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Toronto's Korean Canadian Community: 1948-2005

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Introduction

Ethnicity, the influence of stereotyping – whether it is overt or not - and personal identity intersect on a daily basis. But what is ethnicity? One could argue that it is a flexible idea, or as Weber (1968) notes, a matter of “subjective belief” (p. 389). According to Troper and Weinfeld (1987) “the definition of an ethnic group involves a sense of shared history, real or imagined (p. 106).” I include these two definitions of ethnicity because they both acknowledge the subjective nature of ethnic identity. Reflecting on subjectivity, however, raises questions concerning the interplay between ethnicity and stereotyping. To move beyond generalizations and explore the lived experiences and shared histories of various ethno cultural groups, one may investigate how groups came to form communities in Canada; and then consider the dynamics of the communities themselves.

The aim of this paper is to explore the genesis and development of the Korean-Canadian community in Toronto, and reflect on how historical events and various social forces have impacted on its path, and contributed to its present state. The key segments of this paper include: Perspective; Toronto's Korean-Canadian community; and institutional completeness.

Perspective

Before delving into history, and views of Korean-Canadian identity, I will share some information about my own perspective. I am an elementary school teacher with the Toronto District School Board. Much of my work in the M.Ed. program at OISE/University of Toronto explored issues connected to social justice. I have lived in Korea, studied the language, and am married to a Korean-Canadian. However, as a white male, I can only contemplate the lived experiences of Korean-Canadians from an outsider's perspective. I am myself half Scottish and half Macedonian-Canadian.

In developing this paper I have journeyed through a process of investigation and reflection. This has led me to consider how past events, views of the history, and images of ethnicity have impacted on the Korean-Canadian experience.

Stereotypes are present in today's world just as they existed in yesterday's world. We are exposed to them in advertising, literature, and in the media. But how are we to move beyond the stereotypes of Koreans and contemplate the varied perspectives Korean-Canadians hold? In this paper, I explore the landscape of both Korean and Korean-Canadian history in order to investigate this very question.

Investigating Toronto's Korean-Canadian milieu, has led me to consider how I define ethnicity, ethno cultural identity, stereotype, and generalization.

As previously mentioned, I utilize Weber's (1968) and Troper and Weinfeld's (1987) definitions of ethnicity because they recognize that ethnicity is subjective and not static. An individual's perceptions will have an impact on her ethno cultural identity, just as larger social perceptions will have an impact on her identity. Also, perceptions of ethno cultural identity may shift over time. Ethno cultural, as a word, is larger and more holistic than ethnicity, as it adds elements of culture and cultural identity. I believe that culture and perceived cultural identity are elements of ethnicity, and consequently I use the terms ethnicity and ethno cultural identity interchangeably in this paper. Generalizations are notions that essentialize individuals, groups, actions, events, religions, and so on. Over time, generalizations may transform into stereotypes. Stereotypes represent popularized generalizations that may lead to misunderstanding, and toxic social atmospheres. As Ryan (2003) points out,

... the effects of stereotypes can be even more devastating than the more explicit forms of racism. This is because stereotypes can easily become taken for granted and an accepted way

of life; they can be harder to recognize and, ultimately, to challenge than more obvious forms of racism. (p. 72-73)

It is my hope that in exploring various events and factors that have impacted on the Korean-Canadian experience, this paper will foster a deeper awareness of the community itself.

Toronto's Korean-Canadian Community

In this segment, I provide a brief history of the development of the Korean-Canadian community.

Canada's first recorded Korean immigrant arrived in 1948 (Kim, 1984, p. 176). Tae-yon Whang, a visa student, was linked to one of Canada's numerous Christian missions in Korea at the time. In successfully immigrating to Canada Whang set both a symbolic and tangible precedent, in completing a process that "many other mission-sponsored students had tried earlier, to no avail (Kim, 1984, p. 176; Kim, 1983, p. 168)." His story is indicative of the bond between visa students and Canada's Christian church missions during Korea's first wave of immigration to Canada. As Jung-Gun Kim (1984) observes,

Some Korean students stayed on as Whang did, changing their status from visa student to immigrant, with or without the missionaries' consent. Others returned to Korea upon completion of their studies in Canadian institutions then; some time later, re-entered Canada, this time as immigrants. In the history of the Korean community in Canada, these students turned immigrants formed a unique group of settlers. As an elite Canadian-educated group, they provided institutional leadership in the community. They also became the backbone of intellectual life in the community, especially during its formative stage. (p. 176)

The initial wave of Korean immigration to Canada lasted nearly 20 years. It began in 1948, with Whang, and ended when Canada's immigration policy was restructured in 1967, when "any and all vestiges of racial and ethnic discrimination were finally and officially expunged from Canadian immigration regulations and procedures (Troper, 1993, p. 270)." Following Whang's move to Canada in

the late-1940s, however, the Korean-Canadian community grew a tremendously slow pace. It has been estimated that in the early 1960's the Korean-Canadian population in Canada numbered a mere 70 (Kim, 1984, p. 178).

