

## THE COMPARATIVE STUDY OF INHERITANCE AMONG KOREAN AMERICANS AND KOREANS

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*The purpose of this paper is to reveal whether migration plays a role in modifying Korean immigrants' heirship practices. While heirship practices in Korea are lineal, traditional, and unequal, based on birth order and gender, American heirship practices are horizontal, liberal, and equal. Migration to the U. S. involves several aspects: social contact with a different culture, living in a different material environment, and selectivity of migrants. These factors may lead Korean immigrants to depart from traditional Korean inheritance practices. However, there are also some aspects which will lead Korean immigrants to preserve their traditional inheritance system.*

*The research design involves comparing Korean immigrants and non-immigrant Koreans. In the immigrant sample, 182 Korean Americans over age 40 living in the Washington metropolitan area were interviewed through mail questionnaires. As counterparts in Korea, 159 residents of an industrialized small city (Changsungpo City) were interviewed. It was found that migration to the U. S. has contradictory effects on Korean immigrants' attitude toward the traditional Korean inheritance system. Korean immigrants' disinclination for unequal distribution among children is much stronger than non-immigrants'. However, Korean immigrants are more likely to prefer the tradition of extensive financial support to children than are non-immigrants.*

### INTRODUCTION

The study of inheritance is important for two reasons. First, the study of heirship patterns illuminates familial structure—the network of family members bound by reciprocal rights and obligations. The distribution of decedent's assets to surviving family members reveals the position of heirs in the family and the boundaries of the familial group (Goody 1976). However, as Rosenfeld (1979, p. 30) argues, the American family is no longer structured enough to control inheritance. As a result, current heirship practices cover a wide range of motivations, from gratitude for services that potential heirs performed at the end of decedent's life to the needs of potential heirs (Sussman *et al.* 1970; Fellows *et al.* 1978; Rosenfeld 1979). In short, the American inheritance pattern has become highly variable and reflects the changing resources as well as the changing loyalties of family members. In contrast, the family in Korean society is still sufficiently structured to control inheritance.

Thus, inheritance in Korea continues to be affected by ascriptive statuses in the family, such as birth order, gender, and matrimonial status.

Secondly, inheritance has significant effects on the reproduction of existing inequalities (Engels 1972). Even in industrial societies, the association between father's wealth and son's wealth is very high (Brittain 1978). At the opposite end, poverty continues to breed poverty.

There are two kinds of inheritance: the transfer of status and the transfer of estate. Status inheritance involves the succession of family headship. In Ancient Rome, as in the other traditional societies, the main function of inheritance was to select a new family representative rather than to transfer the familial estate across generations (Maine 1881). Status inheritance is the most important issue in family life, because positions within the family structure determine the individual's life chances and familial relations.

Estate inheritance involves material transfers across generations. The two key issues here are the timing of transfers and the distribution of the estate. The timing of transfers refers to the date at which decedents hand over their assets to heirs and reveals the certainty of the power held by testators. Transfers of the estate to lineal descendants long before death do not mean that testators are likely to suffer from reduced material resources. Rather, it means that their position within the family structure is strong enough to dispense of their own assets. Therefore, the earlier the transfer, the more certain is the power of decedents over their heirs. The distribution of the estate refers to how the inheritor's estate is distributed to the eligible heirs. The issue here is to determine whether bequests are equal or unequal as a function of the heirs' characteristics.

Family headship is still a significant status in Korean society since family heads are responsible for other family members (especially old parents) and ancestor worship. Due to these kinds of duties toward family heads, those who succeed family headship can claim a larger portion in estate inheritance than non-family heads.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, the increasing uncertainty of the American family's structure has lowered dramatically the importance of status inheritance (Schneider 1980). Furthermore, in contrast to the Korean system of inheritance, which is lineal (the primary heir is the lineal descendant), traditional (intestacy is more frequent than testacy; bequests to non-family members is also exceptional) and unequal within intestacy (discrimination against young sons and daughters) (Choe 1982; Lee 1990; Han 1984; Asan Social

<sup>1</sup>The 1989 Reform of Civil Law eliminated the right of those who succeed family headship (usually the eldest son) to receive a larger share than non-family heads in estate inheritance. However, family headship itself was not eliminated; thus, as long as family headship exists, the traditional custom of giving a larger share to the family head will persist for a long while.

