

## **Endangered Korean Minority Society in China: Recent Socio-demographic Changes in the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture\***

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*This paper attempts to explore recent socio-demographic changes in the ethnic Korean population in Yanbian autonomous prefecture. Based on analysis of data from the 1990 and 2000 Chinese population censuses, this study focuses on recent changes in fertility, mortality and population structure of ethnic Koreans in Yanbian. Due to a rapid decrease in the level of fertility and population ageing, the Korean population in Yanbian has been in a decreasing trend in absolute numbers after the introduction of the market economy and the establishment of diplomatic relations between South Korea and China. The growing tendency of regional mobility for work and marriage, the rapid expansion of residential areas, a serious crisis in ethnic education in Korean schools, and weakening social integration and ethnic identity of Koreans in Yanbian are also discussed.*

**Keywords:** *Yanbian Autonomous Prefecture, Ethnic Koreans in China, Korean Chinese, Korean Minority Society, Low Fertility, Population Ageing, Ethnic Identity*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Since the historical experiment of the socialist market economy began representing reform and a more open-door society, China has been undergoing rapid socioeconomic changes for the last quarter of the century. The Chinese are facing drastic changes not only in their economic behaviors and ways of thinking, but also in demographic behaviors such as fertility, mortality, migration and nuptiality. Ethnic Koreans (Korean Chinese) living in China have also been subject to continuous changes. The establishment of diplomatic relations between South Korea and China in 1992 triggered drastic social, economic, cultural as well as demographic changes in the Korean minority society.

The main purpose of this paper is to explain the transition of demographic behaviors among ethnic Koreans in China during the last 10 years and examine its pervasive effect on the society. Ever since the market economy was introduced in China and as more frequent contacts have been made between China and South Korea, the Korean minority society has been undergoing drastic transition; a rapid decline in the fertility level, ageing of the population, labor migrations, expansion of residential areas, changes in occupational distribution, an increasing number of intermarriages and the withering of Korean ethnic education. The changes of demographic behaviors and the population structure are more profound among ethnic Koreans than Han Chinese. In recent years, the absolute population size of the Korean society in Yanbian, where ethnic Koreans are most densely populated in China, continues its downward trend. Furthermore, in addition to the weakening social

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integration and cultural identity, Korean society is in the process of losing its countenance as an ethnic minority society in China.

The data presented in this paper were taken mainly from the documents on Yanbian Korean autonomous prefecture included in the recently released 2000 fifth population census of China. By comparing the above documents with those from the 1990 fourth population census, attempts to understand the changes in demographic behaviors were made. Other documents such as published and unpublished reports from the Yanbian Statistical Bureau were used to analyze the demographic characteristics and changes in demographic behaviors as well as social problems in the Yanbian Korean society.

## 2. RECENT CHANGES IN THE ETHNIC KOREAN POPULATION IN YANBIAN

### 2.1. Growth of the Ethnic Korean Population

Since the establishment of the socialist government, China has conducted five population censuses. According to the 1953 first population census, the total population of China was counted at 590 million. During the following 47 years the total population of China increased by 2.1 times amounting to more than 1,260 million as of the year 2000. During the same period, the ethnic Korean population increased by 71.4% from 1.1 million to 1.9 million. As a result, the proportion of ethnic Koreans, which had constituted 0.19% of the national population in 1953, declined to 0.15% in 2000. Among the 55 ethnic minorities in China, the Korean minority ranks fourteenth in population size. Table 1 presents the population and average annual growth rates of the Chinese population, Han and Korean released from the five censuses of 1953, 1964, 1982, 1990 and 2000.

According to Table 1, the population of ethnic Koreans in period 1953-1964 increased an average of 16.9 % per annum. This figure indicates that ethnic Koreans had a higher level of growth rate than Hans or the Chinese population as a whole. However, since 1964 the average annual growth rate among Koreans has been substantially lower than that for Han Chinese or the national population. Since the early 1970's China has enforced fertility control policies, and specifically since the 1980's a stringent policy called the "one-child per family" has been in force. Nevertheless, ethnic minorities were exempt from the population policy, and indeed minority nationalities have been permitted to have more than one child per couple, and under special circumstances even three have been allowed. Accordingly, as

**Table 1.** Trends in the Population Growth for Han Chinese and Ethnic Koreans in China, 1953-2000

Year (Month. Day.)	Population (in 1,000s)			Annual Growth Rate(‰)		
	Total	Han	Korean	Total	Han	Korean
1953 ( 7.1.)	594,347	547,283	1,120	-	-	-
1964 ( 7.1.)	697,943	654,565	1,349	14.6	16.3	16.9
1982 ( 7.1.)	1,008,175	940,880	1,766	20.4	20.2	15.0
1990 ( 7.1.)	1,133,683	1,042,482	1,921	14.7	12.8	10.5
2000 (11.1.)	1,265,830	1,159,400	1,920	10.7	10.3	-0.1

Sources: YPCO (1991: 6; 2002: 46).

implied in Table 1, the population growth rate of ethnic minorities has been significantly higher than that of Hans. On the other hand, the fertility level of ethnic Koreans has been consistently lower than that of other ethnic minorities, even lower than that of Hans. Especially in period 1990-2000 it was revealed that, although the average annual growth rates of the national population and Han were reported at 10.7‰ and 10.3‰ respectively, the population of ethnic Koreans declined slightly.

Ethnic Koreans in China reside in the southeastern part of Jilin province, populated most densely in the Yanbian region which borders the northeastern part of the Korean peninsula. The migration of Koreans to this region began in the middle of nineteenth century Chosun. Affected by a series of famines in the northeastern part of the Korean peninsula, impoverished farmers, in search of uncultivated lands, began to migrate to the Kando (Jiandao) region which comprises almost all of today's Yanbian Korean autonomous prefecture. It was estimated that the Korean population in the Kando (Jiandao) region had already reached 77,000 during the 1860's. Since then, the residential areas of Koreans have expanded steadily throughout Manchuria (Yoon 1993).

