

## THE KOREAN MINORITY IN CHINA: THE CHANGE OF ITS IDENTITY

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*This paper examines the identity change of the Korean minority in China. Firstly, it treats the existence of "Korean Chinese identity" or "dual identity" of the Korean minority: its ethnic and political identity. Secondly, this study shows the changing self-perception of Korean Chinese after their meeting with South Koreans since the late 1980s. Thirdly, the limits of Chinese minority policies and the prospects of the Korean minority in China are indicated. The hypothesis of this research is that the Korean minority in China, during the last decade, has begun a "we-feeling" that is distinguishable from the "Korean-ness" which those Koreans on the Peninsula may have. This study explores the processes by which, and the reasons why the Korean minority in China have found themselves as "Chinese citizens and a Korean nation."*

### INTRODUCTION

The People's Republic of China (PRC) is, in its constitution, defined as a "unitary multi-national state," consisting of people from many nationalities. The 2000 national census shows that the Han population, the majority ethnic group in China, makes up 91.59 percent of the total population, while China's 55 officially recognized nationalities make up only 8.41 percent. Even though these minority nationalities make up a relatively small percentage of the overall population, this proportion is increasing, which has great political, social and economic significance. The Korean population in China numbered 1,920,597 in 1990. It is the thirteenth largest minority in China. The history of Koreans in China is not very long. Koreans started to move to northeast China in the late 19th century. It is widely believed that the Koreans have the highest level of education and maintain a strong sense of ethnic identity. Koreans are also considered to be in a relatively advanced position, demographically and socio-economically. The population growth rate of Koreans is the lowest among all the 56 nationalities in China, including the Han majority. Their illiteracy rate is the lowest and their college attendance rate is the highest.

However, the Korean minority has been experiencing a deep social change, as other nationalities are, since China adopted reforms and open door policies. In particular, contacts with South Koreans have made a great

impact on the Korean community in China, in both negative and positive ways. Koreans in China are hoping for economic development and, at the same time, are concerned about losing their ethnic identity. The "compact community" of Korean agricultural villages, the basis of their traditional life style, is facing a crisis of disintegration. The challenges from social fluctuations such as population movement seem to be too strong for Koreans in China to respond to them. Koreans in China, on the other hand, are beginning to realize their identity in Chinese society and to perceive their differences from Koreans on the Korean peninsula and abroad.

This study is a descriptive research of the Korean minority on the change of their identity, and their position and role. It intends to examine the existence of "Korean Chinese identity" or "dual identity" of the Korean minority in China. In understanding Koreans in China, their willingness to distinguish themselves from the Chinese should be taken into consideration. In the late 19th century, Korean immigrants into Manchuria started rice cultivation there for the first time. Moreover, they played an important role in building the new socialist country, which was the People's Republic of China, by fighting effectively against Japan and the Nationalists during the Chinese Liberation War. They were not only beneficiaries of the Chinese "enlightened" minority policy, but also benefactors of the Communist Party. In this sense, China's Korean minority cherishes psychological mastership of northeast China. This study treats, firstly, the changing aspects of Korean identity in China; that is, the way Koreans have perceived themselves during different periods since their migration into northeast China. What was the relationship between Koreans and other peoples, including the Han Chinese? Secondly, this study will examine the changing identity of Chinese Koreans after their meeting with South Koreans since the late 1980s. We study the newly developed self-perception of Koreans in China in the middle 1990s. Thirdly, this study tries to find the desirable position and role of Korean Chinese for the purpose of establishing a sounder relationship between the Korean minority in China and Koreans on the Peninsula. In conclusion, the limits of Chinese minority policies and the prospects of the Korean minority in China will be indicated. In this paper, "ethnic identity" means the "we-feeling" that is distinguished from other groups. The Korean minority in China have had their own self-identity distinct from other ethnic groups, including the Han majority. The hypothesis of this study is that the Korean minority in China, during the last decade, has begun a "we-feeling" that is distinguishable from the "Korean-ness" which those Koreans on the Peninsula may have. This study will try to examine the processes by which and the reasons' why the Korean minority in China have found

themselves as “Chinese citizens and Korean ethnicity.”

#### THE IDENTITY OF THE KOREAN MINORITY

The Korean minority in China is a border-crossing people who immigrated into northeast China beginning late in the 19th century.<sup>1</sup> This is one of the characteristics that most distinguishes the Korean minority from other ethnic groups in northeast China. The Korean Chinese have their home country and relatives in the Korean peninsula. They have maintained their ethnic culture by using the Korean language and maintaining Korean customs, life-style, and value system. It is said that they have lived in a “cultural island” in northeast China, which has been isolated from the mainstream of Han Chinese society (Kwon, 1997). The Korean community in China has been influenced by geographical conditions, political changes, Chinese governmental policies, and international relationships. The history and process of Korean migration and settlement in northeast China have defined and strengthened their ethnic identity. They have contributed to the building of the ‘New China’ by developing rice cultivation in the northeast and by taking part in the Chinese Liberation Wars against the Japanese and the Nationalists. In the People’s Republic of China, the Korean minority has managed their lives in such a way as to become a model minority group. In the period of the Cultural Revolution, Koreans were one of the ethnic groups in the northeast to suffer the most. Since the open door and economic reform policies were implemented, the Korean community in China has been experiencing a great transformation. In particular, the opening up of diplomatic relationships in 1992 and increasing exchanges between the PRC and the Republic of Korea (South Korea) have had great impact on the lives of Korean Chinese.