Welfare Foundation 1986),<sup>2</sup> the American model is horizontal, liberal, and equal within intestacy (Sussman *et al.* 1970; Glucksman 1976; Fellows *et al.* 1978). The American system of inheritance concerns only the transfers of the estate across generations. In contrast, Korean inheritance involves the transfer of both the status and the estate. In the American case, individuals have great freedom, but in the Korean case, they are bound by tradition in many respects.

The purpose of this research is to ascertain whether immigration to the United States causes Koreans to abandon the inheritance model prevailing in their country of origin. Data were collected in Korea as well as in America, and the inheritance strategies of immigrant Koreans were compared with those of non-immigrant Koreans.

## SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF KOREAN IMMIGRANTS AND CHANGE OF THEIR HEIRSHIP STRATEGIES

This section describes the social characteristics of Korean immigrants and discusses general theories about the assimilation of immigrants in the U.S.

### *Social Characteristics of Korean Immigrants*

Four social characteristics of Korean immigrants can be highlighted namely, status inconsistency, preservation of familial bonds, geographic concentration in urban areas, and the short history of Korean immigration.

#### 1. Status Inconsistency of Korean Immigrants

Many Korean immigrants may feel status inconsistency between their educational achievement and occupational prestige (Hurh and Kim 1984a, p. 58; Hurh *et al.* 1978). According to the 1980 U.S. Census, 54% of Korean Americans over age 34 have a college degree, compared to only 17% of the overall American population.<sup>3</sup> Despite this remarkable gap in educational achievement, occupational status does not differ very much between the two groups. For instance, 47% of Korean Americans and 44% of Americans in general occupied the following occupational categories: services, precision production,

<sup>2</sup>The 1989 Reform of Civil Law also eliminated inequality between married daughters and other children. Under the old Civil Law, only 25% of other children's share was given to married daughters. Despite this reform, the traditional custom of discriminating against married daughters will remain for a long time.

<sup>3</sup>Persons in their late twenties and early thirties are excluded, since a large portion of this age group among Korean Americans are university students who have come to the U.S. only for studying. Inclusion of this age group will inflate Korean Americans' educational achievement. Therefore, comparison was restricted to the persons of over 34 years old.

craft and repair, operators, fabricators, and labors (Bureau of Census 1987a, 1987b). Educated Korean immigrants may not be able to hold professional jobs in the U.S. because of language deficiency and the lack of cultural specific skills.

In addition to the inconsistency between educational and occupational status, a considerable number of Korean immigrants experience downward occupational mobility after migration. Hurh *et al.* (1978, p. 20) showed that while 65% of Korean immigrants had white collar jobs before migration, only 37% remained in these occupational categories after migration. Alternatively, the percentage of blue collar workers rose from 1% before migration to 31% after migration.

Even though Korean immigrants feel generally satisfied with their material life, most of them have experienced downward occupational mobility. Thus even though Korean immigrants are wealthier than their relatives in Korea, their willingness to stay and adopt an American life style may be limited by low occupational opportunities.

## 2. Preservation of Familial Bonds

Korean immigrants may depend more strongly upon their relatives in the U.S. than would be the case if they remained in Korea. As strangers in the new nation, help from relatives is likely to be crucial in getting valuable information about jobs, education, housing, etc.<sup>4</sup> It is also well known that Korean immigrants often run businesses with their family members and relatives (Min 1984). This kind of family-based life style would promote the traditional mode of inheritance, featuring a strong familial bond.

## 3. Geographic Concentration in Urban Areas

The third characteristic of Korean immigrants concerns their geographical distribution. Instead of living evenly across the nation, Korean immigrants concentrate in urban areas. According to the 1980 U.S. Census, 89% of Korean Americans live in SMSAs (Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas), compared to 64% of the American population in general. Availability of various job opportunities in big cities may be one reason for the concentration of Korean immigrants in SMSAs. Indeed, ethnic networks are better developed in urban than in rural areas, due to the high concentration of ethnic minorities in cities (Gans 1962). Thus, enjoying both Korean neighbors

<sup>4</sup>The crucial role of the family network for newly arrived immigrants' adaptation in the U.S. is also applicable to other ethnic groups. A study of French-Canadian immigrants during the early 20th century found that they were heavily dependent upon the family network for finding jobs and solving problems caused by immigration to a new urban area (Hareven 1978).

and professional services rendered by Koreans would be another and more important reason for their preference for big cities. If Korean immigrants develop a strong ethnic network in cities and heavily depend upon this ethnic network, their cultural assimilation will be decelerated and the traditional mode of inheritance will persist.