The Korean population in Yanbian had grown drastically between the 1910's and the 1930's. During this time the population growth rate in the Korean peninsula ascended steeply due to the reduction in mortality. Moreover, the Japanese colonial regime had caused the deterioration of agricultural conditions and the extreme poverty of Korean farmers, generating a stream of migration to Manchuria. After the Manchurian incident (1931-1932) a massive group migration from Korea to Manchuria had taken place due to Japanese continental politics (Kim 1996; Kwon and Kim 2002). After the liberation of Korea, return migration to the Korean peninsula occurred on a smaller scale, and most of the Koreans who migrated to Manchuria including Yanbian during the Japanese colonial regime settled permanently in China (Kim 1998).

In 1952, three years after the establishment of the People's Republic of China, The Yanbian region was granted the status of Korean autonomous prefecture. The size of this prefecture is 42,700Km<sup>2</sup>, which is slightly less than the half of South Korea. During the last half-century ethnic Koreans in this region have kept their own cultural and ethnic identity and faithfully assumed their responsibilities as members of the Chinese society. Table 2 presents the population trends by ethnic group of the Yanbian Korean autonomous prefecture estimated in the five population censuses. The total population of the Yanbian Korean autonomous prefecture increased by about 2.4 times from 926,207 in 1953 to 2,209,646 in 2000. That is, for 47 years, it has increased at the average rate of 18.4‰ per year. As illustrated in Table 2, in the period 1990-2000 the average annual growth rate of the population was estimated at 5.9‰. This estimate is slightly more than half of the average annual growth rate of the Chinese national population (10.7‰) during the same period. The reason for this relatively low population growth rate in the Yanbian Korean prefecture is that the pace of the Korean population growth rate is significantly slower than that of the Hans. Consequently, as shown in Table 2, the proportion of the Korean population which once peaked at 60.2% in 1953 steadily declined and reached 36.3% in 2000. While the Han population increased by the number of 153,913, the Korean population decreased by 21,591 during the period 1990-2000. The average annual growth rates of Hans and Koreans during this period are enumerated as 11.8‰ and -2.6‰, respectively.

**Table 2.** Population by Ethnicity and Sex in the Yanbian Prefecture, 1953-2000

	Population					Annual Growth Rate(‰) (1990-2000)
	1953 (July 1)	1964 (July 1)	1982 (July 1)	1990 (July 1)	2000 (Nov. 1)	
Korean						
Male	-	-	-	408,158	398,858	-2.2
Female	-	-	-	414,643	402,352	-2.9
Total	557,292	623,136	754,567	822,801	801,210	-2.6
Han						
Male	-	-	-	611,475	700,186	13.1
Female	-	-	-	574,417	640,989	10.6
Total	346,427	643,855	1,074,240	1,187,262	1,341,175	11.8
Total Pop.						
Male	488,739	669,914	950,004	1,056,449	1,134,339	6.9
Female	437,468	624,715	921,508	1,023,453	1,075,307	4.8
Total	926,207	1,294,629	1,871,512	2,079,902	2,209,646	5.9

Sources: YPCO (1991: 4; 2002: 44).

## 2.2. Low Fertility

The continuous reduction in the proportion of the Korean population is mainly due to the low fertility of ethnic Koreans compared to other ethnic groups. According to Table 3, although the number of children born in 1989 was 13,324, the number of Korean children born between November, 1999 and October, 2000 was no more than 3,537, indicating a reduction of 73.4%. Meanwhile, the number of Han births decreased by 57.5% during the same period. The crude birth rate of Koreans in the period 1999-2000 was 4.4‰ which was substantially lower than the 7.1‰ of Hans. It constituted no more than 27% of 16.2‰, the 1989 crude birth rate for ethnic Koreans. No other regions of China or other nations exhibit a fertility level as low as the above.

Because the Yanbian Statistical Bureau is not releasing detailed figures on the mothers' ethnicity-specific and age-specific birth rates, it is difficult to estimate the total fertility rate that functions as the most reliable indicator of fertility level. Instead, since the censuses of 1990 and 2000 contain questions on the average number of children born and the average number of children surviving per woman aged 15-64, it is possible to make an indirect estimate. The average number of children born among Koreans declined dramatically from 1.84 in 1990 to 1.01 in 2000. The decline in the average number of children surviving among Koreans during the same period was also steep: it decreased from 1.70 to 0.99. The number of children born and the number of children surviving particularly among Koreans residing in Yanji, the capital city of the Yanbian Korean autonomous prefecture, amount to just 0.86 respectively. The number of children born and the number of children surviving among ethnic Koreans are significantly smaller compared to those for Hans (YPCO 1991: 174-179; 2002: 1409).

**Table 3.** Fertility and Mortality Indices by Ethnicity in the Yanbian Prefecture, 1989-2000

	Korean			Han			Total Pop.		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
<b>Number of Births</b>									
1989.1.1. - 1989.12.31.	6,747	6,577	13,324	11,512	10,860	22,372	19,253	18,414	37,667
1999.11.1.- 2000.10.31.**	1,801	1,736	3,537	5,091	4,427	9,518	7,170	6,313	13,483
<b>Birth Rate (‰)</b>									
1989.1.1. - 1989.12.31.*	16.5	15.9	16.2	18.8	18.9	18.8	18.2	18.0	18.1
1999.11.1.- 2000.10.31.**	4.5	4.3	4.4	7.3	6.9	7.1	6.3	5.9	6.1
<b>Number of Deaths</b>									
1989.1.1. - 1989.12.31.	3,385	2,370	5,755	3,737	2,351	6,088	7,326	4,809	12,165
1999.11.1.- 2000.10.31.	3,234	2,304	5,538	4,166	2,709	6,875	7,594	5,132	12,726
<b>Death Rate (‰)</b>									
1989.1.1. - 1989.12.31.*	8.3	5.7	7.0	6.1	4.1	5.1	6.9	4.7	5.8
1999.11.1.- 2000.10.31.**	8.1	5.7	6.9	6.0	4.2	5.1	6.7	4.8	5.8

Notes: \* Birth and death rates were calculated based on the 1990 census population.

