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The people in between : education, desire, and South Koreans in contemporary China

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Citation

Ma, X. (2018, September 26). *The people in between : education, desire, and South Koreans in contemporary China*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/66000>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

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Cover Page



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Title: The people in between : education, desire, and South Koreans in contemporary China

Issue Date: 2018-09-26

Chapter 2 Come, Sojourn and Leave

My first visit to Wangjing, known as “Koreatown” in Beijing, on a summer afternoon in 2011 was rather disappointing. Strolling along the wide, bustling main avenues, Guangshun North Street and Guangshun South Street, I noticed that office buildings, commercial centres and shopping malls were predominately Chinese or international rather than showing the conspicuous signs of being Korean businesses. At the central square near the Wangjing subway station, I chatted with some people and found that none of them originated from South Korea. Even more frustrating, Mrs Zhang, the director of the local neighbourhood committee (*juweihui*), told me that since the 2008 global financial crisis, South Korean residents had left Koreatown in large numbers as they were no longer able to maintain their residence and business.

This first impression of Koreatown raised a number of questions in my mind: Is the financial crisis the only reason why Koreans left their ethnic community in large numbers? Why are they in such an unsettled and unstable situation? How is their society organised, and further, how do they interact with the majority population and other ethnic minorities? These questions became my initial motivation to explore the Korean migrants in Beijing. My academic quest sought to examine how the ethnic and foreign communities in China are distinguished from or identical to the “Chinatown”, “Koreatown”, or other ethnic communities discussed in the well-documented literature which is primarily based on the analytical framework of “ethnic enclave economies” and originates from the North American context (Min 1996; Zhou 1995; Wilson and Portes 1980).

I aim to sketch a picture of South Koreans coming to, sojourning in and leaving Beijing. I initiate the chapter with a brief overview of South Korean migration to China from the 1990s onwards. Following, I focus on the process of emergence, growth and dispersal of the “Koreatown(s)” in Beijing over the past two decades. This process of historical development exposes the engagement of ethnic groups with political and economic transformation at the local level. Finally, I look into the various forms of ethnic incorporation that occur in intra- and inter-ethnic group relations and discuss whether ethnicity contributes to the settlement of migrants in the host society. The data in this chapter was collected from academic literature, government

Chapter 2

documents, news reports (in Chinese, Korean and English), interviews and participant observation during my fieldwork.

Come and Leave: South Korean Migration to China From the 1990s Onwards

For four decades following the end of the Chinese Civil War (1945-1949), South Korea maintained diplomatic relations with Taiwan (the Republic of China) rather than with the newly established regime in Beijing (the People's Republic of China, hereafter China) which represented the one crucial member of the Communist world that South Korea stood in opposition to (H. Kim 2010, 2). The freeze of direct contact between South Korea and China lasted until the mid-1970s when the postal and telecommunication services between the two countries opened up, followed by approved individuals being allowed to travel in the mid-1980s (Luova 2009). Indirect trade between the two countries was initiated and grew rapidly from the late 1970s, mainly through third-party intermediaries or trading firms in Hong Kong or Taiwan, with the first South Korean investment in mainland China (a toy factory in Guangdong Province) being operated in a similar way (Lee 1996, 144 and 155). The Tiananmen Square protests of 1989 enhanced Sino-South Korea economic relations because the South Korean government did not join international campaign against China during and after the incident. In addition, South Korea provided economic and technological assistance for the Asian Games held in Beijing in the following year (Lee 1996, 149–50).

The diplomatic normalisation between China and South Korea in 1992 signified that the two countries had officially suspended their ideological hostility that had lasted throughout the Cold War (1947-1991). The first wave of Korean migration to China primarily consisted of diplomats sent by the government and expatriate employees deployed by Korean conglomerates to big cities like Beijing, most of whom had limited knowledge and yet a great deal of curiosity about exploring the country that had been hidden behind the “bamboo curtain” for decades (Song 2013). Besides, South Korean entrepreneurs also set up small-scale businesses in Yanbian, a region populated by significant numbers of Korean Chinese residents due to the convenience of working with the co-ethnics, regardless of the low rate of economic growth in that area (H. Kim 2010, 69).

A more dramatic population wave soon followed, driven by the Asian financial crisis (1997-1998). As an aftermath of the economic crisis in South Korea, rising numbers of Korean

Chapter 2

companies and individuals sought new opportunities in its neighbouring country to tackle the financial hardships they encountered in their home country (Jeong 2013; Yeo 2012; Spencer, Flowers, and Seo 2012). The Asian financial crisis caused devastating economic recession, inflation and soaring rates of unemployment in several Asian economies, including Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Hong Kong, and South Korea which was the worst hit by the crisis (Economist 2007). Approximately one million Korean people reportedly lost their jobs in the first six months after the crisis occurred (Park 1998). The Chinese economy, by contrast, was almost unaffected by the catastrophe, mainly due to the state-controlled banking system and the country's limited engagement in the regional and global economy in the late 1990s (Fang and Xiao 1999, 165). The economic stability, relatively low labour costs and living expenses in China greatly attracted migrants from its neighbouring country. The exchange rate (the strong Korean won versus Chinese yuan) also made it possible for Korean residents in China to live a more affluent lifestyle than back in Korea: for instance, living in a spacious apartment or hiring housekeepers to help with domestic chores (Seo 2007: 483-484).

A large number of Korean entrepreneurs set up factories in China, especially during the period 2000-2007. This period was identified as “a golden age of investment in manufacturing industry” (*chejoöm t'ujaüi hwanggŭmgi*) by KOTRA (Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency) (KOTRA 2011). The number of Korean enterprises soared from 1,768 in 2001 to 4,594 in 2007, with an estimated two-thirds involved in the labour-intensive manufacturing industry, e.g. electronics, textile, general machinery (Kang and Shen 2013, 3326; Pak 2007). With regard to location, Korean factories spread out over Northeast China (Liaoning, Jilin, and Heilongjiang Province) and North China (particularly in Shandong Province). These regions are geographically close to the Korean peninsula and are well connected with Korea via international cargo lines, whereby materials, machines and final products can be efficiently shipped between Korean and Chinese ports (H. Kim 2010, 68–73).

China's accession to the WTO (World Trade Organisation) in 2001 spurred the growing demand by central and local governments for foreign direct investment, which provided favourable policy circumstances for Korean entrepreneurs to develop export processing industries. For example, in 2003 the port city of Qingdao in Shandong Province obtained permission from the central government to establish an “export processing zone” to attract foreign investment to the processing industry (Sun 2009, 42). By 2007, the city and its surrounding counties were reportedly

Chapter 2

accommodating 5,500 Korean-invested corporations (Sun 2009, 43). In general, according to the statistics by the Export-Import Bank of Korea, the amount of Korean direct investment in China rose rapidly from approximately 645 million US dollars in 2001 to a peak of 5.3 billion US dollars in 2007, with a sharp decrease to 3.2 billion in 2010 after the global financial crisis of 2008 (cited in Kang and Shen 2013, 3326).