#### 4. Short History of Korean Immigration

Another feature of Korean immigrants is that most of them are recent immigrants. According to 1986 *Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service*, the number of Korean immigrants admitted from 1971 to 1986 (476,856) amounts to 92% of total Korean immigrants (508,613). Thus, most adult Korean Americans are first generation immigrants. Due to the lack of long exposure to American culture, they still preserve a great deal of tradition concerning inheritance.

##### *Assimilation of Immigrants in the U.S.*

The assimilation of racial and ethnic groups was first studied by Park and his colleagues (Park and Burgess 1969; Gordon 1964). However, their so-called melting pot theory was criticized as ethnocentric, because it assumed that racial and ethnic distinctions diminish gradually through assimilation and that ethnic minorities' cultures will be incorporated into the mainstream American culture (Hirschman 1983).

Yinger (1981) suggests that in the assimilation process some ethnic identity is maintained. Thus, host and origin culture are additive rather than substitutive. Immigrants can fulfill their primary group needs by remaining strongly attached to their ethnic community. Furthermore, ethnic identity may serve as a means to provide immigrants with valuable information about the new environment, to promote their status, and sometimes as a means of protection from the host society's structural barriers or discriminating practices. As long as ethnic attachment serves these functions, immigrants will seek to retain their ethnic identity. Korean immigrants are no exception to this general trend. The assimilation of Korean Americans was labelled 'adhesive sociocultural adaptation' by Hurh and Kim (1984b). Thus, many Korean immigrants are still willing to retain traditional Korean inheritance practices.

Immigrants are unique in that they are exposed to a different culture, live in a different material environment, and represent a select group in their country of origin. These three characteristics of migrants should modify their familial arrangements and, hence, their heirship practices. However, the effects of these three factors on heirship practices should vary. Exposure to American culture and over-representation of the highly educated and mod-

ernized among Korean immigrants are factors leading to Korean immigrants' departure from traditional inheritance practices.

However, the effect of a new material environment is somewhat complicated. The amount and type of assets that Korean Americans accumulate in the U.S. may differ from those of Koreans back home. Korean Americans may enjoy higher incomes than native Koreans; therefore, they may accumulate greater wealth than their counterparts in Korea, which may enable them to widen the range of eligible heirs and provide their adult children with material help for an extended period. In addition to the amount of wealth, the forms of wealth may also differ from those accumulated in Korea. Korean Americans should own movable assets, such as stocks or bonds, to a larger extent than native Koreans. This should make it easier for Korean Americans to divide their estate among family members. Therefore, Korean immigrants are more likely to prefer equal distribution among children than are non-immigrant Koreans. Material conditions of Korean Americans facilitate financial support to children and equal distribution among children.

## HYPOTHESES

Narrowly defined inheritance means estate transfer at the time of the ancestor's death. However, a proper analysis of material transfers among family members should examine estate transfers during the decedent's life as well as after his (her) death, since the share of eligible heirs at an ancestor's death is decided after taking into account what they had received from their own ancestors. For instance, the costs for children's education and marriage could be considered as parts of inheritance. Therefore the issues involved in the study of heirship strategy are very wide.

Specific issues concerning heirship strategy are testacy versus intestacy, unequal versus equal distribution between children, conjugal versus parent-child relation, timing of transfers, financial support versus independence of adult children and parents, etc. Among these several issues, three matters will be compared with respect to Korean immigrants and non-immigrant Koreans in this research: inequality versus equality between children, conjugal versus parent-child relation, and financial support versus independence between adult children and parents.

