

KOREANS IN NZ: NEGOTIATING VALUES IN A TRANSNATIONAL SOCIAL FIELD

BON-GIU KOO

*Gyeonggi Institute of Research and Policy Development
for Migrants' Human Rights in South Korea*

Introduction

My elder daughter is planning to go to Korea after graduating from university. She used to say to me that she would find a job in Korea and would not live here...New Zealand did not seem right for her because she is a typical Korean in her way of thinking. [If I have to define it] can I call it '*jeong* (情)'? (Laugh) But for her, kids in New Zealand are so individualistic that she could not cope with it.

This is a quote from one of my life history interviews with 62 Korean immigrants in New Zealand. I cited this excerpt because it reveals two important points concerning the topic that I will address in this article. Firstly, unlike conventional thought regarding value conflict between immigrants and the host people, where immigrants were supposed to change their values to fit into the new culture, this young woman who came to New Zealand at 15 seems to contend with 'kids in New Zealand' for her value on interpersonal relationships based on a unique Korean sentiment, *jōng*¹ according to her mother. Secondly, she could choose where to work or live: Korea or New Zealand.

Immigration in the past was basically considered to be movement between two different societies which were clearly demarcated by national borders. Immigrants had to change their life-styles, and even be denied the internalised cultural values to adjust to the new society, and this process occurred once and irrevocably. By contrast, today's immigrants experience different dynamics in their relationship to the host society, mainly because of their flexibility and mobility. In economic terms, they have alternative paths so that they do not necessarily compete with the host people over resources in mainstream society. Therefore, today's immigrants do not depend exclusively on rapid acculturation and entrance into mainstream circles of the host society for economic success and social status. In other words, they do not need to give up the way of life of their home country.

This article examines the ways in which Koreans in New Zealand negotiate their values with the mainstream society. First, I briefly review some theoretical discussions

1 *Jōng* has the following three characteristics as Choi and Lee (1999) identify: interactions among involved parties with concern and consideration, intention to help, mutual understanding and caring for the counterpart; we-connoting oneness and sameness; familiarity and unceremoniousness in relations.

on values in the context of immigration and address how transnational networks between Korea and New Zealand have been formed since the early 1990s, through a transnational social field perspective. And then I analyse the life histories of Koreans in New Zealand to show how today's international migrants can maintain or reactivate their value systems in a transnational social field because they can be empowered with various resources supplied through this transnational network with their country of origin. And finally I will argue that in this transnational era immigrants' values are no longer simply accommodated by, but can compete with those of, the host society. Here I define cultural values as "a people's beliefs about the way of life that is desirable for themselves and their societies (Peoples and Bailey 2009: 29)."

This article is based on my PhD research titled "Koreans between Korea and New Zealand: International Migration to a Transnational Social Field" where I examined the life histories of Korean transnational migrants. The interviews, along with participant observation, were done between March 2006 and May 2007. Interviewees were asked to tell their stories from the point at which they made their decision to come to New Zealand to the present. Interviews with ministers, newspaper publishers, a Korean weekend school principal, medical doctors, counselors, and other health practitioners in Auckland, Christchurch and Hamilton also helped me interpret the data. Interviews typically lasted between one to two hours and all interviews were conducted in Korean.

Cultural Values in the Context of Transnational Migration

Since modern nation states have received immigrants from different countries, the governance of diversity has always mattered. Some European societies, according to Grillo (2007: 979-980), have gone through three phases in dealing with ethnic and cultural diversity. During the first phase, from the late 19th century until the mid-20th century, the principal method nation states adopted to deal with immigrants was assimilation to make them their nationals. Immigrants should conform to seemingly homogeneous national norms. During the second half of the 20th century, however, this assimilation approach had to be changed to integration. As national norms were increasingly perceived as heterogeneous, diverse identities and values represented by immigrants could be accommodated within a multicultural framework 'up to a point'. This framework shift has achieved some success in changing interethnic relations over the past thirty years, but multiculturalism and the compatibility of different ways of living in a society became a subject of scepticism and controversy by the early years of the 21st century.