In addition to manufacturing, Korean investment in the service sector, including real estate, restaurants and lodgings, was concentrated in Chinese metropolises like Beijing and Shanghai (H. Kim 2010, 64). Given the soaring economic transactions between the two countries, Korean parents aspired to increase their children's prospects by having them pursue Chinese language proficiency or a diploma from a Chinese university. This was revealed by the trend termed "the fever of studying in China" (*chungguk yuhakyōl*) at the outset of the 2000s (Hwang 2002b). The number of Korean students in China soared from less than 100 in 1991 to 15,000 in 2002, the latter figure accounting for 25 per cent of the total number of international students in China in the same year (Hwang 2002b). In Beijing, a large number of Korean students studied at Beijing Language and Culture University, Beijing University and Tsinghua University in the Wudaokou area, where numerous Korean restaurants and shops prospered by catering to the demand of these students (see Figure 2.2).

Korean migration in China experienced a watershed when the global financial crisis (2007-2008) occurred. As a consequence of the crisis, the value of Korean won plummeted, whereas the value of Chinese yuan increased. The exchange rate of Chinese yuan to Korean won jumped from 1 yuan to 120 won, to, 1 yuan to 225 won in less than two years from the beginning of 2007 to the end of 2008.²⁷ This drastic change in currency value led to enormous financial difficulties for the companies and individuals reliant on the Korean currency. Korean companies were compelled to reduce the number of expatriate employees sent to China in order to cut costs. Students were summoned back by parents no longer able to afford their study expenses. And, entrepreneurs rushed to withdraw their investments from the Chinese market as their businesses became less profitable (Cho 2008).

²⁷ The exchange rate has experienced a decrease after reaching the peak and yet still fluctuated between 1 yuan to 160 won and 190 won till the present. See XE Currency Charts (CNY/KRW), <http://www.xe.com/currencycharts/?from=CNY&to=KRW&view=10Y>, last accessed February 4th, 2016.

Chapter 2

From the autumn in 2008 to the summer in 2009, the Los Angeles Times reported that approximately 25,000 out of 70,000 South Korean nationals living in the Koreatown (Wangjing area) in Beijing returned home, while one in five of the 100,000 Koreans in Shanghai left China (Glionna 2009). The official statistics from the Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs showed the number of overseas Korean nationals in China sharply decreasing from 517,762 in 2007 to 413,442 in 2009, with a stable reduction until the lowest point of 350,529 in 2013 (see Figure 2.1).²⁸ Despite this exodus, a number of returnees made a U-turn and headed towards Beijing when the economic crisis reached an end in the spring of 2009 (Beijing Journal 2009). Most of them believed that living in China offered “much less stress and plenty of entrepreneurial opportunities compared with the livelihood back in Korea” (Beijing Journal 2009). In general, the number of Koreans in China experienced a slight increase to 369,349 people in 2015.

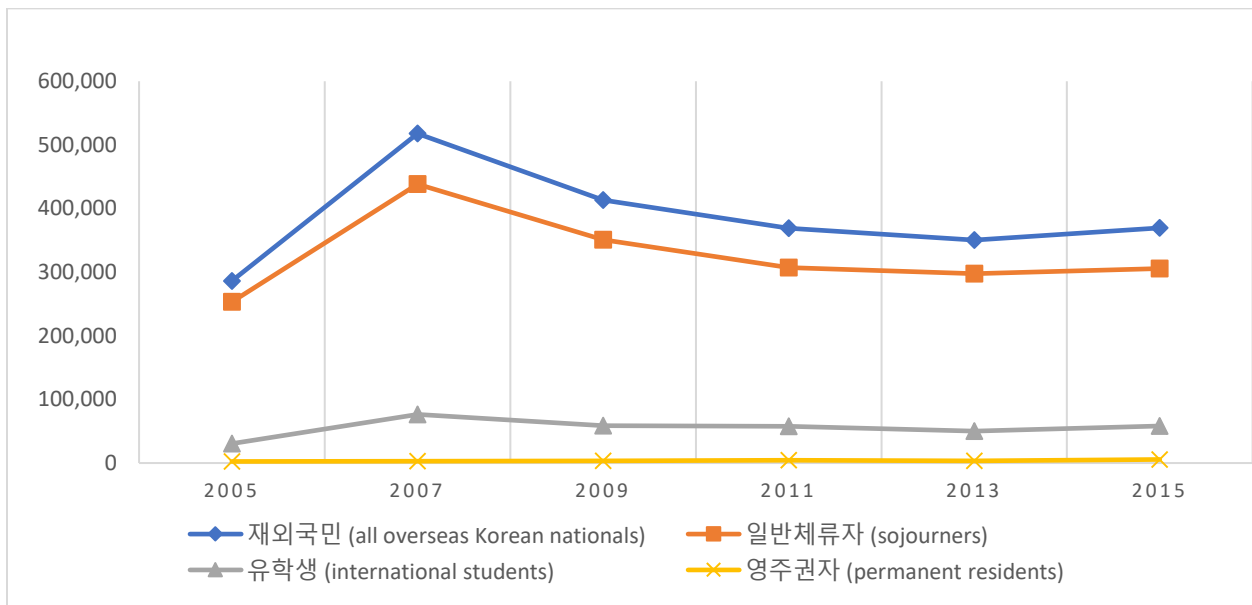


Figure 2.1. Number of South Korean population in China (2005-2015)

Source: Chaeoedongp'o hyŏnhwang (The Present Situation of Overseas Koreans), Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2015, 2013, 2011, 2009, 2007, 2005.

Note: This survey is conducted once every two years from the year of 2002. The total number of overseas Korean nationals includes three categories: sojourners, international students and permanent residents. The group of Korean Chinese is excluded in this survey, and the number fluctuates between 1.9 and 2.2 millions during the same time period.

²⁸ According to the estimation by the Association of South Koreans in China (*chungguk'an'guginhoe*), during the winter from 2008 to 2009, at least 100,000 out of 700,000 Koreans left China. see “Chunggung kŏju han'gukkyomin 60manmyŏngŭro yang 15% kamsŏ” (Korean Residents in China reduced approximately 15% and reached 600,000 people), Beijing Journal, 564(7), last modified February 20, 2009.

Chapter 2

This economic crisis also devastated Korean manufacturing factories in Shandong Province. Given that the factories were predominantly export-oriented, the economic transactions were extremely vulnerable to even a tiny change exchange rate of the yuan to the won. Twice the exchange rate soared and many Korean factory owners vanished in the middle of the night without paying their Chinese workers (Sun 2009, 121–33). Apart from this, Korean factories were subjected to rising labour costs and increased taxation imposed on foreign economic bodies in China from as early as 2003 (Sun 2009, 121–22). The reason being that Korean factories were medium and small sized and labour intensive, hence taking advantage of low labour costs in China with the aim of providing their global customers with products at competitive prices (Park 2011, 232–33). The global economic crisis accelerated their retreat from China and their relocation to countries with cheaper labour costs, especially in Southeast Asia.