### *Inequality versus Equality between Children*

The traditional pattern of Korean inheritance gives an advantage to the first born son compared to the younger sons, to sons compared to daughters, and to unmarried daughters compared to married daughters. Discrimination against the younger sons and daughters occurs because the first born son is

the successor in family headship. Family headship entails duties as well as rights for family affairs. The family head has rights to control other family members; however, he also has duties for ancestor worship and responsibility for younger siblings and old parents. Therefore, those who succeed in family headship (normally the first born son) have the right to require a larger share from their ancestor's estate than do younger siblings or daughters. Married daughters are excluded in inheritance, since the Korean patrilineal family structure regards a married daughter as a member of her husband's family, not as a member of her own father's family. Choe's study of rural areas in Korea shows that in 43% of cases, the first born son inherits all of the parent's real estate, even when younger sons exist (1970, p. 162). In contrast, inequality based on gender and birth order is very rare in America. The main reason for the unequal distribution among surviving adult children in the U.S. is personal, based on affection or on the need to reward those children who take care of old parents.

The exposure to egalitarian American inheritance practices may lead to the abandonment of the Korean tradition of unequal distribution among children. In addition, the preservation of inequality based on gender and birth order does not seem to benefit their children, who have to survive in the new environment. Therefore, it can be hypothesized that Korean immigrants are less likely to prefer unequal distribution among children than are Koreans in Korea.

#### *Financial Support versus Independence of Adult Children and Parents*

The strong bond between parents and children in the Korean family is clearly reflected in mutual financial support between adult children and parents. Parents are willing to support their children financially even after children's marriage, and expect to depend upon their children in old age. Thus, a large portion of Korean parents' estate is usually handed over to their children even before death. Choe's (1970, p. 143) research on Korean rural families showed that in 38% of the cases, the distribution of assets to surviving family members was decided before the death of decedents and ownership was transferred at the same time. Transfers to lineal descendants before death do not mean that testators suffer from reduced material resources. Rather, their position in the family structure is strong enough for them to dispense of the material assets needed for their welfare. Thus, an early transfer may correspond to a form of gerontocracy.

In contrast, the American family structure is characterized by a weak bond between adult children and parents concerning financial matters. Elderly Americans keep their own assets until death, because they have to support

themselves and retain power over lineal kin (Thurow 1975; Chester 1982). Sussman *et al.* (1979, p. 178) found that even though inter-generational transfers before death can save administrative costs and taxes, the elderly usually keep their assets until they die, in order to maintain power over surviving family members. Well-developed social security and pension systems in American society may also play a role in diminishing the tendency for the elderly and adult children to depend upon each other in financial matters. Therefore, it can be hypothesized that Korean immigrants are more likely to prefer financial independence of adult children and parents than are non-immigrant Koreans, due to the influence of American culture and the well-developed American social security system.

### *Conjugal versus Parent-Child Relation*

The traditional Korean inheritance system excludes wives, since the eldest son succeeds in family headship and is responsible for supporting the widow as well as the younger siblings. The horizontal axis in the traditional Korean family structure is secondary in significance, compared to the vertical axis. Choe's (1970, p. 166) study of Korean rural villages shows that cases in which the wife shares the inheritance with sons are very rare.

Conversely, the core of American family structure is the conjugal relationship, not the parent-child relationship. Thus, the primary heir of American inheritance is the wife. In a hypothetical situation in which a spouse, a minor son, and a minor daughter are coheirs, more than half (58.5%) of Americans wished to give all their assets to their spouse (Fellows *et al.* 1978, p. 359). It is hypothesized that Korean Americans are less likely to prefer the traditional inheritance practices of excluding wives than are non-immigrant Koreans.

## METHOD

### *Selection of Sample*

This research uses two samples; one is a sample of Korean immigrants and the other a sample of non-immigrant Koreans. The population for the Korean immigrant sample is persons who are over forty years old living in Washington metropolitan area. The reason for selecting old respondents is that young persons might not have thought about an heirship strategy or have a strategy that is not clearly defined.

In selecting the sample of Korean immigrants, all persons whose family name is Korean were picked from the Washington metropolitan phone directory. Surnames in the Korean community phone directory serve as the refer-



ence for identifying Korean family names from the phone directory.<sup>5</sup> From the list of these persons, eligible respondents who agreed to participate were chosen by telephoning them at systematic intervals. Data were then collected through mail questionnaires during the summer of 1988. All respondents except one received Korean language questionnaires. Initially, 173 persons (63%) completed the questionnaires, and sending a second copy yielded another 14 respondents. From 187 questionnaires collected, 5 were eliminated because the respondents were under 40 years old.