The Korean minority in China has developed a dual identity as both ethnic Koreans and Chinese nationals through their historical experiences (on the identity of the Korean minority in China, see Kwon, 1996: 95-104). Their origin as a border-crossing people, their contribution to the founding of the PRC, and their relationship with the two Koreas have played important roles in the formation of this dual identity. Chinese official appreciation of active participation by Koreans in the Liberation War in the northeast and Korean pride in this has also encouraged Koreans to a dual identity. The

<sup>1</sup>There are different viewpoints on the origin of Koreans in China. It is normally recognized that the Korean minority is a border-crossing people that originated from the Korean peninsula in the late 19th century. On their history, see Chaoxianzu jianshi (Brief History of the Korean Nationality).

Chinese government, as a multi-national state, granted Chinese nationality to Koreans in China. The division of the Korean peninsula created a feeling among Koreans in China of alienation from their "motherland" of Korea. Fighting together with their socialist brethren of North Korea against the Americans was probably the primary factor in giving Korean Chinese a sense of being Chinese nationals. The recent relationship with South Korea has also made them more aware of their differences from Koreans on the peninsula.

The Korean Chinese could keep their identity by forming their own "ethnic boundary," which separated them from other ethnic groups in the northeast. Koreans have lived in their compact communities, of which the representative is the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture. Even in regions sparsely populated by Koreans, they have formed Korean ethnic villages as "cultural islands." These villages have functioned as an autarchy with their own educational system. The Korean Chinese have been able to maintain their traditions through performing cultural activities such as ethnic songs and folk-dances. Throughout Mao's regime, the closed nature of Chinese society with no freedom of residence or movement helped Koreans to preserve their ethnic boundary and to solidify their community. Korean villages were praised as model communities in the period of agricultural collectivization. Since the open door policy and economic reform were executed in China, the Korean community has been experiencing new challenges and changes. The 'model' Korean villages have been searching for a new way of adapting to new environments.

The Korean Chinese have had a dual identity; distinguishing political identity from ethnic identity. As ethnic Koreans, they tend to regard China as their fatherland. On the other hand, the Korean minority has displayed a "positive willingness" to maintain their own culture and traditions (on the positive and negative self-perceptions of the Korean minority in China, see Lee Kwang-kyu, 1994: 262-266). Language and education can be pointed out as two of the most important elements elevating the positive willingness of the Korean minority. Koreans in China have cherished ethnic pride by using their own language, keeping their ethnic traditions and attending ethnic schools, which were allowed by the Chinese minority policy. However, this policy has erected obstacles for Koreans to enter the mainstream of Han Chinese society. Korean minorities have adapted themselves to live with Han Chinese and other ethnic groups in the northeast. They have adopted Han culture and have regarded themselves as Chinese nationals. Chinese minority policy has helped Korean minorities to keep their traditions and culture and has encouraged the elevation of their ethnic consciousness.

However, the nature of Chinese culture and policy has strong assimilative power. The seemingly 'favorable' Chinese minority policy towards the Korean minority also has its limitations. The concept of national autonomy as a foundation for Chinese minority policy is based on the assumption that every minority group consists of Chinese people (*Zhonghua minzu*). Thus, the right of autonomy is not a sovereign power like the right of self-determination, but that of administrative autonomy (Heberer, 1989). The Chinese central government entrusts limited power on regional matters to local government, which includes only economic and cultural affairs, not political issues. The cultural identity of a minority group is encouraged as long as it strengthens integration with the Chinese nation and the 'Chinese-ness' of the ethnic group. When a minority group tries to transform this cultural identity into a political one or shows a tendency towards separatism, the Chinese government will oppress it severely. The intent is to give ethnic groups cultural autonomy, not political. The national autonomy has not been of a political nature, but only administrative.

Koreans in China have developed dual identity through their particular historical experience. They cherished their strong national consciousness through ethnic education prior to the founding of the PRC. Since the opening of New China, their political identity has been defined through Chinese minority policy and state education. The situation of the Korean peninsula has, in a certain sense, helped to construct the double identity of Koreans in China. They have suffered a crisis of ethnic identity for a long time. They have tried to remain Korean in the ethnic and cultural sense, although they have experienced radical change in their political status. It is plausible to say that throughout this, the Korean minority has acquired dual identity as Koreans in China. In order to understand the dual identity of Koreans in China, their historical experiences should be examined. Firstly, the history of the Korean minority is comparatively short in China. When they moved into northeast China, Koreans had already been molded as a 'nation' in the modern sense. Differing from other minority groups in China, which have their historical origin in China, Koreans were forced to migrate into northeast China unwillingly in the late 19th and early 20th century. Koreans had homes and a motherland, which they left behind. In the Manchurian period, Koreans, as Japanese subjects, were of a higher status than Han Chinese. They were also able to maintain a strong identity through their ethnic education. Secondly, early Korean immigrants into Manchuria contributed to the considerable development of northeast China. They began rice cultivation in what had previously been a very sparsely populated region. They also played a key role in the Anti-Japanese and Liberation Wars in

Manchuria, so that they were the protagonists in creating the 'New China,' at least in the northeast. Thirdly, it is suggested that the division of the Korean peninsula and the outbreak of the Korean War gave Koreans in China uncertain feelings towards their motherland. Neither North nor South Korea, which of each dominated just half of the peninsula, could offer enough justification for Koreans in China to give their identification to one of them. The Korean minority fought for North Korea as members of the Chinese People's Army in the Korean War. This instilled them with a sense of their belonging to China rather than to Korea. They could rid themselves of the feeling of conflict between their ethnic and political identities, thus adopting a dual identity. Fourthly, the minority policy of the PRC presupposes a distinction between ethnic identity and state consciousness. The strong ethnic identity of a minority is presumed to help intensify its Chinese political identity, even if this identity cannot be expressed in political reality. This presumption fits the Korean minority in China very well. This seemingly 'favorable' policy towards minorities is believed to have contributed strongly to implanting this dual identity, that is, the Korean ethnic and the Chinese political identities. Koreans in China have adjusted to accepting China as their country. The Yanbian Korean Autonomous Region was established in 1952. Under the new minority policy, respect for the traditions and customs of minorities, ethnic education in their own language, and political participation through national regional autonomy were guaranteed. The PRC's minority policy has fluctuated from moderate to extremist and vice versa, depending on the domestic climate. Regional autonomy, however, in its earlier form, was recovered following the Cultural Revolution. Most Koreans in China support the recent Chinese minority policy, which is perceived to contribute greatly to the improvement of life in general, as well as to their economic and educational development. This positive attitude towards governmental policy strengthens their identification with China. The policies of national autonomy have not always satisfied the Korean minority. Even though some were frustrated by the limits of regional autonomy, they tended to remain within their bounds and to accept the obstacles. In this sense, the ethnic identity of the Korean minority is estimated to be purely cultural, differing from that of other minority groups in China. One of the basic elements of the Korean ethnic identity is understood to be their ethnic pride in cultural traditions.