The oscillation of Korean migration between China and Korea is shaped by economic activities, transactions and crisis on a regional and global scale. As sociologist Saskia Sassen points out, international migration is generated by the advancement of global economic activities, e.g. the growth of international financial markets, trade and direct foreign investment (Sassen 1991). In the following section, I will elaborate on the residence and settlement of Korean migrants in Beijing, focusing on the ups and downs of “Koreatown(s)”, whereby the engagement of Korean migration in the host country will be addressed in depth.

Emergence, Development and Dispersal: the “Koreatown(s)” in Beijing

The Wudaokou university area (see Figure 2.2) in the northwest of Beijing is normally regarded as a region where the Korean population and their businesses clustered in the early stages (H. Kim 2010, 136–37). There are over ten universities, notably the Beijing and Tsinghua Universities (two prestigious Chinese universities) and the Beijing Language and Culture University (specializing in teaching the Chinese language to foreigners), attracting international students wanting to study Mandarin and/or to pursue an undergraduate or postgraduate degree program. Before Korean students proliferated in Beijing in the early 2000s, the Wudaokou area represented a place where artistic Chinese urban youth and students pursued western culture and fashion, and was a centre where rock and punk musicians gathered and performed. The arrival of Korean students drummed up a boom for Korean catering services such as restaurants, entertainment and lodgings (Fang

2014). Despite this, the significance of this region for Koreans was soon overshadowed by another area, Wangjing, in the northeast corner of Beijing. Referred to as a “new town”, Wangjing attracted a broader range of Korean residents and businesses, who began to concentrate it from the 2000s onwards.

Historically, Wangjing was initially presented in Song dynasty’s Chinese geographic literature as “*wangjingguan*”, a place where traders and envoys could sojourn before or after they visited downtown Beijing (Sun 2004). Located slightly to the south of the historical site, today’s Wangjing refers to an administrative sub-district (*jiedao*) in Beijing, 10.36 km², subordinated to the Chaoyang district (*qu*) (see Figure 2.2). It is situated between the fourth and the fifth ring road, approximately 15 kilometres from Tiananmen Square in the city centre, and roughly the same distance from Beijing International Airport. By 2015, this area accommodated 260,000 residents including 30,000 foreigners from 84 countries, with 84 per cent of the foreign population being South Korean nationals (Wangjing jiedao 2015). Wangjing is also the place where I conducted the major part of my fieldwork in this study.

In the early 2000s, the Wangjing area began to emerge as a “Koreatown” in both Chinese and Korean news (“*Hanguocheng*” in Chinese and “*K'oriat'aun*” in Korean) (Xinhuanet 2003; Song 2002; Hwang 2002a). By drawing on the term “Koreatown”, journalists highlighted the Korean economic and residential concentration in Beijing and other Chinese cities, and underlined the conspicuous Korean presence in China as a pivotal milestone in the development of the Sino-South Korean diplomatic relations over the past decade. Two Korean journalists depicted what they witnessed in Wangjing as follows:

700 South Korean households constitute the total 4,000 households in Wangjing New Town (a residential compound in Wangjing area)...there are over thirty real estate agencies only catering to South Korean customers...it is such ‘a small Seoul’ in Beijing, and there is little inconvenience (in Korean people’s daily life), Korean food such as *chajangmyŏn* and *tchamppong* are always available for delivery...There are also a few taekwondo centres and a Korean hospital (Song 2002; Hwang 2002a).



Figure 2.2. The old and new ‘Koreatown(s)’ in Beijing and beyond. Source: d-maps.com

Note: 1, Wudaokou; 2, Wangjing; 3 Shunyi District; 4, Tongzhou District; 5 Yanjiao County, Hebei Province.

The initial Korean presence in Wangjing primarily consisted of small business owners and entrepreneurs who were confronted with incredibly high living expenses in the foreigners-only residential regions. Before 2003, foreign residents in Beijing faced accommodation options restricted to that of certain “hotels catering to foreigners” (*shewai binguan*), “foreign housing” (*waijiaofang*), and “international apartments” (*guoji gongyu*) (Wu and Webber 2004: 210). Most of this accommodation was located in the embassy and commercial regions in the east and the site

of the 1990 Asian Games (*yayuncun*) in the north.²⁹ In the early 1990s, renting a small-size apartment in these areas cost USD 3,800 per month, which was twice as expensive as renting a big house in the United States, recalled a Korean expatriate in his published memoirs on his working and living experiences in Beijing (Song 2013, 28). The regulatory constraints on housing geographically disaggregated the Korean population into three separate parts: most embassy staff and expatriate employees, who received housing subsidies from their employers, resided in the designated areas for foreigners; students stayed in the Wudaokou area; businessmen and entrepreneurs, in contrast, were forced to illegally rent affordable apartments dispersed in several Chinese neighbourhoods in the northeast (Jeong 2014, 339; Yeo 2012, 78–91).

As a result of the unfolding process of urbanisation led by the Beijing municipal government since the late 1990s, Korean business owners and entrepreneurs were attracted to the Wangjing area. Wangjing remained an agrarian village on the edge of Beijing until the local government decided to transform it into one of the “urban new districts” (*chengshi xinqu*) in order to cope with the increasing demand for housing for the Chinese population (Beijing Municipal Government 1994). The housing project implemented in Wangjing targeted the rising “Chinese middle class”, and encouraged individuals to purchase real estate properties and construct elegant apartments in high-rise buildings (Fleischer, 2010: 63-64). Unlike the obsolete and shabby cottage-style residences in Chinese neighbourhoods, these apartments were brand-new, equipped with spacious living rooms (over twenty square metres), elevators, large green areas, central squares, various sports facilities, and were gated as a safeguard from outsiders. The first two housing projects (A5 and A4 Section), completed in between 1997 and 2000, provided nearly 8,000 commodity apartments.

One reason why Koreans, rather than other nationalities, were drawn to the high-rise apartment complex lies in the symbolic implication of this type of housing to the lifestyle of the “new urban middle class” in Korea in the 1990s (Lett 1998, 110–17). According to Lett, during this period an apartment complex (*ap'at'ūdanji*) served as a pivotal symbol of status in Korea. It was distinguished from the traditional-style of long-established dwellings accommodating lower and lower-middle class multiple households under one roof and was differentiated from the low-rise western-style houses owned by the upper-class. The situation in Beijing was identical. The

²⁹ These regions are the East Changan Area in the east of the Forbidden City, the Third Embassy Area and the CBD (Central Business District) area in the east of the Changan Area, as well as the Asian Games village in the north.