The scepticism and controversy comes from opposite directions. On the one hand multiculturalism is criticised that it would make a society so diverse that it would lose its cohesion. On the other hand, some immigration scholars criticise that multiculturalism cannot guarantee enough diversity in a society. They argue that multiculturalism is based on the nation-state-as-territorial-container model, and generally "does not question the territory principal and maintains the idea of a primary belonging to one society and a loyalty to just one nation-state(Castle 2005 cited in Vertovec 2001)." Therefore it has been believed that:

[C]ore values and common belonging [unify] citizens and communities [welding] a nation of individuals into a social unity...[A] commitment to integrating immigrants, while recognizing diversity, [leads to] an emphasis on citizenship, national identity and strong, common civic values (*ibid.* 9).

In this regard multiculturalism is not very different from assimilation in that it requires immigrants to acculturate to a social unity's core values or common civic values.

Thanks to advanced transportation and communication technologies resulted from the global restructuring of capital which Harvey (1989) called "Time-space compression" since the 1980s, immigrants can "forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement (Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc 1994: 7)." These social relations across national borders, if intensified and accumulated by continuous exchange of people and goods, can develop into a public space which connects the two societies. Using Bourdieu's concept of "field", Levitt and Schiller (2004) conceptualise this space as a transnational social field. A social field, in Bourdieu's sense:

is a social arena within which struggles or manoeuvres take place over specific resources or stakes and access to them...Each field...has a different logic and taken-for-granted structure of necessity and relevance which is both the product and producer of the habitus which is specific and appropriate to the field.(Jenkins 1992: 84-85)

As a transnational social field unites two societies, those living within a transnational social field are affected by a set of social expectations, cultural values, and patterns of human interaction shaped by both societies.

According to Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (1995:163 cited in Guarnizo 1997: 310) "Immigrants develop a dual frame of reference, that is, the constant tendency of immigrants to compare and contrast their situation in the host society with their previous experiences in their country of origin." The multi-rooted set of dispositions and practices emerge as an effect of interaction of pre-migration values and meanings with those encountered in the destination place.

Transnational migrants who belong to both sending and receiving societies within a transnational social field develop a transnational habitus, a particular set of dualistic dispositions that inclines migrants to act and react to specific situations in a manner that can be, but is not always, calculated, and that is not simply a question of conscious acceptance of specific behavioral or socio-cultural rules (Guarnizo, 1997: 311). With this transnational habitus, transnational actors, while in the destination place, constantly (re) evaluate its norms and rules through the lenses of their culture of origin. Upon return visits, on the other hand, the rules of "the home land" are constantly confronted with those learnt in "the host society." The constant reference-switching following the trajectories of mobility points to the persistence of transnational habitus (Matyska 2009: 10).

A Transnational social field between Korea and New Zealand

The transnational social field between Korea and New Zealand has been formed as a result of a new international migration flow from Korea since the early 1990s. From the early 1980s New Zealand implemented neo-liberal reforms as a response to the world economic downturn and the country's accumulated foreign debt. As an effort, the government enacted a new immigration act to encourage new economic migrants from non-traditional source countries. In the meantime, the Korean government initiated a policy called "globalisation policy" as a response to neo-liberal challenges from the 1990s. In people's everyday lives, this policy was experienced as an emphasis on competitive human capital in the global market. The white collar workers who had enjoyed relatively secure employment status were pressured to meet this changing demand in the labour market. In Korean society it was believed that competitive human capital in the global market would be materialized through English ability. In the mid 1990s, the Korean government announced that English teaching would be extended to primary schools, which immediately triggered the boom of early English education among Korean middle class parents.

It was in this context that the sudden influx of Korean mass immigration to New Zealand started when the New Zealand government introduced a new immigration policy in 1991 which defined a "points system," awarding points for personal factors like age, education, skill, and financial capital. According to the system, university graduated professionals in their 30s and 40s with a sum of financial capital were favoured, and many Korean white collar workers or professionals were easily able to meet the criteria. Many middle class Koreans were informed, mainly through the promotional activities of immigration agents, about this opportunity of obtaining permanent residency in a welfare state with their current qualifications and educating their children for free in an English-speaking Western education system.

Two or three years after the New Zealand government announced the policy, a boom of application-for-New Zealand permanent residency swept Korean society. In just five years between 1992 and 1996, over thirteen thousand Koreans reported their emigration to New Zealand to the Korean government. During this period the transnational social field between the two countries started to emerge. Non-stop flights began in 1993 and the visa exemption agreement commenced in 1994. The Korean consular office opened and a Korean private bank established its branch in Auckland in 1996 and in 1997 respectively. Personal and material exchanges between the two countries have been rapidly promoted since these technical, legal, and institutional resources became available.

