

GENDER, ETHNICITY,
MARKET FORCES,
AND COLLEGE
CHOICES

Observations of Ethnic
Chinese in Korea

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It has been an eventful journey from the time I began my graduate studies a number of years ago to this moment. This book, the product of that time and work, represents the realization of a humble but ambitious goal.

I would like to dedicate this book to my children - my lifelines Donald and Katherine. They shouldered the burdens and stress of my journey while keeping me focused on my goal.

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Abstract

This study is about Korea's ethnic Chinese population and the factors influencing their educational choices, especially of higher education. Physically indistinguishable, the ethnic Chinese in Korea comprise only 0.5% of the entire population, and, due to strict patrilineal citizenship policies, have been unable to attain citizenship. In the past, their children were educated in ethnic schools which prepared them to study in Taiwanese universities. In more recent years the trend in college choice has changed with a majority of the graduates of Chinese ethnic secondary schools entering Korean universities.

Why has there been a shift in educational choice among the ethnic Chinese students in Korea (Korean-Huaqiaos) from predominantly preferring Taiwanese universities in the past to a current preference for Korean universities? This study sought to answer that question by investigating the causes and the extent of the shift in educational choice among the Korean-Huaqiaos from historical, social, policy, and comparative perspectives.

Documents from governmental and academic sources were used for trend and policy analysis. Questionnaires were distributed to senior students at the Seoul Overseas Chinese High School (SOCHS) to understand university preference as well as their perceptions of Korean and Taiwanese societies. The results of document analysis and the information gathered from the questionnaires were used in in-depth interviews with students, parents, teachers, and alumni of SOCHS, and Seoul Huaqiao community leaders to understand why this shift occurred and its impact on the Korean-Huaqiao community.

The research revealed that college choice of Korean-Huaqiao changed in relation to 1) the political and legal status of this minority

population in the Korean society, 2) changing political realities and social perceptions, 3) varying access to educational opportunities, 4) community pressure, 5) gender, and 6) the increasing or diminishing power of ethnic identity.

This study's findings contribute to the issue of college choice by asserting that decisions made by ethnic communities can have an enormous impact on individual choice; a point which has not been acknowledged in the research about college choice.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Problem Statement

In modern society, education is often seen as a vehicle of social mobility. While the myth of social mobility through education may be exaggerated, the value of schooling for socioeconomic attainment is well established (Olneck, 1995). Especially for immigrant children, schooling has been considered “an avenue out of poverty and into the middle class” (Olneck, 1995, p. 322).

Guskin (1965, p. 151) notes “The effect of the school on the identity, attitudes and aspirations of the students is quite understandable” for “almost every society, the educational institutions represent the major socialization institutions for youth. At an age when individuals are most susceptible to alterations in their identity, the school presents a rather consistent picture of desired behaviors. Also, the school is the major agency of society for training in new skills and areas of knowledge which will enable the adolescent to adapt to the larger society.” Schools thus take over from the family the socializing function. Assimilation which is an element of socialization “refers to the process whereby one group, usually a subordinate one, becomes indistinguishable from another group, usually a dominant one” (Feinberg and Soltis, 1992, p. 25). Therefore, schooling has historically presented and continues to present a challenge to the values and heritage of immigrant groups (Olneck, 1995). The dilemma of whether to assimilate or to maintain an ethnic identity has had profound consequences for immigrant families, often disrupting relationships between generations by transforming the cultural values, practices, and identities of each generation. For this reason, the schooling process sometimes

becomes a source of tension, discomfort, and conflict between first-generation immigrants and their native-born offspring. In less developed societies, even primary level education can result in a separation between children and parents, while in developed societies, such as the United States, Western Europe, and Korea, higher education opens the door to a profession, thus, social mobility. In certain respects, these same attitudes influence educational choices, especially those regarding higher education, made by ethnic Chinese in Korea.

The schooling of immigrants and ethnic minorities thus holds substantial “symbolic power” (Olneck, 1995, p. 310) for both the majority population and its minorities, as it reflects the historical context and the philosophy that inform a given society. In the case of ethnic minorities, the relationship between schooling and cultural values is even more complex, for education often acts as a homogenizing force to integrate immigrant youth into the mainstream language and culture. For this reason, “research on immigrants and education illuminates important societal beliefs and aspirations, prevailing educational policies and practices, and contentious debates about multiculturalism” (Olneck, 1995). In the case of the United States, which is a heterogeneous society, educators’ responses to immigrants in the early part of the twentieth century led to the notion of “Americanization” as the goal of education for immigrants. They “thought to promote cultural conformity in order to integrate the population and to enhance immigrants participation in national life” (Olneck, 1995, p. 312).