Chapter 2

residential units in Wangjing were much more affordable than the low-rise and low-density foreign housing, and yet were in a better condition and of better quality than the accommodation in the old shabby local Chinese neighbourhoods. Besides being a place of residence, the business owners also operated small-scale shops around the residential compounds and were sooner or later joined by their ethnic counterparts, mostly Korean Chinese migrating from rural areas in Northeast China to Beijing to seek a livelihood (I will elaborate on this in the following section).



Figure 2.3. The A5 section (also named *wangjing xiyuan siqu*), the earliest residential compound constructed in Wangjing, in total 4329 units in 19 high-rises (20-29 floors), the majority of construction completed in 1997, the rest in 1999, photograph by the author.

Following these early arrivals, a wider range of Koreans, particularly expatriates and their families, moved to Wangjing when the restrictions on foreigners' accommodation were abolished (Jeong 2013, 444–47). Their movement was driven by several reasons, including a well-established Korean catering economy that provided a variety of ethnic food, products and services. It was also closely associated with the second wave of urbanisation in Wangjing area, and the completion and sale of a series of high-end housing projects to upper-class population, e.g. senior executives, business elites, celebrities. Infrastructure was dramatically improved: roads and public transportation were rapidly developed, shopping and dining sites proliferated. Korean enterprises, thereby, considered the high-end apartments in Wangjing as a suitable alternative to previous

foreign housing and arranged for expatriates to live there. The third reason was that Korean parents were attracted by the increase in educational resources within and near to this region, following the relocation of the overseas Korean school to Wangjing in 2006 and the establishment of several international schools in the neighbouring districts (Jeong 2013, 447).

Apart from their residence, many Koreans invested in the real estate market in Beijing around the same time due to a dramatic increase in pressure to own a property in Korea. As a report on housing prices in Korea shows, the price index of apartment housing in Seoul doubled between 1998 and 2006, whereas fundamentals (e.g. gross domestic product, wage) only increased by less than 35 per cent (Park and Xiao 2009). House prices were also fuelled by the abolition of regulatory restrictions on foreigners purchasing properties in China in 2004 and the following liberalisation of the housing market (Song 2013, 96).³⁰ When new housing projects became available on the real estate market, Koreans rushed to buy with many people purchasing more than one apartment (Zheng and Zhang 2008). According to my informants, the real estate investment fever was also mobilised by Chinese real estate developers. Mr Ryu, who purchased a two-room apartment in Baoxingyuan, a fancy residential compound, told me that he bought it under the name of his wife, who only held a tourist visa. He said, “normally you can’t use a tourist visa to buy a house, but we were allowed to do it because the project did not sell well.”

Despite this, the Beijing municipal government never identified Wangjing as a “Koreatown” in official documents, although Wangjing was incorporated in its political agenda for internationalisation. The local government pledged to develop a “high and new technology industry” (*gaoxin jishu chanye*) in Wangjing in 2002 and to provide tax exemptions to innovation-oriented Chinese and international enterprises (Chinese Government Public Information Online 2002). Subsequently, several well-known multinational enterprises, such as Motorola, LG, Ericsson, Siemens, or Schneider Electric, moved their research and development centres to this region. Moreover, the “Beijing Urban Overall Plan (2004-2020)” included the development of Wangjing as “a comprehensive commerce area that includes commerce, culture and leisure” in order to bolster the commerce and trade industry of the city, and to help the capital reach “the level of modern international city” (Beijing Municipal Commission of Urban Planning 2005). Further,

³⁰ According to my informants, the property price in Wangjing in the mid-2000s was 6000-8000 yuan per square metre, which they believed much more affordable than the property prices back in Korea at that time. However, I could not find the specific housing prices at the same time in Seoul and to make a comparison.

Chapter 2

the national news agency, Xinhua, stated that Wangjing is speeding up to become “the second CBD” (Central Business District) in Beijing, in addition to the first CBD surrounding the China World Trade Centre (*Guomao*) to the east of Tiananmen square (Xinhuanet 2013). Key messages of these documents and news reports conveyed that the local government anticipated a plan to internationalise Wangjing rather than to “Koreanise” it.

Despite the liberalisation of residential freedom, Beijing local authorities began to reinforce the administration of foreign population in regards to document inspection. Prior the outset of Beijing Olympics in 2008, the local police announced a crack-down on “*sanfei waiguoren*” (three-illegal foreigners, i.e. three categories of foreigners who illegally enter China, overstay, and work without permits), in order to provide a good safe image of the city to display to the world (Du 2007). A similar crack-down was launched in 2012 and lasted for 100 days (BBC News 2012). Local authorities also placed more restrictions on applications to extend resident permits. According to Mr Lee, a diplomat working in the Korean Embassy in Beijing, a large number of Koreans were forced to leave Beijing around 2008 owing to the difficulty in renewing resident permits. Lee stated that they were rejected for various reasons including business bankruptcy, engagement in illegal religious activities. Other were simply rejected without any reason given at all.

In the same time period, Beijing municipal government implemented a regulatory system, named the “foreigner residence registration” (*waiguoren zhusu dengji*). This regulation required sub-district police to collect information on foreigners whose accommodation was under their jurisdiction. While short-term visitors should submit personal information to the police within 24 hours of their arrival, long-term resident permit holders needed to update their information every time they moved to a new address or renewed their residency permits. To better supervise and assist foreigners to get registered, a department called the “community policing studio” (*shequ jingwu gongzuoshi*) was established at the main gate of the residential compound that hosted the largest number of foreign residents (see Figure 2.4). The policing studio served foreign residents of this and nearby neighbourhoods and handled documents that they submitted, supplementing the sub-district police office a few kilometres away.



Figure 2.4. The Community Policing Studio in Wangjing Xiyuan Siqu (Wangjing Xiyuan Siqu Jingwu Gongzuoshi). Photograph by the author.

Nevertheless, this rigorous governance of foreign residents does not play an essential role in disaggregating the established Korean residential concentration. The more significant rationales, I argue, are the fluctuation of the local real estate market and the soaring housing and living expenses in Wangjing. The real estate investment fever among foreign residents began to wane in 2008. Foreigners in Beijing and Shanghai were reported to “rush to escape” the Chinese real estate market by putting their apartments on sale at bargain-basement prices, as they speculated about the impact of the increased value of the Chinese currency on the decline of real estate industry (Beijing Journal 2008). Korean house owners in Beijing also made efforts to sell their real estate

and lined up in Korean banks to exchange Chinese yuan to Korean won, aiming to stockpile Korean currency when it was of a lesser value (Yonhapnews 2008). Apart from this, the panic in the real estate market reflected anxiety about the real estate bubble and the probable administrative restrictions on the Chinese real estate market (Hankyungnews 2008). According to Mr Zhang, a real estate agent in my study, most of his South Korean customers sold their apartments around 2010, just before the local authority issued new rules to cool down the real estate market.³¹

During the time period I carried out my fieldwork (2014-2015), I found that none of my Korean informants owned real estate in Wangjing (or anywhere else in China). As one local real estate agent stated, “now the property buyers are all rich Chinese, they are appealing to good educational resources, convenient transportation and advanced living facilities here... Wangjing is, after all, Chinese people’s territory (*zhongguoren de dipan*)”. “It (Wangjing) is only a nominal Koreatown (*mingyishang de Hanguocheng*) because Koreans flocked to here (*zhadui*). There are actually many more Chinese (than Koreans). Now the living expense and housing rent have increased a lot, many of them (Koreans) have left...only the wealthy ones remained”, reported another real estate agent. I completely endorse the words of these housing agents, in that they wisely pointed out the fact that socio-economic status, i.e. class, prevails over and tears apart the ethnic concentration previously established.