These promoted exchanges have lowered the cost of transnational activities, and with the affordability of airfare and communication services such as international telephones, the Internet and satellite TV, immigrants and non-immigrants were easily connected, and immigrants could stay active in both societies if they so chose. As a result watching Korean dramas has become a major spare time activity among Korean families in New Zealand. With up-to-date Korean popular culture continuously supplied by the Korean media, Koreans in New Zealand – whether they are first or second generations– enrich their lives and even disseminate them into the host society.

Human exchange between the two countries has become more frequent and regularised. Since 1991, more than one and a half million Koreans have visited New Zealand, most of whom are holiday visitors followed by visits by friends and relatives. In addition, the number of international students from Korea has been around 10,000 every year since 2001. Immigrant businesses played a role as a transnational agent in this process. Due to increasing visitors from Korea, related business opportunities such as travel and international education agencies were widened, and widened business opportunities led the business people to attract more tourists and international students from Korea which, in turn, developed ethnic business in the community.

The personal transnational networks between Koreans in both countries also played an important role in bringing Koreans into New Zealand especially when people in Korea need to decide where to go for holidays or study abroad. These social connections did not have to be strong: they were not only between family members, relatives or friends but also “the one who go to the same church as my mother-in-law’s sister” or “the mother’s sister of my neighbour in my apartment building.” Immigrants themselves also frequently invite their family and friends. New-comers from Korea, including these visitors and international students, are often considered to be one of the important sources supplying renewed Korean culture into the community, as an immigrant who had lived more than ten years in Auckland pointed out:

[A]mong Korean children in New Zealand, based on my experience watching my children growing up, the more recent immigrants from Korea tend to be more popular among their peers because they bring the latest and more advanced things to New Zealand with them.

Furthermore, through these visits immigrants and non-immigrants fulfill social expectations as members of a Korean family. It is quite a common custom, when a woman gives birth to a baby, that her mother or mother-in-law would come and stay for a while to help the woman during her recovery. Most immigrants also go to Korea once a year, or once every two or three years, mainly to see their parents. A survey (Kang and Page 2000) conducted in 1998 confirmed that Korean’s overseas travel from Auckland fell into the category of “ethnic reunion” with the findings that over the half of respondents travelled as a family; the high proportion of travel was made during the months of September, October and December which coincided with Korean Thanks Giving Day [Chuseok] and Christmas. In addition to maintaining their family and kinship relations, visiting Korea is conceptualised as an opportunity for the immigrants to “fill up” themselves. Whilst visiting Korea every two or three years, they say they have time to “refresh” their Koreanness with Korean food, fashion and entertainment etc.

For 1.5 generation immigrants, in particular, these trips give them an opportunity to contact and experience Korea for the first time as adults, after spending most of their adolescence in mainstream New Zealand schools, when their experience of Korean culture was confined to the community, Korean media or the internet. From this direct experience 1.5 generation immigrants realise that they have an option about where they live or work as shown in this quote:

When [my daughter] visited Korea last year after graduating from high school, she said she liked Korea so much that she would like to return and live there. (laugh)

This visit to their mother-land would give a new reference to them as a 1.5 generation young man, who had lived for a year in Korea, as an exchange student, experienced:

I felt all Korean people lived lives to the full and saw them working hard until late at night. I mean overall they try harder in their lives than people here [New Zealand].

Negotiating Values in a Transnational Social Field

Continual supplies of renewed Korean culture or Koreanness, keeping family relations active, and rediscovering Korea as a new option, all of which are possible in the transnational social field, can be factors which empower Korean immigrants not to give up their cultural values while living in New Zealand. Staying in the transnational social field between Korea and New Zealand, immigrants can be liberated from the dominant cultural logic of one country so that they can negotiate their values with the host society. To examine the way immigrants negotiate their values in the transnational social field, I will analyse some cases where different cultural constructs of social relationships from the two societies are contended.