Fifthly, the dual identity of the Korean minority in China seems to have been consolidated through contacts with the two Koreas. Since China recognized only North Korea as a legitimate state until the 1980s, Koreans in China regarded North Korea as their motherland. The deterioration of the

relationship between China and North Korea in the 1960s made it dangerous to adhere to North Korea. During the period of the Cultural Revolution, many Korean leaders and intellectuals were falsely charged with spying or with being regional nationalists. They had to keep a certain distance from their motherland. Since open and reform policies were adopted, the relationship between the two countries has improved. However, Koreans in China seem to sympathise with North Korea. They both pity and despise the North Koreans because of their political and economic situations. Direct contacts with South Korea since the late 1980s have not led the Korean Chinese to identify strongly with South Korea. The more opportunities they have to meet South Koreans, the more they tend to realize their "Chineseness," how they differ from South Koreans. Although Koreans in China appreciate the economic success of South Korea and consider her as their basis for the realization of the 'Korean dream,' they don't feel at home in South Korea. Those who visit South Korea mostly reach the understanding that they are not "Korean compatriots abroad," as South Koreans refer to them, but "Koreans in China." These above-mentioned elements have played an important role in giving the Korean minority its dual identity. It can be concluded that Korean minority have begun to distinguish their ethnic identity from their political one.

#### ETHNIC IDENTITY

The Korean minority is culturally quite distinct from any other group in China. Their language, life style and value systems are different from those of the Han or Manchu. The stronger ethnic identity of Koreans in China is believed to have been enhanced by the geopolitical background of Manchuria and their cultural particularity. Since they began to inhabit the northeast of China, they have neither lost their ethnic identity nor been forced to abandon it. During the Japanese colonial period, they were forced to assume a strong identity as objects of exploitation. After the foundation of the PRC, the minority policy allowed them to use their language and to manage an ethnic educational system. The policy of isolation has been sustained, and no full-scale or organized integration through cultural assimilation seems to have been attempted with regard to the Korean minority. Having been treated as one of the model groups among minorities in China, Koreans have cherished a kind of national pride.

The precursor to maintaining this strong ethnic identity is the Korean language, which is said to be very scientific and developed by linguistic scholars. Language is not purely a means of communication, but a cultural sym-

bol that determines ways of thinking and behavior patterns. It was natural for the Korean immigrants to build a "compact community" from their collective villages (on the explanation of "compact community", see Kwon, 1997: 8-12). This was not only because of their way of life but also due to language barriers. The Korean language has been shown to have had the effect of isolating Koreans from other ethnic groups, mainly from the Han Chinese, and of their managing their lives in a "cultural island." The use of Korean as an official language in the Korean autonomous prefecture has been encouraged through education, publishing and mass communication. The fact that Koreans generally established their compact villages did a great deal to preserve the linguistic homogeneity of the Korean minority. This is the reason why population movement toward urban or coastal areas is expected to weaken Korean ethnic consciousness. Many young Koreans who have attended Chinese schools in urban areas do not speak Korean. A reliable opinion indicates that about ten percent of the Korean population of China cannot speak the Korean language at all (Zheng, 1996: 276-277). Korean leaders and intellectuals emphasize the correlation between language and ethnic identity. Pointing to the fact that the Manchu have been assimilated into the Han because they lost their language and cultural homogeneity, they warn against the increasing use of Chinese among the Korean population, especially among young people. The proportion of those who have given up using Korean among Korean youth in major cities such as Beijing, Harbin, Shenyang, and Changchun is over 60 percent (Zheng, 1996: 281).

In making mention of ethnic characteristics, Koreans in China tend to distinguish themselves from Han Chinese. The standard referred to is the Han Chinese in the northeast, who migrated into the region during the same period as the Koreans, mainly from Shandong Province. In fact, Korean perceptions and understanding of other ethnic groups seem to be very superficial, and they have not created an intimate relationship with them. The Korean minority has chiefly had contact with Han Chinese and has lived surrounded by the Han majority. Without systematic understanding of Han culture and character, Koreans are inclined to think that they are different from Han Chinese in their way of thinking, behavior patterns, and life-style, including food, clothing, and shelter. These distinctions seem to be looked upon as "ethnic characteristics." In comparison with the Han, Koreans have a certain pride, which can be considered a positive ethnic identity. This perception is based on a kind of "ethnocentrism," which regards one's own group as superior to others. Korean ethnocentrism in China has particular elements of note (Lee Kwang-kyu, 1994: 263-264). In spite of their ethnic

pride, the Korean minorities have managed their lives surrounded by the Chinese and Han cultures that have very strong assimilative powers. In a society of the Han majority, it would be inevitable for Koreans to feel limitations, such as difficulty in advancing their social status. The Cultural Revolution, which threatened the basic premises of Han-minority relations, is said to have had a devastating impact upon the Korean ethnic identity. In the decade following 1966, minority education and Korean usage were strongly undermined. The emphasis on ethnic identification was strongly criticized as cultural degeneration and political retreat. Koreans were marginalized. This experience has remained in the collective consciousness of Koreans, who have considered themselves as marginals since their immigration.