Korea, which has very small numbers of minorities, is a unique case because it is known as one of the most homogeneous societies in the world. The ethnic Chinese who arrived in Korea at the turn of the twentieth century represent the single largest ethnic minority group, comprising less than one percent of the total Korean population. The title “invisible minority” refers to several elements: small population and indistinguishable physical characteristics with the host population, which make them able to blend into the host society more easily if one chooses, than racially different groups, such as African-Americans in the US. Although ethnic Chinese in Korea have not been traumatized from the dominant society, this minority population’s invisibility stands out in their preclusion from the political and economic arena of Korean society.

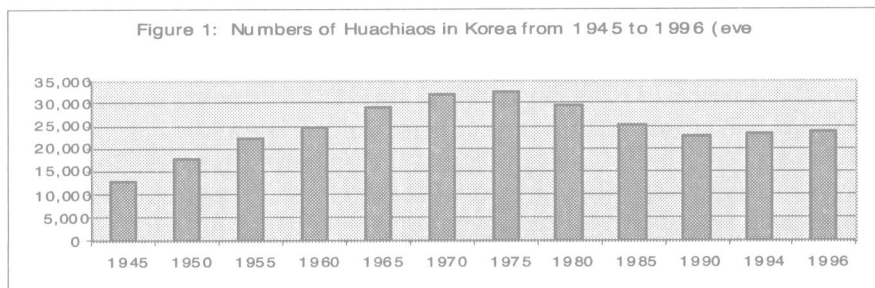
The ethnic Chinese in Korea calls himself or herself *Han-Hua*, which means Korean-Chinese or simply Huaqiao. In this study I will use the English and Chinese term Korean-Chinese, Huaqiao, and Korean-Huaqiao interchangeably. There are numerous way to spell “Overseas Chinese” and Huaqiao(s). For my purpose, I will use “Overseas Chinese” and Huaqiao(s), which may differ from others’ spelling of these words.

Following the Korean War (1950-1953), the ethnic Chinese were unable to return home to China and, at the same time, there was no fresh influx of immigrants to Korea. Thus, the majority of ethnic Chinese in Korea belong to the generation of those who were born and grew up in Korea.

Korea is an “economic miracle” that has achieved an incredible record of growth. Three decades ago its GDP per capita was comparable with that of the poorer countries of Africa and Asia, such as Ghana and Indonesia. Beginning in 1962, however, Korea launched a series of five-year economic development plans, resulting in Korea’s emergence as one of the leaders among developing countries as it has become more urban and industrialized. Today its GDP per capita is eight times India’s, fifteen times North Korea’s, and is already comparable with the weaker economies of the European Union (*CIA World Fact Book*, 1998). Economic strength has enabled Korea to successfully host the Asian Games in 1986, the Olympics in 1988, and the Taejon EXPO ‘93. Korea has also elected to co-host the 2002 World Cup with Japan. All of these events demonstrate remarkable political, economic, social, and cultural progress. Korean education has also experienced extraordinary growth: quantitative expansion from the 1960s through the 1970s and qualitative development in the 1980s. This growth in education is credited as the driving force behind Korea’s national progress and growing international prestige, producing the workforce needed for industrialization and democratization.

Korea’s rising economic power has had a significant impact on the relationship between the ethnic Chinese and the larger society. When Korea was a colonized nation and economically underdeveloped, the more affluent ethnic Chinese remained aloof from Korean society. But as the economy developed and the nation grew politically more stable, this minority group could no longer maintain its separateness but rather sought to develop stronger ties with the larger community.

Rapid economic growth is often followed by an influx of immigrants (e.g. guest workers in Western Europe), and, in most cases, the second generation decides to stay in the host nation. However, in Korea the minority ethnic Chinese population decreased during the prosperous period of the 1970s through the 1980s (see figure 1).