\*\* Birth and death rates were calculated based on the 2000 census population. Number of births and birth rate were calculated from the 9.33% sample data.

Sources: YPCO (1991: 56-65, 174-180; 2002: 90-101, 673).

Davis (1963) asserted that the fear of relative deprivation resulted in fertility control. Likewise, in the case of Yanbian Koreans, the introduction of the market economy and the successful establishment of diplomatic ties between China and South Korea eventually led them to feel insecure about their living conditions by comparing those of others and aspire to upward socioeconomic mobility. This resultant atmosphere of seeking security culminated in labor migrations to other cities in China or Korea. It is predicted that because of the sharp rise in the cost of raising and educating children during this transition period, new norms, values and attitudes preferring low fertility have been shaped. Another major contributing factor associated with low fertility is the increasing imbalance between the number of men and women of marriageable ages caused by massive marriage migration.

### 2.3. Mortality

The medical environment in Yanbian is considered to be at high level for China (Anderson et al. 1997). Its mortality has reached a relatively low level as well. For the last ten years there has not been any significant change in the mortality level. When compared to the data from 1989, while the number of deaths among ethnic Koreans declined by 3.8% in one year from November, 1999, the number of deaths among Hans increased by 12.9% according to the indices given in Table 3. The crude death rate for ethnic Koreans from 1999 to 2000 was 6.9‰, marking a substantially higher level than 5.1‰ of Hans.

The higher mortality level of ethnic Koreans compared to that of Hans can be affirmed by analyzing the average number of children born and the average number of children surviving. A significantly higher mortality of Korean children is observed particularly in the

following groups: those aged mid-50s and older, those with low education level, farm household members and those who are registered as farm household members. On the other hand, no significant difference in the mortality rate of children was noted between the Han and the Korean young people with a higher education level residing in cities (Kim 1996).

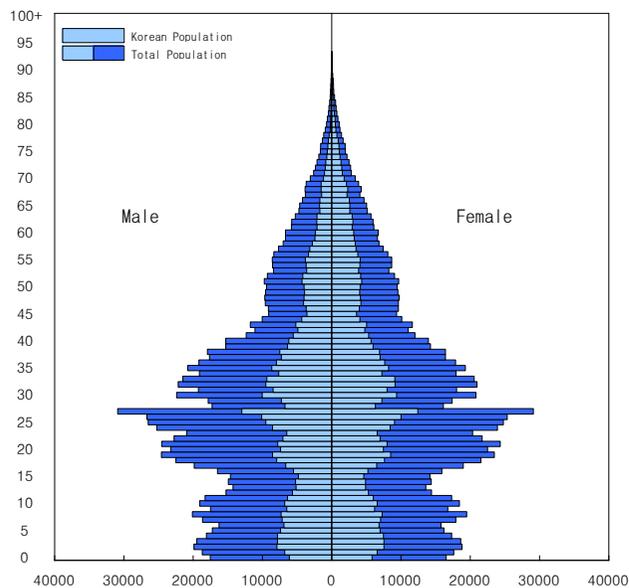
As shown in Table 3, the death rate of Korean men from 1999 to 2000 was 8.1‰, which was much higher than that of Korean women (5.7‰) or of Han men (6.0‰). This high death rate among Korean men is known to be associated with spicy traditional food such as *kimchi* and the excessive consumption of alcohol and chain-smoking (Shen and Tong 1997). In particular, the prevalence of high blood pressure was the highest for Koreans among the 56 ethnic groups including Hans, which is twice the national average level (*Heilongjiang Newspaper* 12/18/2001).

The mortality level of the Yanbian prefecture is influenced by sex and regional variations. According to the 2000 population census, the capital city Yanji exhibited 5.0‰, the lowest crude death rate, but outer regions such as Hunchun, Longjing and Helong exhibited the highest level crude death rates. This turns out to be true regardless of ethnicity and sex. For instance, while the death rate of Han women residing in Yanji was the lowest at 4.1‰, the death rate of Korean men residing in Hunchun and Helong was reported to be 9.3‰.

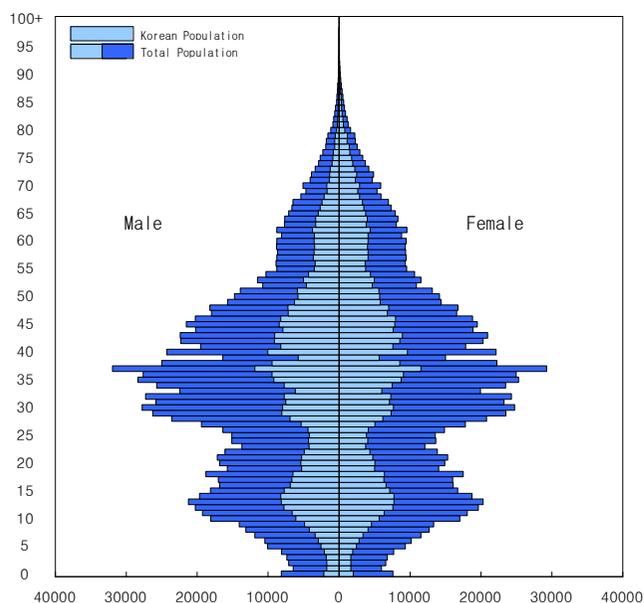
#### 2.4. Changes in the Population Structure

The age structure of the Yanbian population has experienced rapid change in the last 10 years. Figures 1 and 2 present the structures of the Korean and the total population in Yanbian by age and sex. These figures were derived from the 1990 and 2000 population censuses.