This feeling of being marginalized is reappearing among Korean Chinese, as a signal of uneasiness in this period of open door policy. In the collectivist agricultural society, the Korean minority was praised as one of the model ethnic groups. Under current trends of industrialization, Koreans think of their region, especially Yanbian, as a geo-economic hinterland in comparison with the coastal areas. They would be apprehensive of a future in an open and competitive society, and are likely to perceive that they are less competitive and less connected in business than the Han Chinese. From this perspective, some negative dispositions of the Koreans are often evoked as causes impedimental to progress. Koreans in China often criticize themselves with the allegory of "host and guest." Despite considering themselves citizens of the PRC, they do not think of themselves as in the mainstream of Chinese society. They feel themselves not as "hosts" of the country but "guests." Some comment that the Korean Chinese have lived a wandering life, and they still maintain that attitude. The Korean press often reports examples of Koreans who have succeeded in entering into the mainstream of Chinese society as high-ranking officers, cadres, researchers and professors, putting an emphasis on the importance of trying to have "ownership" of the country. Korean minorities still carry an awareness of being marginals in their collective consciousness.

#### POLITICAL IDENTITY

Koreans in China consider the People's Republic of China to be "their country" (on this part, see Kwon, 1996: 98-100). This political identification is a recent phenomenon and has developed since 1949. Before the founding of the New China, they were officially classified along with the Japanese or Manchu, but did not consider Japan or the Manchu Empire to be their coun-

try. However, the fact that Korean Chinese regard China, officially and psychologically, as their own country, even though most of them speak Korean and live together in compact communities, is a radical shift in political identity. This shift can be explained by the appearance of a strong unified socialist state and the Korean strategy of survival in this new situation. These two elements, however, cannot account for their change of political identity.

To understand the changes in Korean political identity in China, their appreciation of the Chinese socialist government based on their historical experiences should be examined. As seen before, most Korean immigrants were poor peasants. They entered northeast China for the purpose of cultivating crops and vegetables to survive. Their lives in China were made difficult by Japanese suppression and political instability. The appearance of the New China was a blessing for the poor peasants because the Communists promised to give them land of their own. For the older generation, who experienced considerable hardship, the founding of the People's Republic was a great transition comparable to going "from hell to heaven." It can be observed that most of these older Koreans accept China as their own country with gratitude and sincerity. Moreover, many Koreans in China accepted the Communist ideology as a means of independence from the Japanese; they played an important role in the liberation of the northeast as members of the CCP, fighting against the Nationalists. Koreans in China were appreciated by the CCP as great fighters in the Chinese Revolution and were accepted as citizens of the New China. It seemed to be rather easier for them to stay in the New China as Chinese than to return to Korea where the situation was very precarious.

Recent discussions on ethnic characteristics among Korean intellectuals in China have concluded that the Korean minority has lost the common elements of a nation with Koreans in the peninsula due to divergent economic approaches in different lands for more than a century. This debate, the subject of which was "Where do we (the Korean minority) belong?" progressed in the daily Korean newspaper of Heilongjiang Province for nearly one year, and came to the conclusion that: "We have our own home. Our motherland and our land are neighbors, which have the same walls. Let's make our home powerful, exercising our ability and potential energy." (Heilongjiang Xinwen, 25.07.1995); "It is without doubt that we are Chinese people. We are a Korean minority in China. We have to recognize our destiny to be Chinese ... Only China embraces us in her bosom. Our future and hope lie in our reliance on China, which is developing rapidly. It is because we have driven our roots into this soil and we shall live here indefinitely. As a wise and brilliant minority group, we should support the prosperity of China in every

field with mastership of this country." (H.X., 01.04.1995); "Our nationality is Chinese. We are Chinese people. The Korean peninsula, which we call our motherland, can only give us some comfort. The two Koreas cannot determine our destiny, or our political and practical circumstances. The Korean minority in China cannot be enriched with their help." (H.X., 10.10.1995).

Koreans in China seem to have clarified their position in relation to the Korean peninsula. Some mention that Korea is their motherland (•• *muguo* in Chinese) and China their fatherland (•• *zuguo*) or that "North and South Korea are the parents who gave birth to us, and China is the parent who has raised us." (H.X., 18.07.1995). It is estimated that Koreans in China have felt that they have dual identities as Chinese nationals with Korean blood lineage since the foundation of the PRC. They have also come to understand how they differ from Koreans who live on the peninsula. On the basis of their historical experiences of over one hundred years' immigration in China, they have realized China as "a Fatherland," which is the base of their lives and destiny. In aspects of culture and language, the Korean minority has dual and bilingual characteristics. Koreans in China have absorbed some Chinese cultural elements as their own. They have been transformed into beings of dual characteristics and dual cultures.

In the same context, a representative professor in the Yanbian Prefecture compares Koreans in China to a daughter who went to the home of her husband's parents. The Korean minority is thus the daughter with Korea as her maiden home and China her husband's family: "Koreans abroad often ask themselves such questions as "Who am I?" and "To which country do I belong?" We look upon ourselves as Koreans by our blood lineage. On the other hand, we feel ourselves to be nationals of our residing country because we are accustomed to the culture and life-style of our host country. In this way, we have forged a dual identity for ourselves. It is natural for Koreans in China to think of themselves as daughters who have left the home of their physical parents to live in the homes of their husbands' parents. Since we have married and come to live with our in-laws, we should follow the family traditions of our husband and wait on our parents-in-law, keeping some distance from our own parents. Since we have crossed the Tumen River to live in China, we should abide by the law of the host country and not do harm to those who live there. The host country does not like its immigrants to be in collusion with their original country." (Zheng, 1996:271-272).