Some may wonder why Canada's first Korean immigrant arrived as late as 1948. After all, sizable immigrant communities from China and Japan – Korea's neighbours – had grown in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Kobayashi (1992) approximates that there were 23 000 Japanese-Canadians alone by 1941 (p. 14). Three key forces contributing to Korea's late involvement in Canada's immigration circuit include a postponed opening to the West, Japanese colonization, and a racially biased Canadian immigration policy.

For most of the nineteenth century Korea warded off overtures – whether peaceful or violent – from Western powers. The peninsula-state opened to the West nearly two decades after China and Japan. In "Opening of Korea: A Confucian Response to the Western Impact," Key-Hink Kim (1999) chronicles the tumultuous path that led to Korea's first treaty with a Western nation in 1882. As he observes,

The middle decades of the nineteenth century witnessed massive intrusions of Western power and influence into this Sinocentric world. By the 1860s, Western powers, led mostly by Great Britain, succeeded, after decades of active trade, diplomacy, and war, in imposing upon China, Japan, and the rest of East Asia their system of international commerce and diplomacy ... Of all the major East Asian states, Korea was the last to join the new system. (Kim, 1999, p. 1)

Kim (1999) goes on to argue that Korea's perception of China, as being a global leader in culture and enlightenment, compounded by an acute awareness of China's conflicts with Western nations, contributed to a chronic distrust of the West (p. 1, 5). This distrust festered into the 1880s. Following decades of quarrels with Western visitors – varying from missionaries and diplomats to traders and soldiers – coupled with pressure from Japan and China, Korea grudgingly signed the Korean-American

Treaty of Amity and Commerce on May 22, 1882 (Kim, 1999, p. 61). It was a move that led to further treaties with Britain and Germany in quick succession. As none of the three treaties officially recognized China's special relationship with Korea, one of suzerainty, the three agreements marked a shift in the balance of power between China and Japan, Korea's influential neighbors (Kim, 1999, p. 61-63). It was a precarious balance that would explode into open warfare just twelve years later.

When a peasant's revolt erupted on the peninsula in early-1894 the Korean government requested military support from China. Shortly after China sent troops, Japan countered by dispatching a force three times the size of the Chinese unit, arguing that China's involvement and slow pullout broke the Sino-Japanese Convention of Tientsin of 1885 (The Russo-Japanese War Research Society, 2002). After Japan established a new government in Seoul, in June 1894, both China and Japan refused to pull out of Korea. The following month this impasse triggered the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895, a conflict that was initially fought on Korean soil. Then after approximately 55 Samurai soldiers raped and assassinated Emperess Myeong-Seong, the last Emperess of Korea, combat shifted to Manchuria in late-October 1894 (Moon, 2005). Following Japan's decisive naval victory in early 1895, "China was forced to rescind any claims on the peninsula ... [and] Japan maneuvered into position as Korea's modernizing protector (Howard, 1995, p. 2)." Amidst opposition, "the Korean Emperor Kojong was forced to abdicate and the army was disbanded" in 1907 (Kim, 1983, p. 23). This eventually led to occupation, as Korea became a protectorate following Japan's victory in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904 (Storey, 1997, p. 14-15). Japan officially took control and colonized the peninsula in 1910 (Howard, 1995, p. 2).

The early 1800s saw a growth in the number of Catholics in Korea (Kim, 1999, p. 11). The first Western missionary entered the country in 1836 (Kim, 1999, p. 11). Amidst persecution, charges of treason, and executions, the number of Catholics in Korea reached approximately 9 000 in 1838 and 23 000 in 1865 (Kim, 1999, p. 11). As missionary work spread, a select few Koreans visited North America

and Europe for training in missionary work. The first Canadian missionaries arrived in 1898 (Kim, 1983, p. 3, 30). It is estimated that before 1900 some 15 Koreans passed through Canada while on their way to Europe or the U.S. (Consulate General of the Republic of Korea in Canada, "First Koreans in Canada"). While none of these visitors immigrated, the bond between Canadian missions and Korean migration would resurface during Korea's first wave of immigration to Canada following the close of the Second World War.