**Figure 1.** Korean and the Total Population in Yanbian, 1990



Sources: YPCO (1991: 56-71).

**Figure 2.** Korean and the Total Population in Yanbian, 2000

Sources: YPCO (2002: 273-275, 348-350).

In the 1990 population pyramid in Figure 1, the population size fluctuates severely according to age. First of all, the age group in their mid-20s to the early 30s exhibits an anomalous population size. This pattern is repeated in the age group from the mid-30s to their early 40s presented in Figure 2. Therefore, this phenomenon seems to be attributed to social conditions before and after the Great Leap Forward Movement (1958-1959) rather than to the quality of the census data.

According to Figure 1, the population declines drastically as age gets younger from the late 20s to the mid-10s. The reason for the sharp downward trend of the population appears to be associated with the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). During this period of political and social turmoil particularly the Korean minority society in China experienced a more drastic decline in fertility, which led to reduction in the proportion. In addition, Figure 1 shows that for all ethnic groups, the number of children born in Yanbian has increased gradually since 1976 after the Cultural Revolution. However, fearing the consequences of rapid population growth, the government initiated a stringent one-child policy which has effectively lowered fertility in China since the early 1980's. On the other hand, ethnic minorities were exempt from the population policy, and two or even three children have been allowed per family. However, the fertility level of Koreans has been kept lower than those of other ethnic minorities, even lower than that of Han Chinese.

This high level of fluctuation in the age distribution of the Korean population in just a 10-year period from Figure 1 to Figure 2 is an extremely rare phenomenon. The total population and the Korean population in Yanbian in Figure 2 reveal an abnormal age

structure.<sup>1</sup> Firstly, a drastic downward trend is observed in the age level lower than 14. This trend reflects the fact that the fertility of Yanbian Koreans has been reduced rapidly with the great expansion of China's market economy and the booming of Korean-Chinese diplomatic relations. This unusual age structure of the Korean and the total population in Yanbian is similar in city, township or county areas.

When comparing Figure 1 with Figure 2, it is evident that the Yanbian population has been ageing at an extremely rapid rate. This trend is more prominent for the Korean population. In the case of Yanbian Koreans, even though the proportion of those aged 65 and older accounted for just 5.1% in 1990, it increased sharply marking 7.8% in 2000. Evidently, the Korean population in Yanbian has already become an ageing society (YPCO 1991: 56-71; 2002: 348-350). The ageing trend of the Yanbian Korean population is even speedier than South Korea whose population is ageing at the fastest rate in the world.

Rapid population changes are considered as major contributing factors to societal transformation. The transition trend of the Yanbian Korean population for the last 10 years indicates that the Yanbian Korean society has entered the early stage of dissolution. If the ageing trend of the Yanbian Korean population, along with a decrease in absolute population due to low fertility, continues for a substantial period, it may lead to the weakening of its recognition as an ethnic minority society. Furthermore, the socio-demographic basis of the Yanbian Korean autonomous prefecture might be seriously threatened.

Lastly, in contrast to Hans and other ethnic minorities, the sex ratio of the Yanbian Korean population is at a relatively stable level. According to the 1990 and 2000 population censuses, except for the gradually declining sex ratio of the population aged over 50 due to sex-biased mortality, the proportions of male and female populations are well-balanced. Disproportion in the sex ratio at birth due to the preference for sons has not been serious since 1990 (Kim 1997). For reference, in 2000, the sex ratios of Yanbian Koreans aged 0 and 1 were estimated at 107.7 and 105.5 respectively, not deviating from the range of the normal sex ratio at birth. However, labor migration to other parts of China or South Korea and migrations of Korean women in China to South Korea by marriage has had a significant influence on the sex structure of the youth and adult populations. The pervasive effect of sex selectivity in labor migration and the geographic expansion of the 'marriage market' on the sex structure of the Yanbian Korean population will be discussed later in this paper.

## 2.5. Regional Differentials in Socio-demographic Structure

The Yanbian Korean autonomous prefecture is composed of 6 cities and 2 counties. Among the total population of 2.2 million, the Yanbian Korean population accounts for 36.3% totaling 0.8 million. The proportion of Yanbian Koreans has decreased by 3.2% from the 39.5% of 1990. Yanbian Koreans are populated densely in urban areas, which lie along the border of the Korean peninsula. A proportion of the 49.0% of the Yanbian Koreans numbering 393,000 reside in the cities, and the 28.9%, numbering 231,000, are in the city of

