

**Urban Theology Paper**  
**The Korean-Chinese living in NY and NJ**

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## **About the Korean-Chinese in NY and NJ**

### **- Who is the Korean-Chinese**

The Korean-Chinese are one of China's official ethnic minorities mainly living in northeast China. They are now known in Chinese as the Chaoxian and Chosun in Korean, which is the word for North Korea. As China's official ethnic minority, they have their own autonomous region called the Yanbian Prefecture, where they run the schools, hospitals, and local government.<sup>1</sup> In China, the Korean-Chinese are estimated at about 2 million. According to the Korean-Chinese Association of USA and the Korean-Chinese Association of New York, there are approximately 70 to 80 thousand Korean-Chinese in the US and 50 thousand in NY and NJ. With an estimated population of 20 thousand in New York City, the Korean-Chinese are an increasing presence in this area. The Korean-Chinese in the US began to emigrate to the US as industrial trainees in the early 1990s and the numbers of the Korean-Chinese are rapidly increasing every year since 2000.<sup>2</sup>

### **- History of the Korean-Chinese**

The ancestors of the Korean-Chinese moved to northeast China from what is now North Korea between 1860 and 1945. Most of them came to China for farming and manual labor to make their living. In the era under the colonial administration of imperial Japan (1910-1945), a lot of people who participated in the independence movement of Korea came to northeast China to continue their anti-Japanese fights. After the end of World War II, about 40 percent of people came back to the homeland, but 60 percent remained in this area. In 1952, China acknowledged them as an

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<sup>1</sup> "Korean-Chinese in the New York Metro Area," *Korean-Chinese in the New York Metro Area* (All Peoples Initiative, 2009))

<sup>2</sup> Sik Jong Kong, "More Korean-Chinese Choose New York," *Dong-A Ilbo*, January 27, 2006, <http://www.donga.com/en/article/all/20060127/245710/1/More-Korean-Chinese-Choose-New-York?m=kor>)

official ethnic minority of China and permitted them to have the autonomous region and to establish self-government in northeast China, Yanbian Prefecture in Jilin Province and Shenyang in Liaoning Province. From 1978, as a result of the Chinese economic reform, the Korean-Chinese started to move not only to other areas of China but also to foreign countries, such as Korea, Japan, Russia, America, and Canada.<sup>3</sup>

## **- Social Issues of the Korean-Chinese**

### **1. Identity Issue**

The major problem of Korean-Chinese is the identity issue. Significant numbers of the Korean-Chinese have various degrees of difficulties in their personal and social life due to confusion and disruption of their identity. Most of all, the ethnic identity problem has been an essential issue, and it has impacted on the Korean-Chinese community seriously through their history. The confusion of ethnic identity has produced and remained numerous deep wounds and indelible scars among the Korean-Chinese people. The main cause of the ethnic identity problem is described as a dual identities issue.<sup>4</sup> The Korean-Chinese are struggling between the identities of Chinese and Korean. The Korean-Chinese has been exploited and discriminated against and suspected by China and Korea according to the political and ideological policies of two countries. Due to this deep-rooted resentment, disbelief, and wounds, the Korean-Chinese who live in the US tend to keep a distance from both Chinese and Korean immigrant communities and avoid close contact with them. They have tried to make their independent immigrant community, and the size of this community is significantly growing in NY and NJ through the successful adaptation and strong unity between the Korean-Chinese people.

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<sup>3</sup> Jiang Shunhua, "Invited Scholars and Experts' Seminar," *Research Group for Global Korean Business and Culture* (September 14, 2006))

<sup>4</sup> 김현, "한중 혼혈 민족 정체성", *한중문화연구* (1993))

## **2. Family Issue**

Most of the Korean-Chinese have experienced family disorganization as the consequence of industrialization and urbanization driven by Chinese economic reform. In the midst of a rapid switch from the agricultural to the industrial society, strong family bonding started to break down, and most young people left their homes to grab the opportunity of a better income. From the period of Chinese economic reform in 1978, over 70 percent of the Korean-Chinese who are workable age left their hometown and have been separated from their family members to earn foreign money and to find a better job.<sup>5</sup> Most of the Korean-Chinese who live in the US are no exception. Most young parents leave their homes to earn money, and their children are raised by their grandparents. The aberration of their children in China is becoming a huge problem in Korean-Chinese society.

## **3. Ideology Issue**

Because the Korean-Chinese became legal citizens of China from 1952 and they have lived and been educated under the rule of communism, it is not rare that they have various degreed difficulties in adapting to capitalistic economy and its system. The consumerist values of the affluent society create confusion in their world view and cause economic and social disruption in their old and traditional values.<sup>6</sup> As a result, many Korean-Chinese people are struggling with the habit of overspending, impulse buying, lookism, materialism, and a get-rich-quick fever.