During much of the first half of the twentieth century Korea was an occupied state. For Koreans, Japanese rule ushered in an era of subordination and loss. It also marked an ongoing struggle to maintain language, culture, and ethnic identity amidst slavery and attempts at ethno cultural genocide. In *True Stories of the Korean Comfort Women*, editor Keith Howard (1995) observes,

The Japanese approach to colonizing Korea was the summation of four modalities. First, Japan allowed few concessions to Koreans, the result of experience in Taiwan where they had trouble controlling 'unsophisticated' tribes after their invasion of 1905. Second, Britain, other European states and America seemed relatively unconcerned, so Japan felt that in Korea they could emulate colonization practices employed elsewhere. Third, confidence was high, since Japan had triumphed in conflicts with China and Russia. Fourth, legend provided a divine mission, in which Korea could be exploited for Japanese good ... in the 1930's, Koreans were eventually forced to adopt Japanese names and the Japanese language, and to discard shamanism in favor of Shinto. (p. 2)

Also during this time somewhere between 100 000 and 180 000 Korean females, most between the ages of sixteen and nineteen, were forced into sexual slavery (Howard, 1995, p. v; McCormack, 2004, p. 17, 123). In addition to this, many young Korean males were compelled to serve in the Imperial Japanese Army or work in mines and at construction sites (Park, 2002; McCormack, 2004, p. 17). While the Japanese government has yet to officially apologize for these past actions (Howard, 1995, p. 199;

McCormick, 2004, p. 124; Jimenez, 2004), an awareness of past sufferings live on in the memories and consciousness of many Korean-Canadians. Troper and Weinfeld (1987) explore the connections between interpretations of historic events and ethno cultural awareness in Canada's Jewish and Ukrainian communities. They note that,

... the flow of events, which constitutes each group's shared history, is not imagined. But interpretation of those events is grounded in different if overlapping understanding of the past and how those understandings are applied to the cause of ethnic cohesion today. (Troper & Weinfeld, 1987, p. 106)

During the period of Japanese colonial rule, emigrating was simply not a viable option for Koreans.

Prior to and during Japan's occupation, no Koreans settled in Canada. However, some did migrate to the United States in the early 1900s. These early Korean immigrants primarily settled as workers in the cane fields of Hawaii. They had been brought in to drive out Japanese sojourners and settlers, who had been demanding higher wages (Chung, 2001, p. 46). Japan quickly blocked this route when Korea became its protectorate in 1905 (Chung, 2001, p. 46). Following Japan's annexation of Korea in 1910, a small number of Koreans managed to escape to the United States as political refugees (Chung, 2001, p. 47). Although Canada did not receive any Korean refugees during this period, H. Y. Cho, the first Korean student to come to Canada, arrived in 1915 (Kim, 1983, p. 78). Following Cho, a handful of mission sponsored students entered Canada between 1915 and 1948 (Kim, 1983, p. 76-125).

In addition to Korea's late opening to the West and its experience as a colony of Japan, Canada's discriminatory immigration regulations severely limited all emigration from Korea up to its liberation from Japan in 1945, were Canada's discriminatory immigration regulations. Rooted in the Social Darwinian beliefs that arose in the early 1900's that fuelled notions of biological racism, these regulations were codified in Canada's immigration policy in the mid-1920s. Of the policy, Troper (1993) notes that "Legislated bars against Asians remained in place" up to and following the Second World War

(p. 260). Slowly, these racial barriers began to fall; commencing in 1951, when Canada implemented a law allowing for non-white immigration from within the British Commonwealth (Troper, 1993, p. 263). According to Statistics Canada, only 93 Koreans immigrated to Canada in 1965 (Consulate General of the Republic of Korea in Toronto, 2004, "First Koreans in Canada").

With a rising demand for labor in the 1950's Canada courted large numbers of immigrants from Italy and Hungary, among other countries (Troper, 1993, p. 264). During this time, however, the Korean-Canadian population rose at a slow pace. While 37 000 Hungarian refugees resettled in Canada in the late-1950s (Troper, 1993, p. 265), the Korean-Canadian population only reached 100 in the early 1960s (Kwak, 2004, p. 14; Kim, 1983).

Amidst this limited expansion of the Korean-Canadian community, Canada began to face a growing issue of illegal immigrants in the early 1960s. To investigate the situation Ottawa "commissioned a major review of Canadian immigration (Troper, 1993, p. 268)." Following a period of inquiry and analysis,

A white paper on immigration was released in 1966 ... [calling] for a complete overhaul of Canada's immigration law, regulations, and procedures, including a final purge of any last hint of racial or ethnic discrimination. (Troper, 1993, p. 268)

With the development of a new class of *Nominal* immigrants in 1967, and the removal of ethnic and racial preferences, Canada suddenly became a far more open country (Troper, 1993, p. 269-270). Coupled with this new openness to Asians, and other visible minorities, was a policy that allowed for family reunification. For South Koreans, "The more inclusive family reunification program ... played an important role ... [as it] Extended sponsorships beyond parents and children, to relationships such as siblings, uncles and aunts, became possible (Kwak, 2004, p. 14)."