Revisiting Wangjing in the summer of 2016, I learned that house rental prices had constantly increased: a 50m² studio in a modest neighbourhood, for instance, was leased for 5,000 yuan (667 euro) per month in 2015, and that by summer 2016 this figure had soared to 6,000 yuan (800 euro).³² As one informant explained, the entry of large Chinese and multi-national enterprises to this area has brought significant numbers of enterprise employees with them, markedly stimulating the demand for housing and increasing the average rental prices. When the Alibaba Group, the largest Chinese e-commerce company, moved its headquarters to Wangjing in mid-2015, many local house owners demanded an immediate increase of hundreds of yuan in the rental price. Furthermore, rising living expenses in Beijing placed a massive financial burden on ordinary households. Many Korean housewives complained that imported Korean products in Beijing were

³¹ The new rules banned urban registered families in Beijing from owning more than two apartments, raising the minimum down-payment for second home purchases, and the launch of property taxes in certain areas, aiming to deal with the rising housing prices. See Beijing issues new rules to limit house purchase, China daily, last modified February 16th, 2011, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2011-02/16/content_12028324.htm.

³² I adopt the exchange rate in December 31st, 2014, 1EUR = 7.5 CNY.

nearly twice as expensive as those bought in Korea. On several occasions, I also witnessed Korean housewives sharing a cup of coffee while chatting in cafes, as the price of one cup is rather high for them (30 yuan, 4 euro).

In general, the soaring house rents and living expenditures in the Wangjing area, like elsewhere in Beijing, tend to exclude the less wealthy dwellers, regardless if they are Koreans, Chinese or other nationalities. During my fieldwork, low-income Wangjing dwellers began moving to more affordable regions in suburban Beijing, such as the Shunyi or Tongzhou district, located beyond the sixth ring road. Many settled down in Yanjiao, a county in Hebei Province that borders Beijing, 35 kilometres east of Tiananmen Square (see Figure 2.2). Like Wangjing in the late 1990s, Yanjiao is currently undergoing a boom in real estate development, which is providing a large number of affordable apartments for workers and entrepreneurs to rent or purchase.³³ Specifically, the Korean DA group, a construction and design enterprise, participated in a large-scale real estate project in Yanjiao, named “Seoul Sweet City” (*Shou'er tiancheng*), targeting both Korean and Chinese dwellers (see Figure 2.5). The housing project was still under construction when I visited in 2014.

Today, the Wudaokou area is identified as a multi-cultural centre of education, entertainment and commerce, accommodating Chinese and international students from all over the world. It has been labelled as “the centre of the universe” (*yuzhou zhongxin*) by the public in reference to both the diversity of residents and the extremely high price of real estate in this area (Zuo 2014). Korean business has become an integral part contributing to the cultural and social diversity in Wudaokou, yet the ethnic economy by no means predominates. Offering his outlook on the Korean concentration in Beijing, Mr Lee, a Korean diplomat, speculated that, “in the past we had one Koreatown in Wangjing, another in Wudaokou, but there will be multiple Koreatowns in Beijing in the near future because Korean people have begun to disperse”, when I visited him in the summer of 2016.

³³ As told by a real estate agency in Yanjiao, a fully-furnished apartment (56m²) costed 480,000 yuan (64,000 euro) to purchase in 2014.



Figure 2.5. The model of the ongoing housing project “*Shou'er tiancheng*” (Seoul Sweet City), displayed in the real estate sales centre in Yanjiao town, Hebei Province. Photograph by the author.

From emergence to diffusion, the destiny of the “Koreatowns” reflects the process in which different groups of Korean migrants experience the political-economic processes of Chinese urbanisation and internationalisation. In the 1990s, Korean small business owners found decent accommodation and formed residential and economic clusters in Wangjing owing to the advance of urbanisation, and despite the rigorous administration on foreigner’s accommodation. Nevertheless, they were subsequently squeezed out to more distant and scattered places in the transition to internationalisation, in comparison to the more affluent (i.e. expatriates, diplomats and the successful entrepreneurs) who were invited in. In the process, foreign residents were granted more freedom to choose where they wanted to reside and given rights to purchase properties. However, they were exposed to an unpredictable political and economic climate, e.g. the crack-down on “three-illegals” and the fluctuation in the real estate market. In brief, the above reveals that Koreans migrants are not arranged as a homogenous population group based on ethnic

cohesion, but rather tend to be divided into separate strata according to their professions, incomes and employment statuses in the Chinese political-economic transformations.

The Variation in Ethnic Incorporation

As discussed in the previous section, although South Korean migrants became residentially and economically concentrated, they were confronted with various barriers to maintaining these concentrations due to the unfolding internationalisation process in urban China. This poses further questions: To what extent are they organised and incorporated with their ethnic peers? In what ways do they interact with other ethnic minorities (e.g. the Korean Chinese) and the majority population (i.e. the Han Chinese)? Do these ethnic relations contribute to migrants' settlement into the Chinese context? By adopting anthropologist Don Handelman's typology (1977), I distinguish the "forms of ethnic incorporation" of Korean migrants as fourfold: the ethnic category; the ethnic network; the ethnic association; and the ethnic community, - ranging from the most loosely organised category, to the most tightly corporate community (Eriksen 1993, 41–45). I interpret this as a "non-developmental typology of ethnic organisation", in which different types may coexist in the same society and reflect the complex intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic relations (Eriksen 1993, 41–45). Subsequently, I made a selection of three aspects that I regard as central to addressing this issue: housing; business; and, social and religious organisations.

"The real estate agent is awesome", announced Haemin, a South Korean housewife, with great delight. She had arrived in Beijing with her husband and daughter only two months before we first met. Newly arrived, she and her family spoke very little Chinese and lacked experience dealing with Chinese people and daily life in Beijing. "People I have talked to most in the first month (after I arrived) are from the real estate agency, they helped me with almost everything (to settle down) ...now I hardly can live without them", she said. According to Haemin, the housing agency was run by Chaoxianzu (Korean Chinese), who have a cooperative relationship with the Korean enterprise that deployed her husband to work at its branch in Beijing.