The population for the non-immigrant Korean sample includes residents of Changsungpo City and its vicinity. Changsungpo is a small city with a population of about fifty thousand. However, one of the biggest shipyards in Korea is located there, so most of the residents may have the social characteristics of an industrialized urban population.

The non-immigrant sample was selected via a two stage quota sampling method. At the first stage, 60 administrative districts were selected, and 10 respondents were taken from each district, with allowances made for the gender and age distribution of the city. Data were collected during September, 1990 through personal interviews. Among 489 cases obtained from a sampling frame of 600 cases, the analysis will be restricted to respondents (159 cases) over 40 years old, in order to ensure comparability with the Korean immigrant sample.

### *Operationalization of Concepts<sup>6</sup>*

#### 1. Inequality versus Equality between Children

Korean immigrants were asked how they would distribute their estate in

<sup>5</sup>The Washington metropolitan Korean community phone directory could not be used directly because it did not include all Korean immigrants, especially those who immigrated or moved recently. The regular American phone directory has limitations also since it does not include those who do not have a phone or who have an unlisted phone number.

<sup>6</sup>This paper will compare the respondents' intentions about heirship strategy rather than actual inheritance behaviors. It may be preferable to examine actual behaviors insofar as what people say is not always consistent with what they actually do. However, it is not true that actual practices are the only worthwhile subject to study. While intentions mainly represent the ideology of inheritance (such as the importance attached to the heir's position in the family structure or to reciprocity between generations), actual heirship is determined by both ideology and situational constraints (such as the economic conditions of heirs and testators, the personal relationship of decedents to survivors, and the welfare of the society at large). For instance, the study of two villages in an Alpine valley found that, despite the prevailing model of partibility (equal distribution between children), testators did not split the estate when the size of their land was too small. Alternatively, even though primogeniture prevailed, this model could not be actualized when a small age difference between the designated heir (normally the eldest son) and the testator caused the eldest son to leave home due to an intolerably long waiting period before the testator's retirement and death (Cole and Wolf 1974). Therefore, it is necessary to study intention and practice of inheritance separately because the two may not move in the same direction.

the two following hypothetical situations: between three married sons, and between one married son, one unmarried son, one married daughter, and one unmarried daughter. Responses to the former situation should reveal discrimination against younger sons, while responses to the latter should reveal discrimination against daughters.

In the non-immigrant Korean sample, two questions were asked. One was 'do you agree or disagree with the statement that the eldest son should receive a larger share than younger sons?' The other was 'do you agree or disagree with the statement that the unmarried son should receive a larger share than the unmarried daughter?'

## 2. Financial Support versus Independence of Adult Children and Parents

Both immigrants and non-immigrants were asked: "how long will you provide your children with material support?"

## 3. Conjugal versus Parent-Child Relation

The importance of the conjugal versus the parent-child relation was measured by asking Korean immigrant respondents, 'how would you distribute your estate if your spouse and one married son were the only coheirs?' Non-immigrant Koreans were asked whether they agree or disagree with the statement that wives should inherit a larger share than the children. Though these two questions are not exactly the same, both are reasonable measures to detect the relative portion of the spouse's share compared with that of the children.<sup>7</sup>

# RESULTS

## *Inequality versus Equality between Children*

Table 1 shows that one third (33%) of the immigrant Koreans prefer the eldest son to younger sons in the distribution of inheritance. The portion of Korean Americans favoring the primogeniture system seems remarkable, considering their exposure to the egalitarian ideology of Americans inheritance practices. However, compared with the non-immigrant Korean sample, the figure is only about half of the percentage of non-immigrant Koreans. Almost two-thirds (64%) of the non-immigrant Korean respondents favor the eldest son to the younger sons in inheritance.

<sup>7</sup>One crucial difference between these two measures is that while immigrants were asked to compare spouse and son, non-immigrants were asked to compare wife and son. In the case of male respondents, spouse is synonymous with wife; therefore, the comparison should be relevant. Thus the analysis will be restricted to male respondents in this case.