## **4. Social Discrimination Issue**

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<sup>5</sup> Kwang Sung Park, "Labor Flux of Korean-Chinese and Social Changes in Global Era," *Seoul National University Graduate School: Department of Sociology*, 2006)

<sup>6</sup> Seokman Kwon, "Acculturative Stress and Psychological Health of Korean Chinese in Korea," *Seoul National University Graduate School: Department of Psychology IV* (2007): p. 64)

The Korean-Chinese have been discriminated against from China and Korea. In China, they have been treated as a powerless minority who insist on Korean culture and tradition. Also, in Korea, they have been regarded as ignorant foreigners who came from the undeveloped marginal province of China. In spite of the great advantages of the bilingual and bicultural ability of the Korean-Chinese, they have received discriminations due to their accent and their different manners.<sup>7</sup> Politically, the governments of China and Korea have used the Korean-Chinese people according to their benefits and policies. In the US, these discriminations against the Korean-Chinese are still existing and influencing on their social and economic relations.<sup>8</sup>

## **- Cultural Issues of the Korean-Chinese**

### **1. Using Languages**

In China, the Korean-Chinese are allowed to keep their language and cultural traditions, and unlike some other minorities, they are not harassed by the Chinese government. As a result, Most of the Korean-Chinese can speak both Mandarin and Korean fluently. But due to their accent that Koreans immediately identify as Korean-Chinese, most of the Korean-Chinese experience difficulties in adjustment in South Korea and Korean immigrant society. On the other hand, the Chinese immigrants communities are so closed to other ethnic people and they have not received Korean-Chinese immigrants as their communities' members. Consequently, instead of absorbing as Korean or Chinese people, the Korean-Chinese chose to establish their own community in the US. Through the rapidly increasing numbers of Korean-Chinese immigrant people, they could settle down successfully in the US as an independent immigrant community. These days, the

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<sup>7</sup> Sik Jong Kong, "More Korean-Chinese Choose New York," *Dong-A Ilbo*, January 27, 2006, <http://www.donga.com/en/article/all/20060127/245710/1/More-Korean-Chinese-Choose-New-York?m=kor>)

<sup>8</sup> Chang-hyun Roh, "The Korean-Chinese, Another Gentile in Korean Immigrant Society," *Hannam Daily*, November 3, 2009)

Korean-Chinese are playing a significant role as a human bridge between two immigrant communities, the Koreans and the Chinese in NY and NJ.

## **2. Hybrid Culture**

Officially, the Korean-Chinese are permitted to sustain their Korean tradition and culture in China, but most of them do not want to belong to the culture of China or Korea by the influence of long-term exploitation of the two countries. Instead, the Korean-Chinese built hybrid culture between China and Korea. This hybrid culture has been made through cultural modification by the dual ethnic identity of the Korean-Chinese people.<sup>9</sup>In the Us, Korean-Chinese people have received American culture as well, so they are embracing multiple cultures through their ability and capacity of modification of different cultures.

## **3. Cultural Conflicts between Generations**

The younger generation of the Korean-Chinese tends to have a great affinity for China and capitalism because they were born after the Chinese economic reform and exposed much more to capitalism through their overseas labors. Also, the increasing national power of China powerfully drew their young generation's affinity. On the contrary, the older generation prefers Korean culture because of their familiarity. Some of them want to remain faithful to the last to Korea as descendants of activists of the Korean independence movement. In line with the disorganization of the family system caused by the Chinese economic opening, the cultural and generational conflicts are being aggravated more and more in the Korean-Chinese community.

## **- Economic Issues of Korean-Chinese**

### **1. Major Types of Occupation**

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<sup>9</sup> 曹炳, “中韩经济合作”, (1997)

Most of the Korean-Chinese people in NY and NJ are working in restaurants, nail shops, and construction companies as a manual laborer. But with the ability to speak both Korean and Mandarin and their connections to China, some Korean-Chinese have great opportunities to attract international business and tap into two large ethnic markets of Korea and China.<sup>10</sup> As their numbers grow and they gain a foothold in the economy, they are becoming a considerable force in NY and NJ.

## **2. Money Flows**

Because almost 70 to 80 percent of the Korean-Chinese in the US are living separated from their family, most of them are sending their money to their family in China when they receive their salary. There are many legal difficulties and demands to come to the US from China, but if they can work in the US, they usually earn 3 to 4 folds income comparing to working in other countries. So, most young Korean-Chinese want to work in the US, and some of them choose illegal immigration at their own risk.<sup>11</sup> Although exact information is not available, it is considered that significant numbers of the Korean-Chinese are illegal immigrants. Generally, in order to enter the US, one adult has to pay about 30 to 40 thousand dollars to their illegal immigrant brokers, and this is an astronomical amount of money in China.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, a lot of Korean-Chinese illegal immigrants have huge debts to repay, and this economic pressure drives them to work straight through Sunday and night and day.