## THE KOREAN MINORITY AND THE TWO KOREAS

A 1997 Social Research showed that most Koreans in China recognize the differences between Koreans living on the Korean peninsula and themselves.<sup>2</sup> Regarding the question whether there are similarities or differences among the three Koreans (Koreans in China, South Koreans and North Koreans), the responses were; (1) there are more similarities than differences among them (53 percent of all respondents), (2) there are more differences than similarities (25 percent), and (3) there are no similarities, but ethnic consciousness and language (19 percent). This indicates that the number of Koreans in China who have emotional ties to both North and South Korea is on the decrease. The number of Koreans in China who were born or had lived on the Korean peninsula is diminishing as their migration took place between 55 and 140 years ago. It is reported that only 2.2 percent of the householders in the Yanbian area were born on the peninsula.<sup>3</sup>

The majority of Koreans in China regard South or North Korea as their ancestral land (•• *guguo*) rather than as a fatherland (•• *zuguo*); more than 70 percent of the Korean minority consider China as their fatherland. Having been educated that their socialist fatherland is the People's Republic of China, the young generation of ethnic Koreans in China has a tendency to naturally accept the idea that "my fatherland is China." The Korean minority's first impression of South Korea is not as "the ancestral land" or "country of the same people," but as "neighbor country of economic development." According to the evidence of the 1997 Social Research, 60 percent of Koreans in China think of South Korea in terms of "economic progress," 21 percent in terms of a country of the same people, and 14 percent in terms of ancestral land (Choi, 1998).

The relationships of the Korean minority with the two Koreas have undergone great changes since the founding of the PRC. In the 1950s and early 1960s, Koreans in China were strongly influenced by North Korea's cultural input. As China was closely allied with North Korea and consid-

2 The 1997 Social Research was done by Choi Woogill with the help of a researcher of Korean minority in July 1997. The respondents are 157 Koreans living in northeast China. See Choi, 1998: Annex 7.

3 According to Jin Chenggao's social research on the Yanbian Korean community (executed in 1990), the generation composition of 2,000 Korean householders in Yanbian are as follows: the 1st generation (2.2 percent), the 2nd generation (38.1 percent), the 3rd generation (43.8 percent) and the 4th or 5th generation (7.0 percent). Yonbyon Chosunjokui wolyung chonipsae daehan suntaekjosa jaryobunsok (Analysis of the source materials of Korean migration history in Yanbian) unpublished paper, 1991.

ered South Korea to be its enemy in the Cold War system, Koreans in China were encouraged to think of North Korea alone as their ancestral land and to follow North Korea in defining elements related to ethnic identity. Until the 1980s, Koreans in China felt their ties to be most closely linked both politically and ethnically to North Korea. Following the deterioration of the Sino-Soviet relationship in the 1960s, North Korea became the only country accessible to the Korean minority in China. Although many Koreans were persecuted as North Korean spies during the Cultural Revolution, they continued to regard North Korea as their ancestral land, since China and North Korea were socialist brother countries and blood ties confirmed through the Korean War. Meanwhile, as South Korea was an enemy country to be defeated, Chinese Koreans received only distorted propaganda from North Korea about South Korea. It was not until the Chinese open door policy that Koreans in China began to criticize North Korean economic failure in comparison with that of China. Its political rigidity and the establishment of a family dictatorship were viewed negatively by Korean communities. This criticism was rationalized with the argument that Chinese development progressed through correcting mistakes made by the "leftists," and that political power was still dominantly held by leftists in North Korea. A greater understanding of the international situation, thanks to improved foreign relations, is believed to have fostered a more realistic world-view. Thus, for example, Yanbian University has promoted scientific exchanges with many institutes and universities abroad since the early 1980s. Yanbian is being fostered as a center of Korean studies and is receiving support from many Koreans abroad. Meanwhile, cultural and scientific exchanges with North Korea have decreased at a rapid pace. Therefore, since the late 1980s, Koreans in China have tended to be more favorably disposed toward South Korea than toward North Korea. They have generally been proud of South Korea's economic successes and cultural advancements; the Asian Games in 1986 and the Seoul Olympic Games in 1988 contributed to this change in sentiment. The two Games gave ordinary Chinese a good and positive impression of South Korea. The Asian Games provided insight into the economic and social development of South Korea, which shocked the ordinary Chinese who had been kept completely ignorant on this issue. The Seoul Olympics only reinforced the positive image of South Korea. It is widely acknowledged that Korean Chinese have acquired much self-confidence as a direct result of South Korea's demonstrated international status and respectability. In promoting its Four Modernization policies, the Chinese government has come to look upon South Korea's economic development as a model. This factor has enhanced the status of Koreans in China. In fact,

Chinese authorities implicitly encourage Koreans in China to visit their relatives in South Korea since the liberalization in policies regarding mutual visits of relatives in the mid-1980s.

The Korean minority's perception of South Korea had been very negative up to the early 1980s, due to the Cold War environment, the Chinese State ideology, influences of the Korean War, and the distorted propaganda of North Korea. Following the open door policy, the negative view of South Korea disappeared quickly and the perception became increasingly positive, especially in comparison with the perception of North Korea, due particularly to the economic successes of the South. However, criticism of South Korea continued concerning the distribution of its wealth, its materialism, and moral decadence, all of which were related to general criticisms of the capitalist system. This depreciation, however, did not lead them to negate the entire South Korean society. Implicitly, they accepted the superiority of the capitalist economic system. They felt pride as Koreans by identifying themselves with South Koreans. They expected to get different kinds of financial assistance from the South. Through mutual visits of relatives, there were many cases in which fortunes were made. Visiting South Korea was and is still regarded as the "American dream" for Koreans in China, which they call "*Hanguk baram*" (South Korean wind).