According to the Korean Ministry of Justice's *1996 Annual Report of Statistics on Legal Migration*, there are 23,282 ethnic Chinese residing in Korea as legal aliens. Moreover, many ethnic Chinese in Korea believe that about 7,000 to 8,000 resident Chinese people in Korea are floating members, residing elsewhere but keeping resident alien status in Korea. Thus, the actual number of ethnic Chinese in Korea is approximately 15,000, with some estimates as low as 10,000 (*The Economist*, 1996). One study claims that Korea had the greatest loss of its ethnic Chinese population (seven percent) during the 1980s (Poston Jr., Mao, & Yu, 1994), with the result that there was a decrease of more than fifty percent since the 1970s (*Kukmin Daily*, Aug. 24, 1992). This population decrease was due to Chinese emigration rather than to the effects of low fertility or high mortality. Rather than entering Korean universities, ethnic Chinese students opted for Taiwanese universities upon graduation from their ethnic secondary schools. Admission to Taiwanese universities was often utilized as a way to emigrate to Taiwan: it was an opportunity to settle in Taiwan and bring over the remaining family members from Korea upon graduation. The ethnic Chinese in Korea claim that various adverse political and economic forces have led to emigration of the Chinese population from the host country (see figure 2). Further, the majority of ethnic Chinese in Korea has been vague about staying in Korea, while strongly defining themselves by their ethnic identity.



Such a trend began to reverse during the Seoul Olympics of 1988, and as a result, at present, approximately seventy percent of ethnic Chinese students upon graduation from ethnic secondary schools prefer to study in Korean universities as opposed to Taiwanese universities (see table 1).

Table 1: Seoul Overseas Chinese High School (SOCHS) Seniors in Taiwanese University Track and Korean University Track

Source: SOCHS 1998

Year	Taiwanese University Track Student Numbers (%)	Korean University Track Student Numbers (%)	Total Student Numbers (%)
1992	68 (54)	59 (46)	127 (100)
1993	75 (49)	79 (51)	154 (100)
1994	63 (46)	75 (54)	138 (100)
1995	62 (47)	69 (53)	131 (100)
1996	61 (41)	86 (59)	147 (100)
1997	108 (64)	170 (64)	170 (100)

Students who apply to Korean universities are exempted from taking competitive entrance examinations, as Korean students must. Although the Chinese claim that they experience discrimination in employment opportunities, they are now choosing to stay in Korea after graduation. While more business opportunities have developed in China and there are more possibilities to travel abroad, including to the United States, Taiwan, and China, not many Korean-Chinese have resettled in China and elsewhere. The Chinese population in Korea is

stabilizing, a trend that coincides with the increasing enrollment in Korean institutions of higher education.

Therefore, the concept of college choice has largely two meanings: the choice of individuals, which has the more conventional meaning in US literature; and the choice of minority communities, which shapes their decision regarding special schools for their children. The shift in Korean-Chinese students' preference for Korean rather than Taiwanese universities may reflect their changes in perceptions on both the individual and community level (e.g. improved opportunities such as fewer political constraints, better economic incentives, and stronger social networks for the ethnic Chinese in Korea). This study will illuminate the impact of these political and social changes by focusing on the overarching question, "Why has there been a shift in the choice of higher education among the ethnic Chinese in Korea?" The following sub-questions were asked in order to answer the main research question:

1. What is the state of majority/minority relations in Korea, and how does this relationship influence ethnic Chinese students' college choices?
2. How does community choice influence individual choice?
3. What were the Korean government's social, economic, and educational policies toward the ethnic Chinese since 1945, and how did these policies influence this minority's educational choices?
4. What are the advantages and disadvantages of studying in Korean and Taiwanese universities?
5. To what extent have Chinese students in Korea chosen Korean over Taiwanese universities?
6. What do students, parents, teachers, and community leaders think has changed so those students now prefer Korean rather than Taiwanese universities? What are the implications of recent trends?

Comparative, historical, and policy perspectives will deepen the understanding of the changes in the Korean-Huaqiao students' choices in higher education. I employ a comparative perspective to investigate and compare, within a broader spectrum, the experience of the ethnic Chinese in Korea and minorities in other societies. In order to understand the characteristics of the Korean-Huaqiaos, I examine Chinese immigration to Korea from a historical perspective, and consider this phenomenon in light of modern Korean history. I also study the educational, social, and economic policies of the Korean and Taiwanese governments, which have played a critical role in the development of the