Before departing from South Korea, Haemin had already been contacted by an agent committed to searching for and renting an apartment (in Wangjing) for the family according to their budget and housing expectations. Once accommodation had been secured, the agent arranged a contract, cleaning, designing the interior, and purchasing furniture requested by Haemin. Besides,

Chapter 2

the agent even hired the family a Chaoxianzu “*ayi*” (domestic worker) to work three days a week, cleaning, preparing cooking materials and doing the laundry. Haemin summarised, “there is a river flowing between us and Chinese people, and Korean Chinese are the ones who fill this gap and build a bridge”.

The Chaoxianzu-run real estate agencies in Wangjing, easily recognised by their Chinese and Korean bilingual signs, are mainly located in a couple of high-end residential compounds and focus on the business of rental houses for South Koreans (see Figure 2.6). By visiting a few agencies, I learned that the majority partner with South Korean enterprises and their major clients are the expatriate families who are relocated from Korea to China. Most agents described their customers as “demanding” (*nancihou*) and “having a high standard” (*yaoqiugao*) regarding accommodation. For instance, these clients require the apartment be completely clean, well-furnished, and many even demanded an “*ondol*” (a Korean-style underfloor heating system) in the house.



Figure 2.6. A Chaoxianzu-run real estate agency in Daxiyangxincheng, a high-end residential compound in Wangjing, Beijing. Photograph by the author.

“If I receive a Chinese client, my job ends as soon as he/she signs the contract (to rent an apartment), but if I get a Korean (client), what I do is endless”, stated Ms Zhang, a Chaoxianzu real estate manager in Daxiyangxincheng (Daxiyang for short), a high-end residential compound in Wangjing. Despite this, these housing agents declared that they felt obligated to help newcomers to settle in, and some even identified South Koreans as being their “blood-kin” and were aware of the difficulties they faced in communicating in Chinese with the local house owners. Most agents were proud of “the quality of service” (*fuwu zhiliang*) they provided to their Korean customers, in that this distinguished their business from other Chinese real estate agencies. Some called themselves “South Koreans’ housekeepers” (*Hanguoren de guanjia*), or “the second property management” (*di'er wuye*).³⁴ To support these claims, they showed me their basic service package provided to Korean clientele:

- Picking up at the airport;
- Cleaning up (free of charge);
- Moving (free of charge if it is movement within the neighbourhood);
- Instructing how to pay electricity and water bills;
- Repairing items (such as bulb, toilet, and everything else they can at a basic cost);
- Accompanying Korean mothers to children’s school (as interpreters);
- Accompanying to hospital (as interpreters); and
- Helping to search for babysitters, domestic workers, and drivers.

In return, South Korean enterprises committed to paying higher than average prices for house rentals, thereby keeping the agency business highly profitable and sustainable. Korean Chinese agents benefit from the commission that house owners pay for their service on every apartment they rent to South Korean clients (the amount of commission is equivalent to one month’s rent). Accordingly, Chinese house owners are lured into leasing their apartments to South Koreans due to greater income from their property. According to Mr Li, a real estate agency owner,

³⁴ Property management (*wuye*) refers to the “operation, control and oversight of real estate” in its most broad terms. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Property_management. Here, it refers to the service offered by professional and commercial companies to take care of public space and equipment in residential compounds. Korean Chinese adopted this term to imply their wide range of service.

a two-room apartment can be leased for 12,000 yuan (1,687 euro) per month in Huadingshijia (Huading for short), a high-end residential compound with a cluster of Korean residents, with this price being 1.5 times higher than for a comparable rental property in another neighbourhood nearby.

In this sense, South Korean expatriates, enterprises, and Korean Chinese real estate agents have formed a tightly knit “ethnic network” (Eriksen 1993, 42–43; Handelman 1977, 194–96). These three parties established regular interactions with one another and perceived their ethnic categories more in affinity than in opposition. They also showed moral obligations to support each other, although they did not function as a visible interest group. As a consequence, Korean expatriate employees and their families are separated from low-income and non-expat Korean dwellers. According to reports by several agents, roughly 30-35 per cent of 3,680 apartments in Daxiyang and nearly 40 per cent of 1,061 apartments in Huading were leased to Korean families, mostly expatriates. These expat households are surrounded by comfortable home-like “cultural bubbles” created by the Chaoxianzu agents, which severely reduce their direct contact with the Chinese society (Kurotani 2005, 12). A similar ethnic network can also be found in Korean Chinese service sectors, such as supermarkets (selling imported Korean food and products), guesthouses, and tourist agencies that cater to South Korean customers.

Despite this, the efforts made by South Korean small-scale businessmen and entrepreneurs to establish identical ethnic networks appear less productive. When they initially get involved in running a business in China, South Koreans are inclined to team up with Korean Chinese as business partners or to hire them as employees, anticipating that this relationship will be favourable and profitable for several reasons. They expect that the Korean Chinese, as their “blood-kin”, will work as their loyal and honest helpers in making profit in China. Additionally, they believe they can rely on these bilingual co-ethnics who are capable of not only translating and interpreting Chinese-Korean language, but also of providing updated information and knowledge on the Chinese economy and culture.

More importantly, cooperation with a Chinese national is considered as a crucial strategy to cope with local government constraints on the advancement of small-scale foreign businesses. In Beijing, the administrative procedure to register an enterprise requires a minimum of one million yuan (approximately 133,300 euro) as “registration capital” (*zhuce zijin*) for a “foreign-invested enterprise” (*waizi gongsi*). However, the amount of the required capital can be reduced ten times

Chapter 2

if starting a “Sino-foreign joint venture” (*hezi gongsi*). Hence, seeking a Chinese national as a business partner is the most feasible means of starting an enterprise especially for foreigners who do not have a large amount of capital.

Unfortunately, these aspirations often lack reality and are soon replaced by stories of South Koreans being betrayed and deceived by their Chaoxianzu business partners and employees. This is the case with businesswoman, Mrs Jeong, who told me that she has been cheated so many times in Chaoxianzu that she was superstitious of any name that included the word “chao”. She worked as a make-up artist in South Korea before coming to Beijing in the early 2000s. Her aim was to start a wholesale business and ship Korean cosmetics and other skincare products to sell in China. She based her prediction on the popularity of Korean fashion products among youth Chinese urbanites influenced by the rise of the Korean Wave (i.e. the increase in global popularity of South Korean popular culture since the 1990s).

With insufficient capital to register a foreign-invested company, she needed to seek collaboration with Chinese nationals and establish a joint-venture. Introduced by a South Korean businessman she knew from a Korean church in Beijing, Mrs Jeong was connected to a Korean Chinese woman, the director of a private hospital. “She (the Korean Chinese hospital director) has a pretty face like an angel and promised me that she would help me with my business... and said many sweet words”, said Mrs Jeong. Given that Mrs Jeong did not speak Mandarin and had little knowledge of the Chinese law and market, she was required to completely trust her partner to begin her first company. She also hired three Korean Chinese employees introduced to her by the hospital director.