#### THE KOREAN CHINESE IN SOUTH KOREA

Korean Chinese trips to South Korea started full scale in 1989 in the form of visiting relatives. It is estimated that by 1996 more than 120,000 Korean Chinese had paid a visit to South Korea, which is over five percent of the total population of the Korean minority in China. According to the South Korean Ministry of Justice, the number of Korean Chinese in South Korea has reached about 60,000, more than half of them considered to be illegal sojourners who have passed their lawful period of stay (*Dong-a Ilbo*, 29.11.1996). Having borrowed money at a high rate of interest in China to buy Chinese medicines, the first visitors from China brought them to sell to South Koreans. It was not until the winter of 1993 that Korean Chinese medicine peddlers became a social problem in South Korea. Hundreds of them were found in main streets in the major cities. Some medicines were proven to be spurious. The situation was resolved when the South Korean Red Cross purchased all the medicines. Realizing that peddling Chinese medicine had become profitless and because some peddlers were ruined by the debts they incurred when they bought the medicines, Korean Chinese began to find laboring jobs, especially in the construction field and in restaurants.

One social study showed that 41.3 percent of Korean Chinese in South Korea were employed in the construction field as manual workers and 23.4 percent in restaurants as cooks or employees (The Institute of Labor Policy, 1995 *Social research on foreign workers*). It is said that major satellite towns around Seoul were newly built in the early 1990s mainly by Korean Chinese laborers. Their average monthly income was 830,000 won (900 US dollars) in 1995 or about 20 times their revenue in China. Two years' working in South Korea without any troubles can earn them the equivalent of more than 20 years' revenue in China. Several years' stay and direct experiences in South Korea do not necessarily give Korean Chinese a sense of integration with South Korean culture. Visits to their ancestral land give them opportunities to perceive their differences with Koreans on the peninsula, which can be called a "new revelation of Korean minorities' self-identity." (Hwang, 1995: 11-15). They have maintained a strong ethnic identity throughout migration history in China for more than a century. After visiting South Korea, they have come to understand that South Korean culture is different from theirs and Koreans in the peninsula are different from them.

Social research on Korean Chinese who have visited South Korea shows that they have been discriminated against in South Korea, cannot adapt themselves well to South Korean society, and have recognized their differences from South Koreans. Before coming, South Korea was their object of adoration and the way to make their "South Korean dream" come true. But after having been in South Korea and having experienced "the capitalist way of life," they began to breed a negative perception of South Korea. At the same time, they strengthened their pride in being a Korean minority as a Chinese citizen. The fact that Korean Chinese in South Korea have been relegated to the lower strata of South Korean society as illegal sojourners and manual laborers has made them understand the realities of "heartless" capitalism. The Korean Chinese tendency to adapt to South Korean culture through indirect experiences has been transformed to that of differentiation through direct contacts in South Korea. They have come to strengthen their ethnic identity, which has been distinct from that of the Han Chinese and other minorities in China, and is now distinguished from that of Koreans on the peninsula.

Some Korean Chinese authors, who are third or fourth generation Korean Chinese, have voiced their disappointment with South Korea and have realized their identity as Korean Chinese after having been in South Korea. Their common reflection on the South Korean influence on the Korean minority in China is expressed by the term "wind." As a way to portray the circumstances of the Korean minority as well as those of herself, one female

novelist used the term “wind flower” (*Baram ggot*)<sup>4</sup>: “I am a wind flower, wandering from place to place. I have come and gone here and there between two worlds where the wind flows and dies, I could not make my dwelling place anywhere. Without striking roots deep into the soil of one place, I have suffered from recollection and oblivion, nostalgia and rancour towards the other place, flying here and there without stopping. I have coexisted in two worlds and escaped from the two worlds. Who am I?” (Xu, 1996: 7).

Another promising author of the Korean minority also complains of the narrow-mindedness of South Koreans in his book published in South Korea, and states that “*Hangukun obdda*” (South Korea does not exist): “There is no place for us (Korean Chinese who are in South Korea) in this country ... The gate of South Korea is not widely open for Korean Chinese. It is slightly open to those who are needed by South Korea. Why cannot they open their doors to Koreans in China? China is so backward that Korean Chinese will take all the foreign currency that Koreans have earned if the doors are open. South Koreans are so accustomed to getting money from foreign countries. ... They do not like it that Korean Chinese scrape up money on their streets. They do not care for the tears and sweat that Korean Chinese have shed to earn that money.” (Jin Zhaiguo, 1996: 80-82). The author continues to mention his disappointment with South Korea in another essay, entitled “To come to know South Korea is our misfortune.”: South Korea is teaching the Korean Chinese that “Your fatherland is not China but our Korea.” (This provokes Chinese enmity towards South Korea and the Korean minority in China.) In reality, this teaching implants in the mind of the Korean minority the idea that South Korea is not even an ancestral land. “South Korea will have to pay dearly to heal the wounds that they have inflicted on the heart of the Korean Chinese.” (Jin, 112-113). He concludes with some emotion that: “Both a love that gave birth to me and a love that raised me up are precious to me. Korea could not raise up her own children because of the Japanese Empire and instead China raised these motherless children without complaint. I am a son of China as well as that of Korea ... Some may think that “being Korean Chinese is miserable, because they are not treated as Korean on the Korean peninsula and are not accepted as Chinese in

4 Xu Lianshun, *Baram ggot* (Seoul: Bumwoosa, 1996). This novel is appreciated as the first long novel written by a Korean woman novelist (Yanbian ribao, 12.09.1996). It deals with the issue of Korean Chinese visiting South Korea. The book-cover states; “the ancestral land which is visited full of hope ... What is waiting for us: a cold reception, hatred, and a tired life everywhere. In miserable conditions, struggling to survive, beautiful and sorrowful love blooms like the snow flower ...”