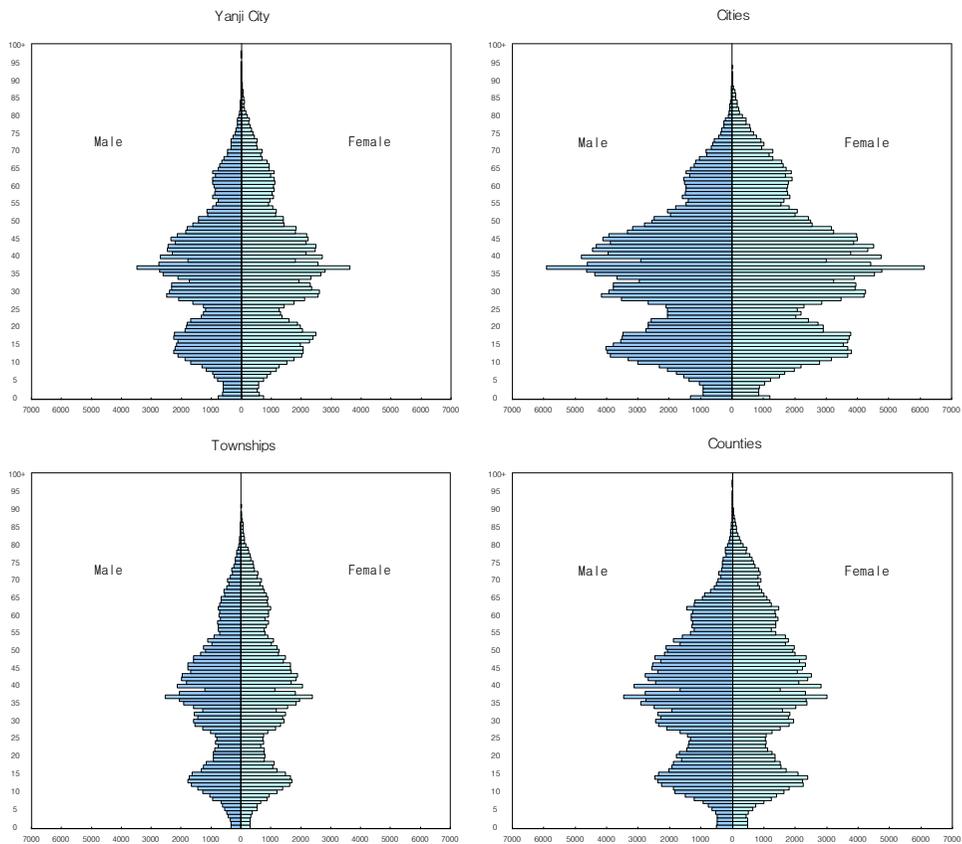
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<sup>1</sup> Recently, Kim (2003) examined the reliability and accuracy of the 2000 Chinese population census data. Based on the analysis of the sex ratio, age ratio, the Myer's index, the UN age-sex accuracy index and the survival ratio, it was concluded that misreporting or inaccurate estimates did not bring about the anomalous age structure of the Korean population in Yanbian.

Yanji. The proportions of 20.7% and 30.3% of the Yanbian Korean population dwell in the townships and counties, respectively.

Figure 3 and Table 4 present the sex and age structure of the Yanbian Korean population in Yanji, cities (including Yanji city), townships and counties. The sex ratio of the Yanbian Korean population is marked at 99.1, indicating a balance between men and women. Nevertheless, when examining the sex ratio by residence, an excess of males over females is observed in rural areas. Compared with the 95.3 sex ratio of the cities, the sex ratio of the counties is marked at 105.7. Unless labor migrations occur selectively in a particular sex group, the sex ratio is likely to decline with age increase due to sex-biased mortality. According to the sex proportion illustrated in Figure 3, in Yanji and other cities male preponderance is observed up to age 15, but beyond that age women outnumber men in the population. In contrast, although some exceptions are noted, in townships and counties men outnumber women up to in their early and mid-50s.

**Figure 3.** Yanbian Korean Population by Residence, 2000



Sources: YPCO (2002: 348-372).

**Table 4.** Sex and Age Structure of the Yanbian Korean Population by Residence, 2000

	Yanji city	Cities	Townships	Counties	Total population
Population	231,280	392,625	165,693	242,892	801,210
Sex ratio	95.5	95.3	99.2	105.7	99.1
Median age	34.3	34.8	36.8	37.1	36.0
Population aged 65+ (%)	6.6	7.0	8.6	8.5	7.8
Ageing index	42.7	43.4	54.0	57.2	49.6
Child dependency ratio	20.0	20.8	21.1	19.4	20.5
Aged dependency ratio	8.5	9.0	11.4	11.1	10.2
Total dependency ratio	28.5	29.9	32.5	30.6	30.6

Notes: Ageing index= $\{(\text{pop. aged 65 or over})/(\text{pop. aged 0-14})\} \times 100$ .

Child dependency ratio= $\{(\text{pop. aged 0-14})/(\text{pop. aged 15-64})\} \times 100$ .

Aged dependency ratio= $\{(\text{pop. aged 65 or over})/(\text{pop. aged 15-64})\} \times 100$ .

Total dependency ratio= $\{((\text{pop. aged 0-14})+(\text{pop. aged 65 or over}))/(\text{pop. aged 15-64})\} \times 100$ .

Sources: YPCO (2002: 348-372).

This kind of trend is more prominent in the counties among the population of marriageable age. For the age group in their late 20s in the counties, the female population is extremely small: all sex ratios exceed 130. This shows that a lot of young women in rural regions have migrated to more industrialized parts of China or to South Korea for work or for marriage. For example, in the case of Baijin Xiang, Longjing, the number of unmarried men amounts to 40, whereas all of the unmarried women have left the village. They are either married to single men who live in Korean agricultural villages or have left for work; the remaining unmarried women are elementary school students.

Four figures in Figure 3 illustrate basically similar shapes in the age structure. For the counties and cities including Yanji city, the proportion of the age group between their mid-20s and mid-50s is relatively higher than that for the townships. For the townships, the absolute population size of this age group or its proportion among the total population is considerably smaller. As shown in the ageing indices in Table 4, the less industrialized the region is, the higher the ageing level is. For example, the estimates of the median age and ageing index of the counties are 37.1 and 57.2 respectively; these are substantially higher than the average estimates of the cities, which are 34.8 and 43.4. The Yanji autonomous capital city indicates the lowest level in all of the indices associated with ageing. On the other hand, the levels of the child dependency ratio and the total dependency ratio are the highest in the townships. The reason is that the townships exhibit the lowest level of the economically active population and the highest proportion of the age group 0-14.