**TABLE 1.** COMPARISON OF KOREAN IMMIGRANTS AND NON-IMMIGRANT KOREANS REGARDING DISCRIMINATION AGAINST YOUNGER SONS.

	Immigrants			Non-immigrants		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Equal distribution between the eldest son and younger sons	72(63.7%)	24(77.4%)	96(66.7%)	33(38.4%)	22(32.4%)	55(35.7%)
Favoring the eldest son to younger sons	41(36.3%)	7(22.6%)	48(33.3%)	53(61.6%)	46(67.6%)	99(64.3%)
Total	113(100%)	31(100%)	144(100%)	86(100%)	68(100%)	154(100%)

**TABLE 2.** EFFECT OF MIGRATION ON DISCRIMINATION AGAINST YOUNGER SONS, CONTROLLING FOR GENDER, AGE, AND EDUCATION.(N = 292)<sup>1</sup>

Effects	r	Beta
Migration <sup>2</sup>	-.28***	-.19*
Gender	.04	-.05
Age	.02	.03
Education	-.31***	-.22***
R <sup>2</sup>	.12	

\* &lt; .05 \*\* &lt; .01 \*\*\* &lt; .001.

<sup>1</sup>A number of total cases varies across tables due to missing cases.<sup>2</sup>Migration is dummy variable; '0' non-immigrants, '1' immigrants.

A direct comparison between the Korean immigrant and non-immigrant samples should be done cautiously, since the social characteristics of these two groups differ markedly. For instance, 20.8% of the immigrants have a college degree, compared to only 7.3% of the non-immigrants. The relatively high educational achievement of respondents in the immigrant sample may be a factor in the immigrants' departure from the primogeniture system. This departure may be caused not only by migration experience but also by modernity acquired through higher education. Therefore, in comparing the inheritance practices of these two groups, it is necessary to control for level of education.

Regression analysis in Table 2 shows that the effect of migration experience

**TABLE 3. COMPARISON OF KOREAN IMMIGRANTS AND NON-IMMIGRANT KOREANS REGARDING DISCRIMINATION AGAINST DAUGHTERS.**

	Immigrants			Non-immigrants		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Equal distribution between sons and daughters	72(71.3%)	24(82.8%)	96(73.8%)	35(40.7%)	30(44.8%)	65(42.5%)
Favoring sons to daughters	29(28.7%)	5(17.2%)	34(26.2%)	51(59.3%)	37(55.2%)	88(57.5%)
Total	101(100%)	29(100%)	130(100%)	86(100%)	67(100%)	153(100%)

**TABLE 4. EFFECT OF MIGRATION ON DISCRIMINATION AGAINST DAUGHTERS, CONTROLLING FOR GENDER, AGE, AND EDUCATION.**

(N = 278)

Effects	r	Beta
Migration <sup>1</sup>	-.28***	-.17*
Gender	.04	-.10
Age	.02	.06
Education	-.31***	-.30***
R <sup>2</sup>	.12	

\* &lt; .05 \*\* &lt; .01 \*\*\* &lt; .001.

<sup>1</sup>Migration is dummy variable; '0' non-immigrants, '1' immigrants.

on the attitude toward primogeniture system, controlling for age and the level of education is significant at the .05 level. Therefore, it can be said that Korean immigrants are less likely to favor the primogeniture system than non-immigrant Koreans, partly as a result of their migration experience to the U.S.

With regard to discrimination against daughters, the same pattern was found. The percentage (26.2%) of those in the immigrant sample favoring sons to daughters in inheritance is less than half of the comparable percentage of those in the non-immigrant Korean sample (See Table 3). Regression analysis also shows that, even controlling for age and education, migration experience is still a significant factor in Korean immigrants' departure from the traditional inheritance pattern of discriminating against daughters (See Table 4). In short, migration experience is an important factor in Koreans'

departing from inequality based on gender and age in inheritance.

In addition to the effect of migration experience, the level of education also turned out to be an important factor in the departure from inequality between children (See regression coefficients for education in Table 2 and 4). Furthermore, the coefficient for level of education is bigger than that for migration experience, suggesting that modernity acquired through education is a more important factor than migration experience itself in disfavoring the Korean tradition of inheritance of discriminating against daughters and younger sons.