It is usually believed that Asian immigrant women in interethnic marriages with white European men would be affected by such factors as male and white dominance, lack of cultural knowledge and language fluency. Korean women in interethnic marriages with white European New Zealand² men would also be affected by the same factors, but they are no longer subjugated by European and male centred notions of marriage as immigrant women. They rather challenge the notions with their own cultural ideas about husband-wife relationships when they experience spousal conflict or marriage crisis.

There are quite a number of Korean women married to Pakeha men. According to Callister and his colleagues (2005: 49) who provide the results of research on ethnic intermarriage in New Zealand using the 2001 census, 4.7% of the partners of 3,483 Korean married women were European, while 0.7% of the partners of 3,246 Korean married men were European. During my fieldwork, when I asked Korean men for possible reasons for this phenomenon the most frequent response was that if a Korean man married a European woman he could not dominate the relationship, which reflects gender-race politics: superiority of man and white and inferiority of woman and non-white as Constable (2003:170) explains:

Relationships between US men and Asian women are part of a more common cultural logic, a well recognised imaginary, in which it is considered more

2 A white European New Zealander is conventionally referred to by a Maori word, "Pakeha." Hereafter I will use this term.

acceptable for women to marry patrilocally and more acceptable for men to marry “down” than for women.

This cultural logic is also evident in ethnic intermarriages between Pakeha New Zealanders and other ethnic group women, especially Asian women in New Zealand. In addition to this gender-race politics, preexisting gender and racial stereotypes of ‘European’ men and ‘Asian’ women would distort interethnic couples’ relationships. According to a Korean counsellor in Auckland, Pakeha men and Korean women are likely to have different expectations of each other based on gender and racial stereotypes. Pakeha men expect Korean women to be obedient to them, while Korean women expect the men to be gentle and take good care of them. Soon after marriage, however, as they realise different realities, and language and cultural difference, spousal conflict often follows.

Cultural difference in general is often perceived as “inferiority” by Pakeha men according to my participants. In many cases of Pakeha men-Korean women marriages, Pakeha men tend to look down on their Korean wives because of their lack of cultural knowledge of New Zealand, and Korean women feel shame at their inability and ignorance. A woman was embarrassed when her Pakeha mother-in-law and husband asked her to cook toasted sandwiches because she did not know what these were. So she asked them what they were and they laughed at her asking how it was that she did not know what toasted sandwiches were. She responded by laughing at first but she became upset as they repeatedly laughed at her.

But in such a situation few Korean women in interethnic marriages can express themselves properly because of their English inability. A woman who divorced her Pakeha husband one year after marriage also experienced language problems:

Even when we had an argument at that time...I was not able to speak English well at that time...I felt frustrated because I could not express myself in English. That was my biggest difficulty. He also seemed to feel great loneliness as well as me because we had problems to have everyday conversation with each other. Even if we had some conversations, those were superficial...without much depth...I felt he ignored me much.

Her married life soon experienced difficulties, among others, because of this language problem. A few months after their marriage her husband decided to separate from her, and left her. But she “tried to save the marriage” in her “Korean way” asking people around her husband to persuade him not to divorce her. Her efforts turned out to be in vain because, even though her husband respected the person, if he did not permit them to mention his marital problems, they could not give him any advice, which she could not understand at all:

When you want to reconcile with your partner after you have argued with him but your partner strongly refuses to do so, Koreans generally seek help from such people like a pastor or those they respect asking them to tell their

partner to change his mind. But they [New Zealanders] could not say a word to my husband because he didn't allow them to talk about it even if they were counsellors.

She said her efforts to recover the relationship with her husband were based on the Korean notion of marriage where “however hard the husband and wife argue they manage to live together trying to recover the relationship while enduring each other.” In her understanding, however, New Zealanders have a different notion of marriage, so “in general it seemed very easy for them to give up the marriage relationship, and to divorce and re-marry.”

She pointed out that the biggest difference in perception of spousal relationships between her ex-husband and herself was the level of individualism. She described her husband as “too much” individualistic in spousal relationship as she exemplified:

They [New Zealanders] distinguish yours and mine even between spouses in many situations. For example, if he needed five dollars...he asked me to lend money with the promise of paying back (laugh)...For us [Koreans] mine is yours and yours is mine but for these people yours is yours and mine is mine.