An entryway had been opened and the results in the Korean-Canadian community were immediate. This is visible in the substantial growth in Korean immigration to Canada in the late 1960's

and early 1970's. The first year of this change in immigration practice saw Toronto's Korean-Canadian community in double in size, reaching 200 (Kim, 1983, p. 185). It was a modest beginning no doubt, but this modest beginning provided a glimpse of what was to occur over the next few years. By 1969, there were approximately 2000 permanent residents in and around Toronto (Kim, 1982, p. 83). In 1975 the Korean Canadian Association of Toronto estimated that 10 000 Koreans lived in the Toronto area (Kim, 1982, p. 83). This second wave of Korean migration to Canada, a period of rapid population growth, spanned from 1967 to 1976.

Just as the Korean-Canadian population ballooned in the mid-1970s, an economic recession led to an abrupt change in Canadian immigration dynamics. Amidst the financial slowdown, Canada tightened the family reunification element of its immigration policy with a new quota system in 1976. Troper (1993) describes the change as follows,

... those family members eligible for reunification with kin in Canada, asked from a spouse or dependent child under ten, still had to satisfy government personnel that their education, employment record, or skills were an immediate asset to Canada. This was hardly an open door. (p. 278)

Intertwining a new quota system with reduced opportunities for family members to reunite led directly to the Korean community, and numerous other immigrant communities, to hit a plateau in the late-1970s (Kwak, 2004, p. 14). Consequently, the period between 1976 and 1985, the third era of Korean immigration to Canada, marked a time of stagnation in population growth (Kwak, 2004, p. 7). However, it was during this era that Toronto's budding Korean-Canadian community nurtured its institutional completion, as I explore in the following segment.

With a brighter economy in the 1980s, Canadian immigration policy changed again in 1986, opening the way for investors and entrepreneurs. This policy shift fuelled the fourth wave in Korean migration to Canada, and not only marked dramatic growth in the Korean-Canadian community, but also

a shift in demographics. While 12.9% of the Korean Landed Immigrants in Toronto between 1980 and 1985 had a Bachelor Degree or Higher, this shot up to 37.7% for the period between 1996 and 2001 (Kwak, 2004, p. 21). As Kwak (2004) observes,

... the newly revised business immigration program began to attract affluent migrants from Asian countries including Korea ... [and] Since 1997, the number of skilled workers also increased rapidly as the Asian financial crisis hit the Korean economy. Many affluent potential entrepreneurs and well-educated middle class families decided to leave Korea to avoid unstable socio-economic conditions. (p. 15)

In a May 2002 speech, Member of Parliament David Kilgour (2002) reported that, 80% of Korean immigrants fall into the skilled category, among whom, "... 6 in 10 have backgrounds in the vital computer and engineering fields." Coinciding with the emergence of this new business-oriented policy and shift in demographics was a healthy rise in the South Korean economy, punctuated by its hosting of the 1988 Summer Olympics in Seoul.

To say that the Korean-Canadian community has boomed over the past 18 years would not be an exaggeration. According to Canada's 1996 census, the Korean-Canadian population stood at 66 655 (Government of Canada, n.d.). By 2004 Korean-Canadian numbers in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) alone reached approximately 65 000 (Toronto District School Board, 2005). The number of Korean-Canadians living in the GTA is expected to double by 2017 (Toronto District School Board, 2005).

However, it is quite possible that the picture I have outlined, one of rapid growth in the Korean-Canadian community in recent years, is incomplete. Specifically, it neglects to include illegal Koreans, student visas and North Koreans.

First, the South Korean government estimates that there are 100 000 illegal Koreans in Canada (The Asian Pacific Post, 2004). Of this population, The Asian Pacific Post (2004) reports that most "are engaged in retail businesses or work in small factories, the entertainment business or restaurants

owned by Koreans.” If these numbers are accurate, we could add another 30 000 to 50 000 to Toronto’s Korean-Canadian population.

Second, the largest group of visa students in Canada is Korean (Toronto District School Board, 2005; Kwak, 2004, p. 10). As Min Jung Kwak (2004) observes in “An Exploration of the Korean-Canadian Community in Vancouver,”

In the late 1990s, Korea was the leading source of international student inflows to Canada ... the inflow dropped temporarily in 1998 as a result of the Asian financial crisis. However, the number fully recovered in 1999 and has kept growing since. There were 13,479 Korean students who received study permits to enter Canada in 2001. (p. 10-11)

According to Korea’s Consulate General in Toronto, there are presently 25 587 Koreans studying in Canada (Consulate General of the Republic of Korea in Toronto, “History of Korea in Canada”). If we estimate that approximately 5000 to 10 000 of these students are in the GTA, then this would push the Korean-Canadian population in the area to over 100 000.