Later on, she discovered that her employees had embezzled capital from the company. “The office rent was supposed to be 7,000 yuan, but they told me they paid 10,000 yuan. The accounting fee was supposed to be 300 yuan, but they asked for 3,000 yuan. The transportation fee was supposed to be 100 yuan, but they asked for 500 yuan...I found this out very late...of course, they put the money into their (own) pocket”. Before she could dismiss them, they stole valuable items including computers and disappeared without a trace. In addition, the hospital director told her that a batch of goods that they had shipped to China had been confiscated by Chinese customs because the import procedure had not complied with certain legal requirements. “I lost all my cosmetics, but I found out that she (the head of the hospital) bought a new car. I really wonder if (suspect that) she took (stole) all the products”, said Mrs Jeong.

Chapter 2

Mrs Jeong's story resembles those of many other Koreans in that the efforts of building economic collaboration by making use of ethnic solidarity do not lead to common prosperity, but rather to intra-ethnic conflicts and distrust (H. Kim 2010, 87–111). A fair explanation for this could be: South Koreans excessively trust and rely on their co-ethnics whom they do not know well (H. Kim 2010, 110). Nevertheless, I highlight that Mrs Jeong's experience also implies a structural dilemma with Korean small-scale business owners marginalised by the discourse of internationalisation in Chinese metropolises. By developing Beijing as an “internationalised metropolis”, the main target of the local government is to introduce large-scale enterprises, innovative industries, research and development sectors, as opposed to small business owners like Mrs Jeong (Cook 2006). Cooperating with Chinese nationals appears to be one of the few approaches available for foreigners to operate small-scale businesses in Beijing, and this places them in a highly dependent and vulnerable position.

The discourse of internationalisation in urban China underlies the unfolding process of ethnicity yielding to class, in which the identity of ethnic origin and shared cultural customs are diffused and integrated into a new social order based on the disparity between the more and the less affluent. Over the past ten years in Beijing, Mrs Jeong has been constantly searching for “reliable” business partners. Despite her collaborations with Korean Chinese, Han Chinese or other ethnic groups, there is little benefit that goes towards changing her unfavourable economic position in the government-mobilised internationalisation. Unlike Mrs Jeong, I learned that some South Korean business owners had relocated to more affordable districts, and some had simply quit their business and returned to home.

Yet, successful businesses were also evident. A couple of business owners who had managed to remain and prosper acknowledged that their businesses depended on local Chinese consumers, now more than ever due to the constant outflow of Korean residents. “Nowadays, a Korean business (regardless whether it is South Korean or Chaoxianzu) will develop well if it caters to both Korean and Chinese customers, those only catering to Koreans will go bankrupt easily”, asserted Mrs Woo, a South Korean medical therapist specialising in Chinese medicine and therapy. Mrs Woo and her husband have operated their own clinic in Wangjing for over ten years. In line with Mrs Woo's view, I witnessed Chinese university students and urbanites travelling long distances to Wangjing to consume “authentic” Korean food or to purchase imported Korean products in the supermarkets (see Figure 2.7). They represent the tremendous impact of the

widespread Korean Wave on the consumption patterns of the Chinese population. Particularly, I found the Korean style “*chimek*” (fried chicken and beer) bars popular among Chinese customers, influenced by the 2014 Korean drama “My Love From the Star” (see also Lin 2014). Visiting a *chimek* bar in Wangjing, I learned from the Han Chinese chef that over two-thirds of their monthly turnover is generated by Chinese rather than Korean clientele.



Figure 2.7. A Korean restaurant and bar cluster in a residential compound Wangjing xi yuan si qu. Photograph by the author.

This tendency is further exemplified by the success of the taekwondo training business (a Korean martial art) run by Mrs Chui and Mr Kim. Both were trained as professional taekwondo athletes in South Korea. Mr Kim opened the first taekwondo gymnasium in Wangjing area in the early 2000s. Mrs Chui studied Chinese at Beijing Foreign Language and Culture University before she joined the gymnasium as a coach and later as Mr Kim’s wife. At the time of meeting Mrs Chui and Mr Kim, they had over one thousand students enrolled in twenty-one gymnasiums in Beijing,

Chapter 2

ranging from four-year-olds to adults. Referring to their business success, Mrs Chui commented, “what is funny is that we hardly have any Korean students, and almost all our students are Chinese”.

The reason they have few Korean students, according to Mr Kim, lies in the controversial pedagogy that they adopt in training courses. This involves an extremely strict and almost ruthless approach to train students (mostly young children). For instance, lazy and disobedient students have to endure physical punishment such as being beaten with a stick, doing push-ups. This training approach was relentlessly criticised by many Korean parents, who condemned the coaches and their training methods as being indifferent and inhuman. In contrast, it had unexpectedly won a great deal of popularity among the Chinese parents, who appreciated Mr Kim’s pedagogy for curing their spoiled children, teaching them to obey rules and to be self-disciplined. Visiting a taekwondo gymnasium operated by Mrs Chui and Mr Kim, I spoke with a few of the parents accompanying their children to lessons. These parents stated that they were satisfied with the training approach and praised its “very authentic Korean way”.

The above stories, either successful or sorrowful, reveal these Korean business owners as loosely organised “ethnic categories”, representing the lowest degree of ethnic incorporation (Eriksen 1993, 41–42; Handelman 1977, 189–94). Although they identify themselves and are considered by others as being culturally distinctive, they failed to establish effective business networks based on a strong sense of ethnic cohesion. Hence, it is problematic to state that ethnic boundaries are identical with cultural boundaries and that a shared culture is the basis of an ethnic identity (Eriksen 1993, 36). It is not uncommon for people to transcend ethnic boundaries and to identify with certain cultural elements that they recognise as different from their own (e.g. cuisine, pedagogy). In this regard, Mrs Chui and Mr Kim’s success indicates that certain Korean ethnic values are possibly opposed by members of their own ethnic group, although they are accepted by Chinese parents and integrated into their child-rearing practices.

The final form of ethnic incorporation that will be considered is the ethnic association. According to Handelman, “when persons, who define themselves as belonging together in ethnic terms, also begin to maintain that they hold common interests which they only can express together, they begin to act ‘in association’ to accomplish these goals” (Handelman 1977, 196). In Beijing, there are approximately ten South Korean social associations (*tanch'e*) that are officially registered at the Korean embassy. These associations represent highly diverse interests. For instance, the Korean Chamber of Commerce (*chungguk'an'guk sanghoe*) exclusively admits large enterprises

Chapter 2

and conglomerates as its members, whereas the Korean Small and Medium-sized Enterprises Association in Beijing (*pukkyōng han'guk chungsogiōp hyōp'oe*) represents the interest of smaller and younger companies. Korean students in Beijing have a united organisation, the Federation of Korean students in Beijing (*pukkyōng han'guk'aksaeng yōnhap'oe*), and yet they are also divided into the separate student unions that represent individual universities.