There are also little gender differences in the attitude toward discrimination against younger sons and daughters in inheritance. Women's objection to sexism in inheritance was stronger than men's objection.<sup>8</sup> Women's strong attachment to an egalitarian ideology in inheritance seems reasonable, since they are victims of gender-based inequality in inheritance. However, there was only a slight gender difference concerning primogeniture. In the non-immigrant sample, female respondents are even slightly more prone to favor primogeniture system than are male respondents (67.6% versus 61.6%). Despite the fact that primogeniture system is part of the traditional patrilineal family structure, women's negative feeling toward primogeniture was not much greater than men's objection to this practices.

#### *Financial Support versus Independence of Adult Children and Parents*

Table 5 shows that Korean immigrants' willingness to provide financial help to their adult children was stronger than that of non-immigrant Koreans. 40.6% of Korean immigrants wanted to provide their adult children with material help even after marriage, compared to only 7.9% of non-immigrants. Regression analysis controlling for age and education shows the same pattern (See Table 6). This result is contrary to the hypothesis that Korean American are more likely to favor the financial independence of adult children from parents than are non-immigrants, due to the former's exposure to Americans culture.

While Korean immigrants are exposed to the American belief of valuing financial independence of adult children from parents, they may also have deep concerns about their children's future in a new environment. Therefore, Korean immigrants wish to provide their children with material help for a longer period than non-immigrants. This result is consistent with Hareven's (1978) finding that support from the familial network is crucial for the adaptation of newly arrived immigrants in the U.S.

<sup>8</sup>However, the gender difference in this matter was not big enough to remain statistically significant after controlling for the effects of other independent variables in the regression model.

**TABLE 5. COMPARISON OF KOREAN IMMIGRANTS AND NON-IMMIGRANT KOREANS REGARDING FINANCIAL SUPPORT VERSUS INDEPENDENCE OF ADULT CHILDREN AND PARENTS.**

	Immigrants			Non-immigrants		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Provide financial support to the children						
until they finish their education	42(31.8%)	12(31.6%)	54(31.8%)	22(26.2%)	17(25.0%)	39(25.7%)
until they find a stable job	29(22.0%)	7(18.4%)	36(21.2%)	46(54.8%)	30(44.1%)	76(50.0%)
until they get married	8 (6.1%)	3 (7.9%)	11 (6.5%)	14(16.7%)	11(16.2%)	25(16.4%)
even after their marriage	53(40.2%)	16(42.1%)	69(40.6%)	2 (2.4%)	10(14.7%)	12 (7.9%)
Total	132(100%)	38(100%)	170(100%)	84(100%)	68(100%)	152(100%)

**TABLE 6. EFFECT OF MIGRATION ON FINANCIAL SUPPORT BETWEEN ADULT CHILDREN AND PARENTS CONTROLLING FOR GENDER, AGE, AND EDUCATION.**

(N = 317)

Effects	r	Beta
Migration <sup>1</sup>	.16**	.27***
Gender	.06	.06
Age	.05	.05
Education	.02	-.11
R <sup>2</sup>	.06	

\* &lt; .05 \*\* &lt; .01 \*\*\* &lt; .001.

<sup>1</sup>Migration is dummy variable; '0' non-immigrants, '1' immigrants.

Another reason for Korean immigrants' willingness to support their adult children for a longer period than non-immigrants may be their relative economic prosperity. Cho (1989, p. 121) found that amount of wealth is positively related to the willingness to provide financial help to adult children for an extended period. Therefore, the large wealth that Korean immigrants have accumulated in the U.S. enables them to be generous toward their children in

**TABLE 7. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ANTICIPATED SOURCE OF SUPPORT IN OLD AGE AND CUT-OFF POINT FOR PROVIDING MATERIAL HELP TO ONE'S CHILDREN.<sup>1</sup>**

How long will you provide your children with material support?

How to support one's old age	Until education completed	Until job found	Until marriage	After marriage	Total
By myself	44(80.0%)	26(70.3%)	9(81.8%)	50(72.5%)	129(75.0%)
Asking help to children in need	11(20.0%)	11(29.7%)	2(18.2%)	19(27.5%)	43(25.0%)
Total	55(100.0%)	37(100.0%)	11(100.0%)	69(100.0%)	172(100.0%)

<sup>1</sup>This table is based on Korean immigrant sample only.**TABLE 8. COMPARISON BETWEEN MALE KOREAN IMMIGRANTS AND MALE NON-IMMIGRANT KOREANS REGARDING SIZE OF SPOUSE'S SHARE VERSUS CHILDREN'S SHARE.**

	Korean Immigrants	Non-immigrants
Giving more to spouse than to children	70 (59.8%)	57 (66.3%)
Giving less or equal to spouse than to children	47 (40.2%)	29 (33.7%)
Total	117(100.0%)	86(100.0%)

financial matters.