## **- Religious Issues of the Korean-Chinese**

### **1. Christianity in the Koreans-Chinese**

<sup>10</sup> Sik Jong Kong, "More Korean-Chinese Choose New York," *Dong-A Ilbo*, January 27, 2006, <http://www.donga.com/en/article/all/20060127/245710/1/More-Korean-Chinese-Choose-New-York?m=kor>)

<sup>11</sup> Kyung-hwa Song, "Beyond the Pacific Ocean 'The Sorrow of a Nail Shop'," *Hankyoreh News*, November 18, 2011, [http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/society/society\\_general/506029.html](http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/society/society_general/506029.html))

<sup>12</sup> Sik Jong Kong, "The Number of Korean-Chinese is exploding in New York," *DBA News*, February 3, 2006, <http://www.dbanews.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=1609>)

In 1903, the first Korean-Chinese church built in northeast China because some Korean Christians came to this area and settled down. From 1903 to 1949, there were a few Korean-Chinese churches in northeast China. But after the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, all churches were forced to close, and religious freedom was deprived by the communist regime. In 1978, the government of China proclaimed the reform and opening-up policy in China, and the Korean-Chinese churches could reopen their doors to the Korean-Chinese people in northeast China. Unlike mainland China, in the Korean-Chinese prefecture, the Korean-Chinese people could have their own churches instead of the controlled church by the communist government. According to the statistics of China, among 2 million people of the Korean-Chinese, the numbers of Christians are estimated at about 120 thousand people.<sup>13</sup> In recent years, the Chinese government expands and strengthens the surveillance, control, and restrictions of Christians. New restrictions on the internet, social media, non-governmental organizations, and the 2018 regulations on religion are strictly applied, increasingly spread throughout the country, and all seriously limit freedom of Christians. According to Open Doors’ World Watch List 2020, today, many churches are being monitored and closed down, not only independent house churches but also some government-sanctioned churches. The government even banned the online sale of the Bible.<sup>14</sup> The Korean-Chinese churches are no exception in this persecution of the communist government.

## 2. Religious Asylum

Most of the Korean-Chinese came to the US to earn money, but small numbers of Korean-Chinese came to this country to escape the persecution against Christians and to achieve

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<sup>13</sup> 朴炳, “중국 조선 교인 현황,” *세계교회협의회 한국위원회*, (세계교회협의회 한국위원회 2005))

<sup>14</sup> “China,” Open Doors USA (Open Doors), accessed April 22, 2020, <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/china/>

religious and political freedom.<sup>15</sup> These Korean-Chinese Christians have received great help from Korean missionaries in China, Korean immigrant churches, and the Korean-Chinese churches in the US. But the process of assigning legal status to them based on their claim is very difficult and demands a lot of money, so it is not rare that these Korean-Chinese Christians give up to apply for asylum.

### **3. The Korean-Chinese Churches**

From the early 1990s, the Korean-Chinese churches started to open in the US. In the beginning, some Korean immigrant churches started to serve the Korean-Chinese immigrants. through ESL and computer classes for them. With the increasing numbers of the Korean-Chinese immigrants, the Korean-Chinese people began to worship with their own people, and several churches for the Korean-Chinese immigrants emerged in NY and NJ.<sup>16</sup> These days, the Korean-Chinese churches are playing a vital role as a pivot of a fellowship of the Korean-Chinese immigrants.

### **Biblical and Theological Framework**

#### **- The Foreigner Residing among You**

*“The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the LORD your God.” (Leviticus 19:34)*

*“Since you call on a Father who judges each person’s work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear.” (1 Peter 1:17)*

The Korean-Chinese have been scattered all over the world, and most of them are living separated from their family in strange countries. They are struggling with not only economic

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<sup>15</sup> Kyung-Hwa Song, “Beyond the Pacific Ocean 'The Sorrow of a Nail Shop',” *Hankyoreh News*, November 18, 2011, [http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/society/society\\_general/506029.html](http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/society/society_general/506029.html))

<sup>16</sup> Ji-Eun Bang, “New York Chosun Church Embracing the Wounds of the Korean-Chinese,” *News M*, May 25, 2010, <http://www.newsm.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=1921>

pressures but also physical, emotional, and spiritual loneliness by uprootedness from a familiar environment and severance of relationships surrounding them. Most of the Korean-Chinese feel anxiety due to their unstable social status in the US. Also, they are facing unceasing hard labor every day. These Korean-Chinese immigrants' circumstances are closely akin to the situations of Jews in exile or Jewish slaves in Egypt. The Word of God teaches us that we, Christians, must remember that we are foreigners and exiles in this world. Also, for we are foreigners in this world, we have to respect other foreigners residing among us and love them as ourselves. As their sisters and brothers, we should fill their needs and embrace their wounds. Almost all Korean-Chinese immigrants don't know Jesus Christ, and many of them have to work every Sunday. So, with compassionate family love, Christians should receive them without barriers and convey the gospel and serve them in reverent fear of God who accepted us as His family.

