are “Koreans”, but the second and younger generations have weaker identity as Koreans. This is especially true in case if they do not speak the Korean language well. Yoon’s observation of the Korean American communities in the US in the mid-1990s suggests that even when the younger generation Korean Americans are not good at speaking Korean or understanding Korean traditions, they still have strong attachment to the Korean nation and their being Koreans is important in their daily life (Yoon 2003).

In general, nevertheless, Korean Americans tend to enjoy positive feelings of their being “Korean Americans” and this affects their ethnic return migrations to their ethnic homeland.
Diasporic Return

Unlike the ethnic return migrations of the Korean Chinese and Soviet Koreans, whose primary motivations for such migration are very much economic reasons, the ethnic return migrations of Korean Americans tends to be more cultural and educational. The most typical form of their ethnic migration of Korean Americans is “homeland tour”, in which young Korean Americans visit their ancestral homeland to learn its culture and language. Many Korean American youths participate in this kind of homeland tour normally as university students. As so many Koreans migrated to the USA in the 1970s and 1980s, by the 1990s and 2000s there were large number of those young Korean Americans who visited South Korea as tourists or students. Numerous service businesses were set up in South Korea to cater the needs of those young visitors, and this include universities opening Korean language education centres for them. Often, these Korean American homeland tourists would work as English teachers.

There are also young Korean American returnees, who seek for jobs in their ethnic homeland. English-teaching jobs are plentiful in South Korea and there are many other employment opportunities for them, especially as professionals. Korean American young people are normally highly educated and not like the Korean Chinese or Soviet Korean ethnic return migrants, who mostly work as manual workers in “3D” sector, Korean Americans take up high paid white-colour jobs. In fact, from the 1990s there were large number of Korean diasporic returnees, who come to South Korea for employment opportunities. It was a “turning point in migration” in South Korea, which means that there were more overseas Koreans returning to South Korea than those who left the country.

Employment opportunities aside, behind this ethnic return migrations of Korean Americans and others was the South Korean government, which adopted a diasporic engagement policy. Since the early 1990s South Korean government started to pay greater attention to the Korean diasporas overseas. It established new government organisations such the Overseas Koreans Foundation to reach out to the 7.5-million strong Korean diaspora all over the world. In 1999 they enacted a new law on the status and entry visas for ethnic Koreans, which allowed Koreans overseas virtual citizenship rights. Ethnic Koreans now can visit and live in South Korea, open bank account, and create their own business. This policy was not only to “call” ethnic Koreans home, but it was also to re-strengthen their ethnic identity as “Koreans”. This includes supporting Korean language education among the Korean diaspora, and inviting and encouraging them to visit their ancestral homeland. It was in this context when the government established homeland visit programmes for Korean adoptees. Each summer certain number of Korean adoptees are brought back to Korea so that they can learn the cultural heritages of their homeland. The South Korean government also pursued network-making for all Korean diaspora of the world and numerous ethnic networks have been created since then (Song 2014).
Identity, Homeland and Hierarchy

As Korean American ethnic return migrants occupy higher status in the labour market of their ethnic homeland, Korean Americans tend to feel more satisfied and comfortable in South Korea. This is very different from the cases of Korean Chinese and Soviet Koreans, who occupy mostly manual work with low payment. They do not feel socially alienated or marginalized. Therefore, Korean American ethnic returnees tend to feel more confident and positive about their being as “Korean Americans.” In another word, they feel that they are both “Korean” and “American” – a healthy diasporic identity, which helps them to be more genuinely “global citizens.” This is similar to the cases of the Japanese American returnees in Japan, or Chinese American returnees in China, who also are positive about their being “Japanese Americans” or “Chinese Americans”.

In this way, Korean American ethnic migrants are at the top of the ethnic hierarchy among all “Koreans.” Such a status allow them to have a more liberal and generous attitude toward the South Korean society, and often they volunteer to help it. For example, the Korean women who migrated to the USA and other western countries through marriages recently organised themselves into a large network, which is called KIMWA (Korea International Marriage Woman’s Association). Members of the organisation volunteer to support South Korea’s multicultural families – families formed normally with Korean husbands and foreign wives – by sharing their multicultural experiences with the foreign brides and local government staff who deal with the multicultural families.

As seen above, for the ethnic returnees from the wealthy and developed countries such as the USA and other western countries, with their positive migration experience in their ethnic homeland, ethnic return migration becomes normally a positive matter. This makes them develop a more positive and healthy ethnic identity and even cosmopolitan attitudes to the world, which is a big contrast with the cases of Korean Chinese and Soviet Korean ethnic return migrants.