Third, there is also the too often forgotten element of North Koreans. A recent case of a North Korean immigrating to Canada proved to be a very public affair. In August 2001, Song Dae Ri and his family defected to Canada from North Korea via Beijing (Jimenez, 2004). After Ri applied to Canada’s refugee board, Bonnie Milliner ruled that he was “complicit in crimes against humanity ... for being a member of Kim Jong-il’s government (Jimenez, 2004).” Although the former trade official was very nearly deported from Canada, the decision was reversed and Ri received asylum in March 2004 (Jimenez, 2004). While the number of North Korean defectors living in Toronto is miniscule, and would not significantly change the data I have explored, it is important that we consider the situation of having two Koreas and reflect on how it might impact on the perceptions of Korean-Canadians.

The road to the Korean War was complex, and details are still being uncovered nearly six decades later. In *Target North Korea*, McCormick (2004) outlines some lesser-known events that led up

to the war. McCormick (2004) questions why it was Korea and not Japan that was to be divided by the allied forces at the close of the Second World War,

Soviet forces crossed the boarder into Korea on August 9, 1945, and by the time the Japanese surrendered six days later, had already captured much of northern Korea, while the nearest United States forces were hundreds of kilometers away on the island of Okinawa. Hastily, in the State Department an arbitrary line was drawn across the map at the 38th parallel, a geographical marker of no previous political or cultural significance ... Despite the fact that the Americans had no troops on the ground, Russian dictator Joseph Stalin acquiesced in ordering his forciers to withdraw to the U.S. line. (p. 16)

Within a year of U.S. involvement in the South, fears arose relating to left wing movements. In February 1946, intelligence informed U.S. General Hodge,

... that elements in the South would be bound to win any fair election, and in the same month a survey found that 49 percent of South Koreans felt that conditions were worse under the Americans than they had been under the Japanese. (McCormick, 2004, p. 18)

Around this time, two leaders in the South, who had both sought to forge links with Pyongyang on separate occasions, were mysteriously assassinated – leftist Yo Unhyong in July 1947 (McCormick, 2004, p. 19), and rightist Kim Ku in June 1948 (McCormick, 2004, p. 24). Discontent with the divided framework of Korea, an uprising arose on the southern island of Chejudo. The uprising was suppressed swiftly and violently,

... between 10 and 25 percent of [Chejudo's] 300,000 inhabitants were massacred, more than half of their villages burned, and the panoply of anti-guerrilla measures ... - herding of the population into strategic hamlets or fortified villages, destruction of crops, scorched earth, slaughter of villagers – put into operation. (McCormick, 2004, p 22)

Whether or not the intricacies leading up to the Korean conflict are commonly known, the results of the war itself are known all too well. The conflict was in many ways a surrogate world war, as “Americans and Russians ... battled in the skies, while on the ground British, Australians, Turks, and others fought as part of a U.S.-led “coalition of the willing” against North Korean regulars and Chinese “volunteers” (McCormick, 2004, p. 15).” The U.N.’s coalition of the willing also included Canada. Fighting broke out “on the morning of June 25, 1950, when Korean People’s Army (KPA) forces crossed into the south (McCormick, p. 15).” As Oh and Hassig (2000) note,

The Korean War destroyed much of North and South Korea’s infrastructure, and more tragically, killed more than a million people: 294,000 North Korean soldiers; 225,000 South Korean soldiers; 184,000 Chinese soldiers; and 57,000 UN soldiers, mostly Americans. These figures do not include several hundred thousand Korean civilians killed in combat-related actions. Eleven million Korean families were separated by the war. (p. 7)

Numerous atrocities were committed in the war by both sides (McCormick, 2004, p. 10). There is the possibility that U.N. forces utilized biological weapons, such as sarin nerve gas, as developed by Japanese Unit 731 in China (McCormick, 2004, p. 32-33; Chomsky, 1999). Napalm was dropped extensively, and U.N. forces used 35.4 liters in the first three months of the war alone (McCormick, 2004, 35). Additionally, North Korean hydroelectric power stations and dams were bombed, knocking out 90% of the country’s power supply and destroying the country’s agricultural infrastructure (McCormick, 2004, p. 36). Statistics relating to civilian victims of atrocities on both sides are unknown (McCormick, 2004, p. 39-42). Most of the Koreans who immigrated to Canada during the first three waves of migration were survivors of this devastating war. Their personal and familial experiences during and/or following the war would profoundly shape their views of politics, democracy, and of Canada itself, as a participant in the war.