China... However, there is a policy of preferential treatment towards minorities in China. In Korea there is no preferential policy or alternative for Korean Chinese ... It is not until coming to South Korea that most Korean Chinese realize their Chinese identity ..." (Jin, 246-247).

Writing of his experiencing several visits to South Korea, a young Korean Chinese author also asks questions such as; What kind of country is Korea? What are the differences between their forefathers, border-crossing people, and themselves, the third or the fourth generation of immigrants? What is the ethnic identity of the Korean minority in China? Expressing the broken hearts of Korean Chinese who have lived in South Korea, he concludes that the Korean dream was shattered, so that Koreans in China have to reflect on their own way of life and improve their lot by their own efforts (Liu Ranshan, 1996). This is a collection of essays of impressions of South Korea: "The Korean dream was shattered. Who is responsible for this? This is a natural result. Dreams of being rich without any effort, of placing our own destiny in others' hands, and of being pitied by others, are absurd and should be shattered. So this may give us a chance to manage a more earnest and faithful life than before ... We did not notice for a long time that South Koreans do not have enough room to embrace us. They did not treat us fairly ... Is this the problem of differences of social systems or ideologies? Is this because of Korean Chinese backwardness? Instead of criticizing South Koreans, we should recognize that Koreans, including the Korean minority in China, are so narrow-minded."<sup>5</sup>

Korean Chinese visits to South Korea were limited to those who had relatives in South Korea in the early 1990s, including many intellectuals for cultural exchanges. It was not until the establishment of diplomatic relationship between China and South Korea in 1992 that large-scale visits of Korean Chinese began. This intercourse has contributed to improving mutual understanding and to identifying the ethnic solidarity in a positive way, but has aggravated Korean Chinese perceptions of South Korea. Those Korean Chinese who come to South Korea without any preparation and education on different social systems and life environments of South Korean capitalism, have had difficulties in overcoming their cultural shock. They have managed their lives of socialist collectivism under the principle of equality. The influx of Korean Chinese into South Korea has mainly been caused by labor shortage in the South Korean industrial world. This might be one of the reasons why Korean Chinese cultural shock in South Korea

<sup>5</sup> Cui Sanliang, "Kaeojinun hangukggungwa uriui saengjon jase" (Shattered Korean dream and our attitude of survival), Yanbian ribao, 14.11.1996. This is Cui's impression of Liu's book.

has been great. It must be a great cultural shock that they have been confronted with strong individualism based on the principle of competition and severe hierarchical order in labor places in South Korea. This results in wide spread antipathy among the Korean community in China.

The incident of the steamship *Pescama* in August 1996 is a typical example that showed the aggravation of Korean Chinese feeling towards South Korea. A group of six Korean Chinese crewmen killed twelve co-workers, mainly South Koreans in the *S. S. Pescama*, a deep-sea fishing vessel in the South Pacific Sea. This became a great sensation and dispute in South Korea and the Korean community in China. The murderers were sentenced to capital punishment by the South Korean High Court of Justice, waiting for the Supreme Court's decision. One Korean Chinese novelist vents his emotion about this incident as follows: "Among those who have worked in South Korean deep-sea fishing vessels, there are few who say they like South Koreans. They were not treated as human beings, being beaten and scolded ... Resentment does reside in the heart of Korean Chinese. We are just poorer than South Koreans. Why do they treat us as slaves? Have they ever thought about the fact that the ancestors of Korean Chinese were fighters for Korean independence? How could South Korean companies in China prosper without Korean Chinese? It was a fratricidal tragedy and tremendous shock. Two million Korean Chinese are waiting, suppressing their resentment. Until when can we put up with this?" He displays Korean Chinese feelings towards South Korea: "Our ancestral country is a developed one, of which we were proud. Korean intellectuals in China after their visit to South Korea had been busy reporting her prosperity and her hard working people ... But South Koreans mean very different things to two million Korean Chinese ... haughty *nouveau riche*, lascivious South Koreans, and swindlers. ... Do they have any generosity for Korean Chinese? They used to say that we were their compatriots, which turns out to have been only a lip service ... Let us reflect on this incident. What kind of lesson can we learn from this?" (Cui Sanliang)

The 'Korean Dream' and the increase of Korean Chinese in South Korea have not promoted positive relationships between the two parties, but have helped to increase Korean Chinese animosity toward South Koreans. Apart from their emotional changes towards South Korea, the cultural influence of the South on Korean communities in China is quite extensive. Chinese Koreans are exposed to a rapidly growing amount of South Korean publications and other cultural programs. Many people listen to radio broadcasting from the South, watch video-tapes of South Korean television programs, and most intellectuals have access to South Korean daily newspapers. The

newest popular songs of South Korea can be heard on the streets of Yanbian. The cultural gaps between the two parties are decreasing rapidly. Closer relations between the PRC and the Republic of Korea (South Korea) have been developing since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries in August 1992.

#### RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN KOREAN CHINESE IN THE TWO KOREAS

Koreans in China have played an important role in connecting the two Koreas. Yanji, Tumen in Yanbian Prefecture and Dandong, the Sino-Korean border city in Liaoning Province are reported to be major reunion places for families separated by North and South Korea. According to a source from the South Korean National Unification Board, 128 cases of separated family meetings in a third country from the two Koreas were known since 1989. Most reunions have been performed in China. It is known that 60 percent of about 3,800 cases of letter exchanges were transferred by Korean Chinese from 1989 to summer 1997 (*Segye Ilbo*, 30.09.1997). The life or death verification of family members in North Korea for South Koreans, of which 942 cases are known, is done by Korean Chinese. The Korean community in China is building a bridge between the two Koreas.