VI. CONCLUSION: COMPARISON AND EXPLANATION

As we have seen, ethnic or diasporic return migrations have been unusual but an important form of international migration in the post-1980s world. This was caused by a few important changes in global politics and economy: the collapse of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union; the economic recessions in Latin America; and the emergence of East Asian economies. While some ethnic return migrations were due to political reasons, most of ethnic return migrations have happened due to economic reasons. Here, the migration policies of the receiving countries toward their co-ethnics overseas played important role. Some western countries with liberal immigration policies accepted their co-ethnics on the bases of humanitarianism while countries in East Asia have accepted their co-ethnics
from overseas for economic benefits.

Ethnic return migrations or “homecomings” of diasporic groups have not been a simple or smooth process. Though the returnees might have expected warm ethnic welcome in their ancestral homelands, the realities of ethnic return migrations are not trouble-free. In fact, most of ethnic return migrants tend to have negative experience in their ethnic homelands. Regardless of the support they may get from the accepting homeland governments, life of returnees is seldom easy. Particularly for those ethnic return migrants migrating from less developed countries to more developed ones tend to go through many difficulties. In most of the cases, they are engaged only in low-paying manual works that the locals tend to avoid, which results economic marginalization. They also tend to be culturally discriminated and socially alienated by the locals. Often local co-ethnics and homeland government treat them differently from their co-ethnics who are from wealthy and developed countries.

Such negative experiences in ethnic homeland make ethnic return migrants reflect upon the meanings of their being members of the particular ethnic and national communities. This can reshape their ethnic and national identity, ironically, in their ethnic homeland. This has been observed in some cases of ethnic return migrants: Aussiedler from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union; Nikkeijin from Latin American countries; and Chosŏnjok from China and so on. The negative post-ethnic return migration experience also can change their notions of “homeland” in their ancestral homeland. As seen above, many Chosŏnjok Korean Chinese came to strengthen their being “Chinese” after they return migrated to South Korea. Though their being “Koreans” has been always highlighted in their daily life in China, in their ancestral homeland (South Korea) now their being “Chinese” is more emphasized. This reminds them and bring back the positive quality of their natal homeland, China, especially with the relatively generous nationality policies of the Chinese Communist party. Indeed, as an ethnic minority, Korean Chinese used to enjoy rights, especially in terms of their language and culture. In any case, China is a gigantic and emerging power while South Korea is small and stagnating. Thus, they would lean more on “China” for their identity.

Meanwhile, Korean diaspora from the former Soviet Union go through different path in their identity changes. Unlike their co-ethnics from China, Koryŏ saram ethnic return migrants lost their language and tradition. Due to this, Koryŏ saram ethnic return migrants do not feel they are as strongly “Koreans” as their co-ethnics from China do. They are assigned to a economic status lower than that of Chosŏnjok, and they often work under Chosŏnjok superiors at work. This makes them resent their co-ethnics from China. They, however, learn the hierarchy within the diverse “Korean” community in South Korea. When it comes to the question of who they are in South Korea, they do not choose the country where they are from, i.e., Uzbekistan as the basis of their identity. This is because Uzbekistan does not give the empowering feelings that their Chosŏnjok counterparts feel from “China”. Many of them, thus, identify themselves as “Russians”. In any case, their mother tongue is Russian and their “homeland” used to be the Russian Far East.
Korean American ethnic return migration case is also different from those of the Korean Chinese or the former Soviet Koreans. Having lived in a society with liberal and democratic tradition and system, Korean Americans do not experience any cultural oppression in the USA. “America” as a country also carries many positive meanings and characters, and this makes the ethnic Koreans in the USA cherish their being “Americans with Korean heritage,” and they are generally proud of their Korean ethnicity. In any case, their being “Korean” (or “Asian” in some cases) is not something that they can choose due to their racial feature. The dominant Europeans would always distinguish Koreans (and any other non-European races) as “foreign” regardless of the length of the time that the latter have lived in the country. In any regard, they are treated better in their ethnic homeland and in fact they occupy higher economic and social status than their co-ethnics. This positive experience help them to develop positive attitude toward their being “Korean Americans”.

The three cases of the Korean diasporic homecomings provide important and interesting facts on how diasporic people build, re-create, and change their identities and notions of “homeland”. Their notions of “homelands” are multiple, situational, and contextual. Both of the Korean Chinese and Soviet Korean ethnic return migrants and their identity changes in their ethnic homeland challenges the contemporary notion of the ethnic nationalism and national identity in South Korea, which are based on primordialist notions of the Korean “blood” and ethnic/racial homogeneity. Among the many benefits of the study of ethnic return migrations is our further understanding of the fluidity and flexibility of ethnic/national identity of diasporic peoples. This is something that many governments, including Japan and South Korea, did not understand when they pursued bringing of their co-ethnics for labour force and believed that these people would not disturb the existing ethnic/racial homogeneity of their societies. This is the reason why such phenomenon as ethnic return migration should be studied further.

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