Although many Korean-Kiwi interethnic married couples had successfully gone through crises at the initial stage of their marriage and settled down to the married life, some marriages would end up with divorce as in the case of the woman above mentioned. Divorce itself is not unusual but failure of Asian immigrant women-European men marriage has generally been considered the women's failure in acculturation to the host society while in other cases the women have often been victimised as helpless (e.g., Menjiva and Salcido 2002; Yang and Shin 2008).

But this perception or image is not the case for transnational migrants who have strong connections to the home country through which they are supplied material, relational and psychological resources. The woman above ended up divorced but not victimised. Note that she tried to save her marriage “in Korean ways” and her discourse about spousal relations.³ She first came to New Zealand as a secretary of the New Zealand branch of a Korean Christian organisation, and after her marriage she continued to have relations with the organisation. During the separation period before the divorce when she suffered from psychological distress, she went to Korea and stayed with her family for about a year. Five years after her divorce, she returned to Korea to re-marry a Korean man who she had contacted and “dated” via Internet messenger programmes in New Zealand.⁴ She stayed in the transnational social field between the two countries and activated transnational networks when she needed resources from it.

3 In fact the divorce rate in Korea is not low (2.3% in 2012), but still divorce is not considered to be a ‘right’ decision and so is likely to be hidden.

4 This interview with her was conducted in Korea one year after she returned.

In other cases Korean parents often conflicted with their children over their Korean style of discipline. Typical examples of this conflict were over children's sleepover and party-going with their Kiwi friends. Sleepovers, especially, were strictly prohibited by some Korean parents regardless of children's gender. The parents' -- the fathers in particular -- reason for prohibition was unclear, or too clear: a female participant said her father did not let her sleepover because "it is not allowed", and a male participant said his father never allowed him to sleepover under the ultimate proposition that "people should sleep at home". These participants were also not allowed to buy popular sunglasses or to go to a party, respectively, without "particular reasons."

The participants' parents focused on keeping their children from vices like smoking, drinking, or having sex, that youth often indulge in before they become university students, and which are considered typical examples of teenager misconduct in Korea. In these incidents, the two participants responded differently. The male participant accepted his father's decision without complaint because, he said, he knew it was pointless for him to resist accepting his father's 'ultimate propositions'. The female participant strongly confronted her father at that time, but when I interviewed her when she was a graduate student she told me that she knew what her father wanted for her.

My father must have thought 'after you go to university you do whatever you want but before that you should obey me'. In his thoughts, New Zealand was more permissive than Korea and moreover, he did not know much about what New Zealand families were like. So the best way to protect me would be to prevent me from going into possibly risky environments.

These responses are somewhat different from existing perceptions of intergenerational value discrepancies among immigrant families. Acculturation theory predicted the gradual change of immigrant values towards the values of the dominant group, and because of more rapid change among adolescents than among their parents value discrepancies in immigrant families were expected to increase over time (Phinney, Ong and Madden 2000: 536). But the same research pointed out that among three groups of Vietnamese, Armenian and Mexican immigrant families in the US, Mexican families did not show intergenerational value discrepancies. It was suggested that this was partly because the proximity of Mexico made for bidirectional influence between Mexico and the US. By the same token, within a transnational social field between the two countries later generation immigrants who are acculturated into the host society can be enculturated by their countries of origin at the same time, so that they had minimal cultural value discrepancies with their parents. Upbringing, parents' networks, living experience, and continuous exposure to home country media in the transnational social field have an impact on later generation immigrants.

Later generation immigrants' relationship with the host people is another good example which shows the impact of living in a transnational social field. Many of my first generation participants said that they had difficulties in making Kiwi friends regardless of how long they had lived in New Zealand. It is generally believed that the difficulties immigrants face in forming friendships with the host people come from their

lack of English fluency and tendency to stick with their fellow immigrants and, also the host people's attitude toward immigrants as this media report suggests;

The Immigration Settlement Monitoring Programme Migrants Survey 2011...shows 55 per cent of foreigners had none or one New Zealand mate....22 per cent of migrants didn't even socialise with any New Zealanders... it could...be due to a language barrier or because migrants tended stick with people from their own countries...there (are) some New Zealand people who don't want to make contact with migrants...because of the whole emphasis that these people are coming to take our jobs, our housing (10.8.2012. Stuff Nation)

But what about 1.5 generation immigrants who had acculturated in New Zealand society through formal education? While I was interviewing 1.5 generation participants, I realised that the real difficulties in building friendships between Koreans and New Zealanders might be the different notion of being a "friend". Many 1.5 generation immigrants—whether they are males or females—told me that they had difficulty in making "close relations" beyond "nice friends" with their Kiwi counterparts as they grew up. When they were in primary school they got along with their Kiwi classmates but from intermediate school or high school, Korean students tend to mix only with other Korean students, mainly because they find it hard to form a deeper relationship with Kiwis.