But how might Korean-Canadians feel about the plight of North Koreans? In the comprehensive *North Korea Through the Looking Glass*, Oh and Hassig (2000) examine the dynamics of North Korean society, surveying its economic, political, and social framework and devastation. Regarding the views of Korean-Americans, Oh and Hassig (2000) note,

There is, however, deep concern on the part of many Koreans for the economic plight of the North Korean people, and many organizations, especially churches, have sent charitable donations to North Korea since the mid-1990s. The number of Korean Americans traveling to North Korea annually is difficult to estimate, but probably does not exceed a few hundred, largely on humanitarian missions. (p. 181)

While the two Koreas remain a fractured nation, at times on the brink of combat, one can only imagine how this impacts on the fears and hopes of Korean-Canadians. It may evoke feelings of heartache tinged with frustration, especially for those whose families have been separated by the war.

Although North Korean numbers in Canada are very low, the very existence of two Koreas, an unfortunate circumstance, is a profound disappointment to many Korean-Canadians. While there may not be many North Koreans living in the GTA, the Korean-Canadian population itself could be significantly larger than the popular estimate of 65 000, and may even be above 100 000.

Institutional Completeness

In this segment I chronicle the emergence of not one, but two Korea towns in Toronto. Specifically, I explore three elements of institutional completeness, including the church, newspapers, and the business community.

As the Korean-Canadian population has grown, so has its level of institutional completeness. As Breton (1964) notes, institutional completeness involves the development of formal and/or semi-formal, “structures that contain organizations of various sorts: religious, educational, political, recreational, national, and even professional. Some have organized welfare and mutual aid societies. Some operate

their own radio station or publish their own newspapers or periodicals (p. 194).” Breton (1964) also asserts that, “the extent to which the institutional completeness of the ethnic community is related to its capacity to attract the immigrant within its social boundaries (p. 194).” One may wonder what fuels institutional completeness. According to Breton (1979), “Most ethno cultural groups have an organizational system to provide for the religious, cultural, recreational, educational and other felt needs of their members (p. 48).”

In examining the development of the Korean-Canadian Christian community, I will first explore Breton’s (1979) idea of “felt needs (p. 48).” In “A Dilemma Facing The Immigrant Church: A Case of Korean-Canadian Experience,” In Kee Kim (2000) notes that “The Korean churches served three basic needs of the first generation Korean immigrants: Keeping their cultural heritage; providing an outlet for social life; and healing their wounded souls (p. 4).” Kim (2000) also asserts that one reason why Koreans originally fostered a Christian church community was to offset the marginalization they felt as a visible minority group existing in a world of negotiated boundaries, stereotypes, and institutionalized barriers, “For the first generation parent, Christian faith was important for their survival and for keeping their hope in this extremely marginalized immigrant life (p. 8).”

But what exactly has marginalization entailed for Korean immigrants to Canada? For Korean-Canadians, as for all groups who experience exclusion, marginalization is fluid. It changes in subtle and not so subtle ways over time, from community to community, individual to individual, institution to institution, workplace to workplace, and so on.

During the initial wave of Korean migration to Canada, immigration policy was racially discriminatory. This led to a period that saw very little in the way of growth in the Korean-Canadian community. Consequently, a very early form of exclusion Korean-Canadian’s experienced in Toronto was the severe limitation placed on the growth of their community, a limitation orchestrated by Ottawa.

Marginalization may also involve stereotyping. Images of Korean women as being quiet and easily dominated by men are still all too common. Such portrayals can be found in travel literature.

For instance, *Korea*, a guide in the popular Lonely Planet series, generalizes that South Korean

... women cater to the private, personal world of the home ... When guests visit the men will often sit and eat together, separately from the women who will grab a bite together between preparing food ... Not so long ago wives were regarded as little more than domestic help and men were as likely as not to seek female companionship elsewhere. (Storey, 1997, p. 30-31)

But how accurate are these observations, and on what exactly have they been based? Such images, when presented as general truths, may lead non-Koreans to develop preconceived notions that tend to generalize Korean values, rather than recognize Koreans and Korean-Canadians as individuals.