According to Table 5, the Yanbian Korean population is highly concentrated in the regions relatively close to the border of the Korean peninsula such as Longjing, Yanji and Helong. In these regions, the proportion of Koreans among the total population accounts for more than half. However, in Antu and Wangqing counties, the proportion of Koreans is relatively low. Particularly in the case of Dunhua city, the proportion is estimated at a mere

**Table 5.** Population Indices of the Yanbian Prefecture by Region, 2000-2001

Region	2000		2001						
	Population	% of Korean	CBR (%)	CDR (%)	Migration				
					In-migrants	IM (from other province)	Out-migrants	OM (from other province)	Net-migrants
Whole Prefecture	2,209,646	(36.3)	6.0	5.3	53,144	(8,381)	50,790	(8,635)	2,354
Cities									
Yanji	432,339	(53.5)	7.2	4.3	11,375	(1,798)	5,825	(1,948)	5,550
Tumen	132,368	(52.5)	4.4	6.8	3,015	( 970)	1,949	( 449)	1,066
Dunhua	480,834	( 4.2)	7.0	4.7	11,026	(1,594)	11,654	(1,938)	-628
Hunchun	211,091	(36.9)	6.0	5.7	10,091	(1,004)	9,373	( 890)	718
Longjing	261,551	(65.4)	4.1	6.7	6,535	( 672)	8,236	( 656)	-1,701
Helong	215,266	(52.3)	4.9	6.7	4,673	(1,037)	5,770	(1,037)	-1,097
Counties									
Wangqing	255,882	(28.7)	5.8	4.8	2,394	( 532)	3,693	( 773)	-1,299
Antu	220,315	(20.6)	6.4	4.8	4,035	( 774)	4,290	( 944)	-255

Sources: YPCO (2002: 51-56, 99-101); YSB (2002: 82).

4.2% as of 2000. The proportion of the Korean population has decreased in all of regions since 1990; this downward trend is most apparent in Hunchun city.

When examining the population change from 1990 to 2000 by region, the estimate of the Yanji autonomous capital city increased from 293,000 to 432,000 at the average annual rate of 37.6%. Next to Yanji, Hunchun city, in which the Hunchun Border Economic Cooperation Zone was established, exhibits the second highest rate of population growth. In contrast, in Longjing and Helong which exhibit high proportions of the Korean population, the population size has declined at a rapid rate. Especially in the case of Longjing, since the period of decline of the Korean population which began in 1993, the total population has constantly declined as well. With regard to Dunhua city where few Koreans inhabit, the population size is even greater than the capital city, Yanji. Also during the period 1990-2000 no significant change in population was found.

Table 5 shows the crude birth rates and crude death rates derived from *the 2001 Yanbian Statistical Yearbook*. One of the distinctive features is that the crude birth rates of the major cities such as Yanji, Dunhua and Hunchun are markedly high. In contrast, cities such as Longjing, Tumen and Helong, in which a large number of Koreans reside, are marked at the lowest crude birth rates. For instance, the crude birth rate of Longjing, 4.1‰, is no more than 57% of the crude birth rate of Yanji, 7.2‰. On the other hand, the regional differences of the crude death rates are relatively small compared with those of the crude birth rates. The crude death rates are low in the major cities such as Yanji and Dunhua whereas the highest crude death rates are observed in regions such as Tumen, Longjing and Helong where a large number of ethnic Koreans are residents.

Yanbian population growth due to migration amounted to 2,354 in 2001. Those from outside of Jilin province amounted to 15.8% of 53,144, which was the total number of in-migrants. The number of out-migrants to other parts of China or other countries such as South Korea numbered 8,635, which constitutes 17.0% of the total number of out-migrants. The population increase due to net-migration was the highest in Yanji city at 5,550. Also, in the case of Tumen and Hunchun where exchanges with South Korea are on rise, the in-migrants were greater than the out-migrants. On the other hand, for the rest of the regions, the out-migrants were greater than the in-migrants, resulting in a population decline due to migration. Especially in the case of Longjing city, the large number of people moving into nearby Yanji city along with low fertility and high mortality caused the greatest population decrease since 1990. However, one thing to note is that the figures of population migration in Table 5 might have been underestimated. It is suspected that there have been a substantial number of unreported or even illegal migrants.

### 3. SOCIOECONOMIC CHANGES IN THE ETHNIC KOREAN POPULATION

#### 3.1. Changes in Educational Attainment and Reduction of Ethnic Education

It is widely known that the level of educational attainment of Koreans is one of the highest among various ethnic groups including Hans. As shown in Table 6, regardless of sex, the proportion of ethnic Koreans who had an education beyond a high school or university level was significantly higher than that of the Hans. The proportion of ethnic Koreans with an elementary school level education was evidently lower than that of the Hans. During the period 1990-2000, the educational level of the population in Yanbian has increased rapidly. This tendency can be observed in both males and females in the Korean and Han populations. Especially in the case of the Korean male population, it was estimated that 10.6% had education beyond a university level as of 2000. Nevertheless, it is ascertained that the difference in level of educational attainment between Koreans and Hans, or between the male population and the female population has remained steady during the period 1990-2000.

Until recently, the high educational aspiration of Koreans has culminated in advancing ethnic education. From the early period of immigration, Koreans have founded various kinds of schools for ethnic education in their residential areas. After the establishment of the People's Republic of China, ethnic education was strongly supported under the national minority policies. Accordingly, Korean elementary schools were established in most Korean rural communities, and in the centers of Korean residential areas Korean middle schools were established. Further, as an extension of Korean ethnic schools, Yanbian University was established, forming a complete system of ethnic education.

Ethnic education through Korean schools has stimulated the collective settlement of Koreans. Moreover, it played a vital role in maintaining Korean language and culture as well as Korean identity. However, a drastic decline in fertility and residential expansion have resulted in a drop in the number of school-aged children since 1988. Owing to the decreasing number of students, many Korean schools have either been integrated or faced with the crisis of closing their doors. At first, this phenomenon was most noticeable in agricultural areas where the number of school-aged children was small, but now it has expanded gradually towards city areas. For example, an elementary school in Yanji had 2,700 students in the early 1990's, but no more than 1,489 as of 2001. A middle school located in Longjing had

**Table 6.** Educational Level of Yanbian Population by Ethnicity and Sex, 1990-2000

	Korean				Han			
	1990		2000		1990		2000	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Education								
Elementary	21.7	26.6	16.1	20.9	34.9	37.8	27.7	31.6
Middle	40.5	40.4	43.3	43.2	39.6	37.2	45.2	41.7
High	26.0	24.9	24.7	23.2	19.0	19.6	17.3	17.1
Junior College	4.4	4.9	5.3	6.3	3.2	3.3	3.9	4.8
College or more	7.4	3.2	10.6	6.5	3.4	2.0	5.9	4.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note: For population aged 6 and over.