### **- The Exodus of the Korean-Chinese**

***“I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.” (Exodus 6:7)***

***“I brought you up from the land of Egypt and ransomed you from the house of slavery. And I sent before you Moses, Aaron and Miriam.” (Micah 6:4)***

When we see the Korean-Chinese immigrants with a Christian perspective, even though they don't think they are blessed and led by God, the Korean-Chinese immigrants could get amazing opportunities to come and see Jesus Christ in the US. They lived and were educated under the communist regime, and over 95 percent of them didn't know who Jesus is and what the Bible is before they came to the US. With the help and serving of Korean immigrant churches and the

Korean-Chinese churches, more and more people became to know who God is and what God has done for them. Their journey to the US can be compared to the exodus of Jewish slaves from Egypt. Through the exodus from communism and atheism, they are called to be people of God, and God gives Himself as their God. Also, God uses the Korean immigrant and the Korean-Chinese churches as Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, who were sent before the Korean-Chinese immigrants who help them to meet God, who is their true redeemer and savior.

### **- Refuge for the Korean-Chinese**

*“The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer. My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.” (Psalm 18:2)*

*“For you have been a defense for the helpless, a defense for the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shade from the heat; For the breath of the ruthless is like a rain storm against a wall” (Isaiah 25:4)*

Most of the Korean-Chinese immigrants don't have stable social status in the US, so they are living like a lamp in front of the wind. They have anxiety and fear by uncertainty and vulnerability. Because they don't have any legal protection in the US, it is not rare that they are exploited by their boss and business owner. God wants to let them know God can be their refuge and willingly wants to be their stronghold. Christians should convey the truth to them because God is their rock and fortress and deliverer and God pays particular attention to the helpless and the needy in distress as a perfect father and good shepherd.

### **- The Aroma of Christ and the Letter from Christ**

*“For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing.” (2 Corinthians 2:15)*

*“You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.” (2 Corinthians 3:3)*

The Korean-Chinese have a lot of strengths as those who keep Korean tradition and culture and know Chinese people and society exactly. The Korean-Chinese immigrants who live in the US already function as a human bridge between Korean and Chinese immigrant communities. If Korean-Chinese immigrants come to believe Jesus and they are trained as His faithful disciples in the US, they would be able to powerful vehicles to spread God’s good news to China. The China’s persecution rate in Open Doors’ World Watch List is ranked as 23th in the world. These days, the communist government is increasing the degree of persecution against Christians and churches, and most of the missionaries are being deported by the Chinese government. In this situation, the Korean-Chinese immigrants might be used as God’s aroma and letter to convey the gospel in China because they can be connected with the churches of Korea and the US relatively easier comparing to mainland Chinese people.

### **Theological Implementation**

#### **- Ministry Approaches for the Korean-Chinese in NY and NJ**

By the nature of immigrants, in spite of the Korean-Chinese immigrants who do not believe Jesus, they try to attend churches to meet other Korean-Chinese immigrants to build a relationship. Churches’ various education programs such as English or computer classes can help them to adapt to the US. Also, the provision of information about social welfare services, legal

advice, and counseling service can guide them to stay in a safer and more stable environment. The Korean-Chinese churches in NY and NJ are already doing an excellent job in this respect. Today the Korean-Chinese churches became a cultural and religious center for the Korean-Chinese immigrant in the US. Therefore, for the Korean-Chinese immigrants, the church approach is the most suitable and effective ministry approach to meet the real needs of these people and to show God's love and embrace them.

## **- Ministry Types for the Korean-Chinese in NY and NJ**

### **1. Evangelistic Ministry**

Because more than 95 percent of the Korean-Chinese immigrants don't believe Jesus Christ and they have learned the ideology of communism and atheism since childhood, the most urgent Christian mission for the Korean-Chinese is the convey of the gospel. Even though they are not Christians, the Korean-Chinese immigrants come to churches to build a relationship. Through this relationship, Christians should let them know Jesus Christ to fill not just their physical needs but also spiritual needs to provide them the most precious life in Jesus Christ.

### **2. Pastoral / Teaching Ministry**

As one body of Christ, Christians should serve the Korean-Chinese immigrants and take care of them as our brothers and sisters. Christians need to show love and compassion to them as one family in God. To convey the truth and to make a faithful disciple of Jesus, the churches must endeavor to teach the Word of God passionately and encourage new believers to stand firm in Christ. To make a disciple who can make other disciples, pastors and church leaders must be humble themselves to serve these people and to show the example of Jesus Christ.

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