However, Korean immigrants' willingness to provide adult children with financial assistance should not be interpreted as their expectation to depend upon their adult children during old age. A majority (72.5%) of those who wished to provide financial help to their married children said that they would remain independent in old age (see Table 7). This finding suggests that parents' deep concerns for their children's future in a new world is a stronger motive for financial assistance than is expectation for reciprocal supports.

### *Conjugal versus Parent-Child Relation*

According to Table 8, there is no significant difference between the Korean immigrant sample and the non-immigrant Korean sample regarding the relative importance placed on conjugal versus parent-child relations in inheritance. About 60% of Korean immigrants and 66% of non-immigrant Koreans wanted to bequeath a larger share to their spouse than to their children. Regression analysis, controlling for age and education, shows no significant difference between the two samples (see Table 9). This finding is inconsistent

TABLE 9 EFFECT OF MIGRATION ON SPOUSE'S SHARE COMPARED TO CHILDREN'S SHARE CONTROLLING FOR AGE, AND EDUCATION. (N = 201)<sup>1</sup>

Effects	r	Beta
Migration <sup>2</sup>	-.11	-.09
Age	-.01	.07
Education	-.06	.02
R <sup>2</sup>	.01	

\* < .05 \*\* < .01 \*\*\* < .001.

<sup>1</sup>This analysis is based on male respondents only.

<sup>2</sup>Migration is dummy variable; '0' non-immigrants, '1' immigrants.

with the hypothesis that the conjugal relationship will be more greatly valued by immigrants than by non-immigrants, due to the former's exposure to the American practice of giving priority to the conjugal relation over the parent-child relation. The explanation for immigrants' extensive financial support of their children may also account for this finding. The relative size of the children's share does not diminish even though Koreans have migrated to America, because of their deep concerns about the welfare of children.

## CONCLUSION

Migration to the U.S. has resulted in new experiences for Korean immigrants, and some of these experiences may cause Korean Americans to depart from traditional Korean inheritance practices. However, some aspects of the migration experience preserve traditional inheritance practices.

The American inheritance system is horizontal (the primary heir is the spouse), liberal (testacy is more frequent than intestacy; bequest to non-family members is relatively frequent; and decedents keep their assets until the time of death), and equal (discrimination against younger sons and daughters is rare) in contrast with the vertical, traditional, and unequal Korean mode of inheritance. While the majority of Koreans in Korea still prefer an estate of unmovable assets such as a house and land, over movable assets, a large part of Korean immigrants' estates may include movable assets, such as stocks and bonds. Therefore, equal distribution among heirs is more easily accomplished among Korean immigrants, due to their easily divisible assets. Moreover, Korean immigrants are a select group in that their educational level is above the average for Koreans. Thus, immigrants are more prone to discard the traditional inheritance system because of modernity acquired



through formal education.

However, Korean immigrants also have characteristics which will lead them to preserve the traditional Korean inheritance system. They may have a strong need for a familial network to adapt to a strange, sometimes, hostile environment. And most of Korean Americans are recent immigrants. Their structural assimilation into American society is also limited by the inconsistency between their relatively low occupational status and their relatively high educational status. Due to these factors, Korean immigrants may be reluctant to give up the traditional way of life. Furthermore, Korean immigrants' relatively large wealth compared to their counterparts in Korea also enables them to easily maintain a strong parent-child bond which includes extensive material support to their adult children. In short, migration to the U.S. both strengthens and weakens the traditional Korean system of inheritance.

This research confirmed contradictory effects inherent in migration experience. Korean immigrants are *less* likely to preserve the traditional inheritance system of primogeniture and unequal distribution between sons and daughters than are non-immigrant Koreans. But they are *more* likely to provide extensive material support to their children than are non-immigrant Koreans.

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