Sources: YPCO (1991: 130-131; 2002: 614-672).

more than 400 students enrolled in the 1970's, but as of 2003 no more than 39 students are enrolled.

In 2000, the sum of the number of Korean elementary and ethnic-combined elementary schools in Yanbian amounts to 183, and the number of Korean elementary school students has reached 52,354. These figures are remarkably lower than the 256 schools and 91,048 students estimated in 1996. The number of newly-enrolled students in 2000 accounted for merely 45.2% as of 1996 (Oh 2001: 15). The declining phenomenon of Korean schools and students has also been observed in other regions of Jilin as well as in Liaoning and Heilongjiang. Based on fertility reduction and increasing migration, it is expected that the decreasing trend of Korean schools and students will continue for quite a while.

On the other hand, Korean ethnic education has some negative aspects. Since the introduction of a market economy, there have been more opportunities for higher education. As a result, a growing number of parents prefer to send their children to Han schools because generally, Korean schools are insufficiently competitive at upper-class levels. The majority of Koreans raised in Korean communities and educated in Korean schools lacks fluency in Chinese. Korean language is one of the most important factors at work behind a strong ethnic identity and cultural consistency. However, the fact cannot be ignored that the Korean language does not work advantageously to the upward mobility of Koreans in Chinese mainstream society. Koreans are limited in work and promotion as an ethnic minority.

Recently, an increasing number of Korean students are attending Han schools. Due to the rapid expansion of residential areas, direct contact with Han culture is inevitable. In addition, as many Korean schools have closed, a growing number of students have been withdrawn or sent to nearby Han schools. Most parents cannot afford the additional costs such as dormitory expenses to send children to distant Korean schools.

According to the education committee of Yanbian autonomous prefecture, 3.4% of elementary school students and 7.6% of middle school students attended Han schools in 1987. These rates have increased since the mid 1990's, reaching 11.2% and 9.6% in 2000, respectively. The increasing trend of enrollment in Han schools is more noticeable among

elementary school students than middle school students, and also Dunhua city and Antu county where Hans constitute an absolute majority of the population. Recently, a similar trend can be observed in Yanji city, which has high proportion of Koreans. Korean students enrolled in Han elementary and middle schools located in Yanji were reported at 1,891 in 1998 and over 2000 in 1991 (Kang 2001).

The closing of Korean schools has led to the unemployment of Korean faculty members, and a falling in the quality of education. During the period 1991-2000 in Yanbian the number of school staff who left Korean elementary and middle schools was 4,200, accounting for 53.1% of total faculty members. Until the mid 1990's, the average grade score and proportion of successful applicants of the Yanbian Korean middle and high school students were markedly higher than those of Han students. However in 2001, they declined to a lower level than those of Yanbian Han students and even lower than the total average of Jilin students (*Yanbian Newspaper* 09/25/2002).

Ultimately, a reduction in the utility of the Korean language and a reduction in ethnic education will severely weaken the integration of Korean society and ethnic identity. Also, intermarriage between Korean women and Han men has recently increased. In consequence, the status of the Korean minority society in China has been seriously threatened. Coping with the situation, the Yanbian Korean autonomous prefecture announced an autonomous prefecture regulation in which both Korean and Chinese languages are to be used when performing official duties (*Yanbian Newspaper* 03/28/2003). On the other hand, for the success of Koreans in Chinese society, the importance of bilingual and vocational education has been emphasized.

### **3.2. The Disintegration of the Family**

In Yanbian Korean society, since the reform and opening policies of Deng Xiao Ping in the 1970's, and especially after the 1992 establishment of diplomatic relations between South Korea and China, dispersed families have appeared in succession at an increasing rate. Many ethnic Koreans, in search of new jobs, have moved to big cities in China or to South Korea with the hope of "the Korean Dream." Accordingly, Korean communities located in three northeastern provinces including Yanbian have been dissolving rapidly (Kwon and Piao 2003). For instance, in the Huanan village of Helong city there were more than 300 households, but more than half have left the village swept by the tide of the Korean dream, and now few young women remain. Those who migrated to South Korea for employment were not limited to laborers. Farmers, housewives, teachers and even public officials have joined this movement.

Dispersed families and the separation of married couples due to labor migration have caused the destruction of families and an increase in the divorce rate. Furthermore, as increasing number of youths are not under the supervision of their parents, their deviant behaviors have been brought up as a serious social problem (Jeon 2001). According to the reports of Korean elementary schools in Longjing and Tumen city, students whose father or mother lives overseas accounted for 41.4% and 63.8% of total students, respectively (Ryang 2001). An elementary school in Yanji city reported that 71.4% of the total students either had their parents abroad or divorced (*Chosun Ilbo* 12/17/2001). Also the rate of dropouts from Korean middle schools amounted to 20%, and the rate of entering high school declined to 71% (*Yemoon Yanbian News* 05/04/2003). In short, recently Korean families are at a crisis of being dissolved due to migration, especially to South Korea.

However, not every aspect is considered negative. Until the 1980's the Yanbian region was lagging behind compared with other parts of China. Nevertheless, for the past 10 years the Korean minority society in Yanbian has grown faster than any other part of China. For example, the amount of foreign money remitted by Yanbian Koreans from abroad including South Korea was reported to have been more than 300 million dollars (US dollars) in 2001 (*Hankyoreh Newspaper* 01/26/2002). This level is higher than the financial income of Yanbian autonomous prefecture, which is 1.7 billion yuans (208 million dollars). If foreign money brought in privately is included, the total amount would increase.