In addition to travel literature, stereotypes of Koreans can be found in the Canadian media. Yi Sun Kyung (1997), a Korean-Canadian who worked on the CBC morning radio show *Ideas* (p. 63) and had a documentary aired on the CBC television program *Witness*, provides a unique example. In her memoir, *Inside the Hermit Kingdom*, Yi (1997) articulates a variety of generalizations of Korean-Canadians. For instance, Yi (1997) believes that Koreans exhibit very specific *ethnic traits*, such as a lack of independence and an untrusting nature, "In our family, no one made independent decisions and no one took responsibility for his or her own actions. I would later discover that these were national traits that made Koreans suspicious by nature (p. 16-17)." In recounting her move to Toronto, she describes the city's Korean-Canadian community as follows, "Toronto's Korean ghetto was a closed enclave, and it wanted to stay that way. Its fifty thousand members were ruled by absolute conformity (Yi, 1997, p. 50)." Conformity is another *ethnic trait* Yi believes Korean-Canadians share.

Throughout this paper I have explored events from Korean and Korean-Canadian history and reflected on how they may impact on the perceptions of Korean-Canadians. As Kim (1983) notes, "The horror of the power politics for domination of Korea had a great impact on the life and psyche of the

Korean people (p. 23).” Yi (1997) offers a very different view of the matter of ethno cultural memory, as she asserts that,

Many Koreans’ favorite pastime is to indulge in self-pity and blame all their woes on their tragic past. It’s a national malaise. They can’t feel sorry enough for themselves. Koreans readily admit that they are a people of tears, and that the Korean War and the Japanese invasion have made them into helpless, pathetic creatures. (Yi, 1997, p. 90)

Yi also articulates a number of stereotypes of Korean females in her book. For instance, she believes that Korean women are unsatisfied with their ethno cultural identity, “Koreans, especially women, are secretly flattered when Westerners mistake them for Japanese but are insulted if they’re called Chinese (Yi, 1997, p. 172).” Later, Yi (1997) argues that, “After a lifetime of being dictated to by authorities, the girls were incapable of thinking for themselves, let alone making independent decisions (p. 194).”

But Yi does not reserve generalizations for Korean women alone. When reflecting on the subject of Korean males, Yi (1997) comments, “In my eyes, Korean men were all the same: domineering, controlling, and stubborn. In other words, they were all like my father (p. 34).” She later expands on this topic, “In Canada, it was almost against my principles to date Korean men because of their Neanderthal attitudes, their unhealthy attachment to their mothers, and their inability to grow up (Yi, 1997, p. 220).”

As previously mentioned, Yi is a journalist who has worked with the CBC both prior to and following the publication of her memoir. She has reported for the Toronto Globe and Mail, and had her film work aired on TV Ontario. *Inside the Hermit Kingdom* itself was partially funded by the Canada Council for the Arts. In July 2004, Yi’s documentary, *Inside the Hermit Kingdom*, aired on *Witness*, a program produced by the CBC (Aysha Productions, n.d.). While I have outlined some examples of stereotypes in Yi’s book, there are more. Such stereotypes may very easily offend Korean-Canadians

and non-Korean-Canadians alike. I know a number of Korean-Canadians who are offended by the book. In funding and/or employing a journalist who voices generalizations about the Korean-Canadian community, the CBC and the Canada Council for the Arts may prompt numerous Korean-Canadians to feel marginalized.

To counter stereotypes of Korean-Canadian and other Asian-Canadian females, Jean Yoon co-founded the Toronto-based theatre group Loud Mouth Asian Babes (Loud Mouth Asian Babes, n.d.). In productions, such as *Sliding for Home and Boarders*, *The Kyopo Trilogy*, and *The Yoko Ono Project*, Joon explores themes including images of sex and gender, perceived ethno cultural identity, and illustrates that Korean women are not as docile as many stereotypes imply (Loud Mouth Asian Babes, n.d.).

Whatever the connection is between the social dynamics of exclusion and the development of the Korean-Canadian religious community, we can note that simultaneous to decades of living with social stereotypes and numerous challenges, Toronto's Korean Christian community has grown steadily. The first two Korean Christian churches were established in the city of Toronto in 1967 (Kim, 1982, p. 83). According to a 1993 survey, 66% of all Korean Christians living in the Toronto area belong to a Presbyterian church (Couto, 2003). On visiting various Korean churches, I have observed that they offer services in the Korean language, and operate routines that are popular in Korea, such as weekend picnics and retreats. The *2002-2003 Directory of Korean Canadian In Ontario*, a 600-page publication, lists over 120 Korean churches in the GTA (The Korea Central Daily, 2002, p. 405-418). Conversely, the book lists only four Korean Buddhist Temples (The Korea Central Daily, 2002, p. 420). The preponderance of Korean churches in Toronto may indicate an effort, whether it is conscious or unconscious, to navigate a landscape that is partially Korean, and may simultaneously foster the transformation of ethno cultural identity within the parameters of a new country.