The existence of the Korean community in China provides places for fugitives from North Korea. A report assessed that more than 7,000 North Koreans fled to China mainly because of food shortage in 1995 and the total number of North Korean refugees since 1991 numbered up to 10,000, who have stayed in the northeast China, especially in Yanbian Prefecture, relying on their relatives or Korean Chinese there (*Tokyo Shinbun*, 28.03.1996). The number of repatriates sent back to North Korea by Chinese police reached 140 persons in the two years of 1994 and 1995, 140 in 1993, and more than 400 in 1989. The Chinese government issued the Regulations of Border Control in Jilin Province in November 1993 to keep illegal immigrants from North Korea from crossing the border (*Donga Ilbo*, 26.12.1996). In early 1997 one big family, more than 20 members, succeeded in escaping from North Korea through the Korean community in China from Yanji, to Shenyang, to Beijing, to Hongkong with the financial help of their relatives in the United States.

North Koreans' border crossing is likely to be a troublesome question for the Chinese government. One unverified article reported that the Chinese government has adopted a plan to accommodate thousands of North Korean farmers on the Sanjiang plain in Heilongjiang Province for the purpose of helping them solve North Korea's economic problems. The North

Korean government was known to be seeking its citizens inhabitation in Korean Chinese villages suffering from labor shortage because of population movement. Instead, the Chinese government proposed to allow North Korean farmers to develop the vast territory of the Sanjiang plain, which is located where three rivers, Songhuajiang, Heilongjiang, and Usurijiang meet (*Hankyere*, 16.12.1996). The Chinese government concluded a contract with a South Korean enterprise, the Continental Comprehensive Development Company (Daeryuk jonghap kaebal) in 1994 to reclaim a part of the Sanjiang plain, which is known to be a damp ground with fertile soil. This joint venture project of farm building is known to be a failure.

The border trade by peddlers, mainly Korean Chinese, between China and North Korea around Korean regions in China is also a lifeline for the impoverished economy of North Korea. One report of a South Korean government think-tank, the Sejong Institute, estimated that the quantity of this trade amounted to three billion dollars in 1995, which reached fifty-five percent of that of the official trade of the two countries. Chinese who have entered North Korea number up to 100,000 a year, most of them are Korean minority (*Choson Ilbo*, 18.08.1996). In the case of Changbai Korean Autonomous County, about 8,000 Korean Chinese were engaged in border peddling as a way of visiting relatives. The major cities of this border trade are Changbai (China)- Haesan (North Korea), Tumen-Namyang, and Dandong- Shinuiju. Koreans in China were mostly reported to support a unification of the two Koreas. They think that a continuing division of the Korean peninsula cannot bring them benefits. With unification Korea would be stronger both politically and economically, and Koreans in China would enjoy a better status and have more opportunities. The Korean minority would generally like to play a positive role in uniting the two Koreas. However, the growth of negative feeling among the Korean community in China may have a bad effect on North Korean perceptions of South Korea.

## CONCLUSION

The Korean minority in China has developed a dual identity as both ethnic Koreans and Chinese nationals through their historical experiences. The Korean Chinese have had a dual identity, distinguishing political identity from ethnic identity. As ethnic Koreans, they tend to regard China as their fatherland. On the other hand, the Korean minority have displayed a "positive willingness" to maintain their culture and tradition. They have cherished ethnic pride through using their own language, keeping their ethnic tradition and attending ethnic schools, which were allowed by Chinese

minority policy. This has helped the Korean minority to keep their traditions and culture and encouraged the elevation of their ethnic consciousness. However, this policy has erected obstacles for Koreans wishing to enter the mainstream of Han Chinese society. The nature of Chinese Culture and policy has strong assimilative power. The concept of national autonomy as a foundation for Chinese minority policy is based on the assumption that every minority group consists of Chinese people (*Zhonghua minzu*). As such, the right of autonomy is not a sovereign power like the right of self-determination, but that of administrative autonomy. The cultural identity of a minority group is encouraged in so far as it strengthens integration with the Chinese nation and the 'Chinese-ness' of the ethnic group. The Chinese government has only intended to give ethnic groups national autonomy, not political. The growth of ethnic identity has been encouraged when it is able to contribute to the national integration of China.

As cultural and human exchanges have been rapidly increasing between South Korea and Korean Chinese society, the Chinese government has been worried about the appearance of Korean nationalism or pro-South Korean groups among the Korean community in China. Despite the Chinese government's doubts concerning the Korean minority, it is not plausible that the Korean Chinese will nurture a separatist tendency or independence movement in the near future. Their strong ethnic identity seems to stay at the cultural level. Firstly, the Korean Chinese distinguish political identity from ethnic. Most of them consider China as their fatherland and North or South Korea as their ancestral land. They identify themselves as Chinese citizens of Korean origin. Secondly, the Korean minority has lost their home instinct which Koreans abroad in other countries have still kept. This is true of most Korean Chinese leaders of the first or second generation. The phenomenon of alienation from their ancestral lands of North or South Korea has been strengthened through their unfriendly experiences with South Koreans. They have realized their 'Chinese-ness' through having experienced culture shock in South Korean society. Thirdly, Korean assimilation in Han Chinese society has been steadily progressing. The enlargement of Korean living space in the period of economic reform has increased their contact with the majority culture. It is widely said in Korean intellectual society that the Korean community in China is on the threshold of disintegration. The open door and economic reform policies have provided them with new economic opportunities, but the rapid social mobility has involved the 'anomie' phenomenon.

The South Korean impact on the Korean Chinese has reinforced their identity as a Korean minority and Chinese nationals. Their differentiation of

the concept of fatherland from that of ancestral land shows their trial of self-identification in new environments. They have even tried to conceptualize the different meanings of fatherland and motherland. It is generally accepted that China is their fatherland and the two Koreas are their ancestral lands. This is evidence of the adaptability of the Korean minority in China. The forthcoming changes in Chinese minority policy and the transformation of the Korean community ought to be watched closely.

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