### 3.3. Migration and Changes in Occupational Distribution

As the market economy was introduced in China and economic exchange with South Korea is on the rise, new waves of migration and expansion of residence are prevalent among Koreans in China. Especially, drastic social changes such as massive labor migration from rural areas to major cities of China or South Korea, migration of Korean women by marriage, and the inflow of Han people into Korean regions have led to the gradual dissolution of Korean communities.

Labor migration is characterized by step migration. Namely, people move from remote villages to the suburbs, and then from the suburbs to nearby cities, and finally from small cities to the major big cities of China or South Korea. For example, in the period 1990-2000 the Korean population decreased in Jilin province (including Yanbian), Heilongjiang province and Inner Mongolia, which have the largest Korean farming populations. In contrast, during the same period the Korean population increased substantially in the Beijing-Tianjin metropolitan region including nearby Heibei region, the coastal region of Shandong including Weihai and Qingdao, the Shanghai metropolitan region, and the Guangdong region including Shenzhen. The sharpest increase was observed in Beijing, which experienced an increase of 13,000 from 1990. This phenomenon prevails in cities where South Korean enterprises are booming. In addition, overseas migration has gradually expanded to Saipan Island, Japan and Russia besides South Korea.

On the other hand, migration by marriage occurs in situations where Korean Chinese women in China move to South Korea by marrying Korean men. According to the vital statistics of the Korea National Statistical Office (KNSO 2002), marriage between Korean man and Chinese woman was reported at 47,564 in the period 1992-2001. The absolute majority of these Chinese women were presumably ethnic Koreans residing in Liaoning, Heilongjiang and Jilin provinces including Yanbian. Ultimately, Korean women's migration by marriage has fomented the serious disorder of the ethnic Koreans' marriage market in China and resulted in an acceleration of the reduction of fertility among the Korean population in China. For reference, although the 1990 census counted the Yanbian Korean female population aged 20-29 at 82,455, it declined drastically to 48,465 in the 2000 census.

The proportion of Koreans residing in the cities of China constituted 45.8% of the total Korean population in China in 2000. Township and county population constituted 54.2%; the rural population is still more than half. However, whereas 46% of the working-age population is concentrated in cities, 74.8% of the population above the age 60 dwell in rural areas, indicating that Korean agricultural communities are in the process of ageing.

The occupational distribution of ethnic Koreans in Yanbian has undergone significant changes in the period 1990-2000. First, in the case of males, the proportion of Korean workers in the manufacturing industry has dropped by half. For females, the proportion

declined substantially from 23.5% to 9.9%. A similar trend was observed among Hans. This trend reflects that the manufacturing-oriented economic structure of the Yanbian region has been transformed into a consumption-oriented one due to the growth of economic exchange between South Korea and China. Also, the proportion of Korean females in trading and food industries increased from 11.8% to 20.3% due to the booming market economy (YPCO 1991: 136-139, 2002: 1157-1234).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study utilizes the Yanbian Korean autonomous prefecture data from the 1990 and 2000 Chinese population censuses to analyze the socio-demographic changes in Yanbian Korean minority society since the introduction of the market economy and the establishment of diplomatic relations between South Korea and China. In addition, various statistical reports produced by the Yanbian Statistical Bureau, local documents, analysis data and local investigation data were used.

The main purpose of this study is to explain the socio-demographic changes of ethnic Koreans in China. Since the partial adoption of the market economy and establishment of diplomatic relations between South Korea and China, Korean minority society has undergone drastic changes. Results from the 1990 and 2000 population censuses reveal that the absolute population size of Yanbian Korean society has been declining. The Korean population in Yanbian was estimated at 801,000 in 2000, indicating a decrease of 22,000 during the period 1990-2000. Accordingly, the proportion of the Korean population in Yanbian shows a gradually declining trend. These changes result from the drastic reduction in the fertility level.

Thus, the age structure of the Korean population shows an anomalous pattern. A rapidly declining trend of the male and female population is noted as the age declines from age 14. For example, in 2000 the Korean population at age 1 was reported at merely 3,382, which comprises 22.7% of the population at age 15. The irregular pattern of the age structure of the Korean population indicates that Korean communities in China have undergone a process of continuous adaptation in fertility, migration, and marriage to the changing socioeconomic environment.

Another distinctive feature of the Yanbian Korean population is that population ageing is underway at a rapid rate. According to the various age-related indices, the ageing trend of the Yanbian Korean population has been even faster than that of the South Korean population, the fastest ageing in the world.

For quite a while, Yanbian Korean society will undergo socio-demographic changes such as low fertility, a reduction in the absolute population size, and a fast population ageing. It is also expected that labor migration, the expansion of the marriage market and residential areas and changes in occupational distribution will persist over the coming decades. In addition, social integration and cultural identity are in the process of weakening due to the decline in Korean ethnic education. If the current state continues, the proportion of the Yanbian Korean population will decline to below 25% in 2020. As a consequence, it is acknowledged that the socio-demographic basis of the Yanbian autonomous prefecture will be seriously threatened.

Nevertheless, these socio-demographic changes in the Yanbian Korean population do not imply the dissolution of all Korean minority communities in China. Recently, in some cities

and suburbs, ethnic Koreans concentrated communities (collective residence villages) have been formed. Xita and Korea Town in Shenyang, Liaoning province, are representative cases. Native ethnic Koreans, returning migrant workers, workers in service industries, intellectuals, and South Koreans inhabit these urban concentrated communities. Other concentrated communities have been developed in coastal cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Qingdao where many South Korean companies are located. These concentrated communities are located in the cities or suburban areas, which provide employment, a cultural life, and educational facilities. On the other hand, concentrated communities are constructed by transforming farm lands into forestry, orchards, nurseries, or bases for the manufacturing and service industries and also by developing apartment complexes, cultural and amusement facilities, parks, or folk villages.

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