A female immigrant who came to New Zealand as an international student at primary school age told me that among her friends, there were some Kiwis but they were friends in name only. A 1.5 generation Korean health professional said he also had the same difficulties when he tried to make friends at school:

After being friends, Koreans develop deep relationships with each other but for New Zealanders -- their relationships are not very deep.... What I am saying is that they set certain boundaries [in relationships] and if anybody goes beyond it they get offended. Of course, there are personal differences, and I am a bit over generalising but the depth of relationship of New Zealanders seems to be shallower than those of Koreans.

He said that he often felt frustrated at his Kiwi friends at school who had made him feel he was "being pushed out" when he tried to have a closer relationship with them, but he "did not know how close is not too close". By his statement, however, this man implies Koreans do not change their own ways in order to make friends in the different culture. Rather, these immigrants withdraw their efforts to make Kiwi "friends" labeling New Zealanders' values in personal relations as "individualistic", as the young woman whom I mentioned earlier did.

But it is hard to conclude that these young immigrants are seeking solely Korean values. During my PhD research I interviewed 11 1.5 generation immigrants, seven of whom were working in Korea or had been in Korea for more than a year at the time of interview, and all of them claimed they have had a similar experience. Many 1.5 generation immigrants, who had returned to Korea at the time of my research, told me that they often felt differences in values between themselves and people in Korea. They complained

of people's rudeness as they bumped into them in the street and went away without an apology or looked straight at them for no reason, which would be considered usual in Korea. In another example, a 1.5 generation immigrant, who worked as a professional in Korea, was embarrassed at his boss's negative response when he planned an overseas trip with his female colleague who was also a 1.5 generation Korean from Canada.

Conclusion

Immigrants' conflict with different values in the host society is not a new phenomenon. But in transnational migration this conflict exhibits different dynamics. Immigrants with prior experience of this conflict assume an inferior position in relation to the host society. Unlike past immigrants, transnational migrants have constant contact with their home country and this contact provides them with a strong reference when they compete with the host society over ways of living and thinking. It should be noted that Koreans, in the cases above, are trying to confront the difference using their own logic and to not simply conform to pressure from the host society. If we can see common values as part of one's ethnicity, competing values between immigrants and the host people is more like a politics of ethnicity and culture.

In this respect competing values are related to identity politics. On the one hand, modern multicultural states make an effort to acknowledge various cultural values in order to integrate diverse population groups, including international migrants, into their societies. But that effort is "still circumscribed by duties and obligations to publicly acknowledge the primacy of national core languages, institutions and values (Pearson 2004: 299)." On the other hand, while being acculturated into the host society today's international migrants try to stay in the transnational social field. In this effort to belong to both societies at the same time, immigrants develop transnational habitus which will liberate them from the dominant cultural logic of one country.

In a transnational social field, however, international migrants might become alienated from both societies. So whether people become more transnational or more integrated is about opportunity cost. International migrants often judge strategically in this kind of decision-making. In this context transnational migrants' values are no longer simply accommodated by, but can compete with those of, the host society. But this competition does not necessarily result in conflict between transnational migrants and the host people. It could be a competition to create newer, wider and more inclusive values and identities as a primary school girl, whose father is Chinese and mother is Korean, wrote on her library membership card. Her ethnicity was 50% Chinese, 50% Korean and 50% New Zealander: a 150% person.

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Biographical note

Dr Bong-gui Koo (PhD, Auckland) is a research professor at the Gyeonggi Institute of Research and Policy Development for Migrants' Human Rights in South Korea. His doctoral thesis examined Korean immigrants in New Zealand through the theoretical framework of transnationalism. His research focuses on globalization, transnational migration and multiculturalism. He is currently carrying out fieldwork in a local city in Korea where international migrants and ethnic return migrants including North Korean defectors are concentrated, investigating migrants' transnationalism and multicultural policies and discourses in Korean society.