For the Korean-Canadian community in Toronto, developing institutional completeness has been an ongoing process. In addition to founding churches, it has also involved the growth of

newspapers. In writing about Italian and Chinese communities in the U.S., Sarna (1978) notes, "It is certainly true that foreign language newspapers developed quickly in every major city, that they were designed to serve a wide audience (p. 374)." As we can see in the development of Toronto's Korean-Canadian community, an audience for Korean newspapers has certainly expanded over the past three and a half decades.

In "Korean Language Press in Ontario," Jung-Gun Kim (1982) chronicles the genesis of Korean newspapers in Ontario from 1971 to 1982. While Toronto's first Koreatown began to form on Bloor Street west of Bathurst in the early 1970s, the *Korea Times* was still being imported from Seoul (Kim, 1982, p. 83). As demand for the *Korea Times* grew, it became evident that Ontario, and more specifically Toronto, would be able to produce its own Korean-language publications (Kim, 1982, p. 83). In rapid succession, no less than eight Korean newspapers emerged between 1971 and 1981. By 1982, five of these publications were still active. The *2002-2003 Directory of Korean Canadian in Ontario* lists seven Korean publications presently being produced in Toronto as of 2002, including *Korea Canada Central Daily*, *The Korea Times Daily*, *The Kyocharo Weekly*, *Next Korea*, *Aha Idea*, *The Korean Entertainment Weekly*, *The Korea Times*, and *Korea Life* (The Korea Central Daily, 2002, p. 386-387). While a rise of five to eight publications in two decades may seem insignificant, it should be noted that with numerous websites – based in South Korea, the U.S., and in Canada – the demand for print media has changed drastically.

With the rapid growth of Toronto's Korean-Canadian community in the early 1970s also came a rise in the number of Korean consumers and Korean-run businesses. In 1973 the Korean Merchants Association was formed in Toronto (KBA, n.d.). Three years later, the collective was renamed the Ontario Korean Businessmen's Association. Then, as the Korean-Canadian nucleus plateaued in the late 1970s and early 1980s, it consolidated its footing in Toronto's business landscape. A Co-Operative Wholesale Body was founded in July 1983 and opened for business in August of that year, at 116 Tycos

Drive (KBA, n.d.). This marked the emergence of an institution from within the Korean community able to supply Korean businesses with items such as, foods and unique supplies. The co-operative itself was renamed Sincere Trading, and expanded and moved to a larger address, at 130 Orfus Road in October 1984 (KBA, n.d.). Toronto's Korean business establishment was further buttressed in 1986 when a sisterhood affiliation with California's Korean Grocers and Liquor Retailers Association was brokered (KBA, n.d.). Two years later, in December 1988, the Ontario Korean Businessmen's Association purchased a building, at 1 Mobile Drive to establish a head office (KBA, n.d.). With the continued growth of Toronto's Korean-Canadian community, a second Koreatown has emerged in the Yonge and Finch area of Toronto with a growing variety of shops and restaurants.

Concluding Thoughts

This paper has examined the genesis and development of the Korean-Canadian community in Toronto, stretching from Canada's first Korean immigrant in 1948 to the emergence of a community that is now well over 65 000. But how might the history of Korea and the story of how Koreans came to Canada impact on the self-identity and perceptions of Korean-Canadians? As previously mentioned, I believe that the notion of essentializing the views of ethno cultural groups is dangerous. While there may be mainstream views in a given ethno cultural group, disregarding the diversity that exists within all groups is misleading. For instance, while laws or religious scriptures may represent collective values, individual interpretations of those laws or scriptures may vary immensely within groups.

In "Settlement Patterns of Toronto's Chinese Immigrants: Convergence or Divergence?" Lo and Wang (1997) explore the diversity of Toronto's Chinese-Canadian community; and observe that, "the public, and even governments sometimes, tend to treat the Chinese as a homogeneous group (p. 52)." While the two uncover the eclectic nature of the Chinese Canadian community, there has yet to be a study that delves into the diversity of Toronto's Korean-Canadian community (Lo & Wang, 1997). Jung Gun Kim's (1983) doctoral thesis, *"To God's Country": Canadian Missionaries in Korea and the*

Beginnings of Korean Migration to Canada, does however, provide an informative portrait of the roots of Korean migration to Toronto. While Mi-Rha Cho (2003) delves into layers of identity in her master's thesis, *Identity Formation in Korean Canadian Women: A Look at Subjectivity, Race, and Multiculturalism*, she does not seek to provide a larger picture of the community itself.

This paper outlines various forces that have impacted on the genesis and growth of Toronto's Korean-Canadian community. Further studies exploring the personal narratives of Korean-Canadians in Toronto would deepen our awareness of a community that has experienced tremendous change, and diversification in recent years.

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