The Association of South Koreans in China (*chaejungguk han'guginhoe*) and the Korean Society of Beijing (*chaebukkyōng han'guginhoe*), in principle, represent the interests of the wider Korean population in China. In reality, they are manipulated by a small group of entrepreneurs and businessmen who aim to expand personal and business networks through participation in social activities. During my fieldwork, I became acquainted with a staff member of one of these associations via a Chinese language study group. She refused a request to talk about the association explaining that there was no information worth writing about. When I revisited her in the summer of 2016, she conceded her concerns about the functional limitations confronting the association, which she felt did not match the name and interests that it supposedly represents. According to her, most events organised by the association, such as planting trees on the outskirts of Beijing, failed to draw people's attention and hence the participants were primarily confined to staff members, their families and acquaintances.

By contrast, a Korean diplomat claimed that the legitimacy of foreign associations in China was the underlying cause of the limitations noted in activities and participants. According to him, the Korea Chamber of Commerce in China was the only organisation (out of the ten organisations) that had been legally registered at the local public security bureau. The other associations were unable to find any legal items or regulations to initiate the procedure of registration. The complication being that current Chinese law only has jurisdiction over foreign NGOs (non-governmental organisations) and associations founded outside of the Chinese territory, therefore no legal items can be applied to those established within the Chinese border.³⁵ Lacking legitimate registration directly leads to constraints on the scale of events organised by the association, i.e.

³⁵ A new law, *Zhongguo renmin gongheguo jingwai feizhengfu zuzhi jingnei guanlifa* (law of the People's Republic of China on the Administration of Activities of Overseas Non-Governmental Organizations within the Territory of China), has been implemented in July, 2017. However, this law still cannot be applied to the foreign associations that are founded within Chinese territory, which cannot change the legal state of the most South Korean associations that are founded in China. See more details on <http://china.huanqiu.com/hot/2016-07/9119063.html>.

Chapter 2

only small-scale (no more than 100 participants) are potentially permitted by the local public security bureau that holds the main executive power over these foreign-run organisations.

In addition, the social and cultural events that represent an ethnic alliance between South Korean and Korean Chinese are regarded as inappropriate by local police. In 2016, I learned of an incident that had occurred in late 2015 to the Association of South Koreans in China. The association planned an ethnic culture event to celebrate the coming new year, wanting to invite association leaders from both South Korean and Chaoxianzu sides, and to entertain them with traditional Korean singing and dancing performances. They named the event “*hanmijogŭi pam*” (A Night of the Korean Nation). Initially, they applied and received permission from the public security officials to organise this event. Shortly before the event started, officials demanded they cancel the schedule due to the excessive number of the participants (250 people, including 190 South Koreans and 60 Korean Chinese). Despite this, the event did eventually take place. The association compromised and agreed to change the theme of the event to “*chaejung han'gugin uhoŭi pam*” (A Friendly Night of South Koreans in China), a condition required by local police, as a means to understate the implication of unity of Korean ethnicity.

In this regard, the above social associations represent an advanced form of ethnic incorporation in Handelman’s typology. However, the barriers to expressing the common interests of a wide range of the Korean population are also obvious. The intervention by the local government plays a crucial role in preventing any possible large-scale ethnic campaigns and ethnic alliances from forming and growing. Another key reason is perhaps that there are insufficient common interests between divergent groups of Koreans, and these associations are merely representative of small and specific groups of people. This, therefore, demonstrates ethnic groups are essentially “interest groups” (Glazer and Moynihan 1975, 7).

The Korean Christian churches, in contrast to these associations, are more likely to aggregate a wide range of the Korean population. There are a number of large-scale South Korean Christian churches in Beijing, e.g. Onnuri, 21C, Full Gospel, - each congregation numbering over one thousand believers. In addition to the weekly Sunday routine, church members attend multiple fellowship meetings on a weekly basis. These meetings are on a smaller scale and are divided by age, gender, and location of their accommodation. Many Korean residents acknowledge that going to the church and meeting other Christians as the only way, or one of the few approaches, to get to know their ethnic peers and to obtain useful information on daily life. As the studies on Korean

Chapter 2

churches in the United States show, religious participation serves crucial social functions for church members and the Korean immigrant community as a whole (Min 1992; Hurh and Kim 1990).

What differentiates the situation in China is that Chinese law explicitly prohibits foreigners from being engaged in any Chinese religious groups or converting Chinese citizens into believers, and vice versa (SARA 2007). Accordingly, the public security officials in Beijing highlighted the jointly religious activities between South Koreans and Korean Chinese as a pressing problem, in order to avoid “the infiltration of foreign religious forces” (*waiguo zongjiao shili shentou*) and to achieve religious stability and social harmony (Feng 2008). Despite this, I witnessed a great deal of ethnic intimacy between the two Korean groups in small-scale family churches in Beijing. Many of these churches are not independent organisations but rather are closely connected with their mother churches in South Korea. They regularly receive financial support and frequently invite pastors from South Korea or the United States to preach. At a Chaoxianzu family church in Wangjing, I witnessed an entire missionary team from South Korea spreading the Gospel through providing free medical treatment, including twenty professional dentists who served hundreds of believers, family members and friends over three full days (see Figure 2.8).



Figure 2.8 Dentists from South Korea provide medical treatment to believers at a Chaioxianzu family church in Wangjing, as a way to spread the Gospel. It is written on the banner, “Welcome XX medical volunteering team” (XX refers the name of the team omitted by the author). Beneath the banner hangs an image of Jesus. Photograph by the author.

Conclusion

To summarise, I argue that the “Koreatown” in China cannot be understood in the same way as the “Koreatown” that originates from the North American context. In other words, the “Koreatown” in China is not an “ethnic enclave economy”, where immigrants occupy a business niche, support co-ethnics, and retain a strong sense of ethnic solidarity (Wilson and Portes 1980). Neither can it be defined as an “ethnic community” that entails tightly-knit ethnic networks and ethnic associations that express a wide range of common interest in a territory with more or less permanent physical boundaries (Eriksen 1993, 43–44; Handelman 1977, 197–98). Rather, I

Chapter 2

understand it as an “ethnic unbonding” society, a term used by Sociologist Manuel Castells to describe one trait of the modern society, in which ethnicity as a source of meaning and identity has been suppressed by more powerful principles (Castells 1997, 52–59).

Globalisation, particularly the fluctuation and shift of the regional and global economy, shapes population movements between China and Korea. Rapid transformation of urbanisation and internationalisation mobilised by governments in Chinese metropolises, such as Beijing, have a great impact on the settlement of migrants and the formation and maintenance of ethnic communities. Embedded in these grand processes, migrants organise themselves in various forms of category, network, or association, which is highly divergent upon the specific interests that people pursue on concrete occasions. In this sense, socio-economic status, i.e. class, shows a tendency to prevail over the identification of origin and culture, i.e. ethnicity. These findings are significant. They serve as a solid foundation and starting point for my further investigation of the internal dynamics of South Korean migrants, and their relations and identities with both the host society and the home country through the lens of the “educational desire.”

