

**Remnant Church:**  
**Building a Bridge from One Generation to the Next**

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CS501NA: People as Social and Cultural Beings

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Remnant Church is a founding member of AMI (Acts Ministries International), a global community of apostolic churches seeking to model the spirituality, vision, and partnership exemplified in the book of Acts.<sup>1</sup> Remnant church is located in midtown Manhattan, and is the only diaspora church within AMI. Remnant Church was originally founded in August 1995 as an English-speaking, second-generation Asian American church. As the first-generation parents began to see their children changing, they wanted to come to church as well. It was at this point that the lead Pastor recognized the need for a Korean-speaking service. Pastor Joseph Chung, a 1.5 generation Korean immigrant who was living in California at the time, was called upon to lead the Korean service. The church has two different services, an English service and a Korean service, which virtually exist as two separate entities. The Korean ministry has about 150 members, and the English ministry has about 250 members. Pastor Joseph, now serving as the lead Pastor, is trying to reconcile and accommodate the cultural gap that exists between the first-generation Koreans immigrants and 1.5 generations and beyond.

For my field research I have observed Sunday services, a prayer meeting and Bible study. I interviewed Pastor Joseph Chung, as well as A Reum Song, a classmate who is also a member of Remnant Church, who was also my informant, and Sunhi Hong, who is the children's Pastor.

A Reum Song was born and raised in Korea in a Christian home. She was married in 2004 and moved to Japan with her husband. It was there that she really met God. A Reum mentioned there are a lot of Korean immigrants and Korean congregations in Japan; however, it is hard to evangelize in Japan, and there are very few Japanese Christians. After one year, she and her husband moved to Hong Kong, and lived there for seven years. In both Hong Kong and

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<sup>1</sup> "About Remnant Church," Remnant Church, accessed August 10, 2020, <https://remnantchurch.org/mission>

Korea, it was easy to find a Korean Church. There was not a big Korean population in Hong Kong, in Japan but there was in Japan (by virtue of proximity). Seven and a half years ago, she and her husband emigrated to the U.S. It was then that A Reum found Remnant Church through friends. It was the first church she and her husband attended, and she didn't know anything about Remnant Church or the AMI denomination. Before coming to the U.S., A Reum had always gone to Presbyterian churches, which tend to be more theologically conservative; e.g., the Presbyterian denomination doesn't allow women ordination. Women could teach Sunday school, but could not teach adult males. It was a cultural shift for her, and it took time, but now A Reum is comfortable with women ordination and women in leadership. The charismatic elements of Remnant church were also new to A Reum, and that was a learning curve for her. The church emphasized the spiritual gifts and the use thereof, such as using prophesy to build the church and encourage others. The worship was also more spontaneous than what A Reum was used to. For example, the worship leader would sometimes go off-script, and people would raise their hands during worship, something that was totally foreign to her. A Reum mentioned that in the 90's, Pentecostal churches were developing in Korea, which allowed for female ordination. She said people born after the 90's and 2000 were more "progressive" or non-discriminatory towards women in leadership. However, she said there is still subtle discrimination reflected in the social system. In daily life it is almost non-existent, except for the older generation, it is very much still there. A Reum acknowledges the presence of Korean Patriarchal society overflowing into church, which is a constant struggle.

Pastor Joseph Chung immigrated to Orange County, California from Seoul, Korea with his family when he was 13 years old. He started out as a youth minister in Orange County in 1991, and was later ordained in 2005 in the Assemblies of God denomination. After holding a

few different pastorates over a span of several years in different states across the U.S., Pastor Joseph was invited to become the lead Pastor of Remnant Church in 2015. He oversees both English and Korean ministries. Pastor Cami, a black American woman, is the associate Pastor of the English-speaking service. This appointment of a female in leadership goes against the grain in Korean culture, and reflects the church's vision for cultural inclusivity. More specifically, a *black, American, female* pastor shows they are making a concerted effort to enculturate and reach out to the local culture, not just Korean culture. This appointment of a female pastor, however, creates tension with some of the first-generation Koreans who aren't comfortable with female leadership. As A Reum noted, in Korean culture, it is not common for women to pastor. The first-generation Koreans will support this belief by citing certain Bible verses forbidding women to speak in church and not to teach men; but she cites it is really an influence of Korean culture. A Reum noted that the formalities of Korean culture tend to overflow into the church, and she "feels" i.e. senses, Pastor Joe's intentional movement away from the formalities of Korean culture. A Reum stated that this creates a close-knit church culture and allows people to be more open, honest and vulnerable with each other. Sometimes Pastor Joe shares very personal experiences and testimonies during sermons and becomes very emotional, which is very rare in Korean culture. In Korean culture, A Reum says, 'boys don't cry men don't show emotions.' The diversity in leadership at Remnant also includes the outreach Pastor, Richard Aguirre, who is Latino. The vision of Remnant Church is not to remain within the strict confines of Korean culture, or even within church walls. They are a Korean diaspora church, while reaching outside the boundaries of Korean culture to the surrounding culture of NYC, as well as abroad.

Pastor Sunhi Hong moved to the U.S. from Korea when she was 18 years old. She has been connected with Remnant church for over 20 years, and has been serving as the children's

pastor for the past six years. Sunhi described her experience as being somewhat difficult, as she feels the pushback from the first-generation Koreans for being a female pastor. She describes it as a “cultural wall.” Pastor Sunhi said the first-generation Korean Americans who are living in Diaspora grew up with a very conservative view of women. She says their view of women is not necessarily wrong or discriminatory; it’s just what they were taught and it’s what they feel comfortable with. Sunhi said she feels within Korean culture, men in leadership are generally shown more respect than women in leadership. She also said that it depends upon one’s denomination; some denominations even within Korean culture embrace women in leadership positions, and others don’t. Sunhi said that most of the time, women Pastors are part-time in Asian churches. She said in Korean culture, it is more common for women to be housewives and stay-at-home moms. Pastor Sunhi testified that it is indeed a patriarchal society, and that certain aspects of that cultural influence overflow in the church realm as well. She acknowledges the significant cultural gap that exists between first-generation Koreans and 1.5 generation and beyond, and the tension that produces.

Remnant Church places a strong emphasis upon discipleship and commitment.

Essentially, one’s commitment to the local church is akin to one’s relationship with Christ. This level of commitment is reflected in Remnant’s four core values:

*“1. Worship; a revelation in the heart, aligning one’s will with God’s will, and submission to the Lord. 2. Growth; discipleship, belonging to a small group and growing in correct understanding of Christian faith. 3. Accountability; everyone is accountable to an accountability group led by a teacher in the church. No one is without a mentor; there is a high emphasis placed on commitment to local church. 4. Participation; encouraging people to be serve but not without being committed and being members of the church first.”<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> “Our Four Core Values,” Remnant Church, accessed August 22, 2020, <https://remnantchurch.org/mission>

According to A Reum, the church identifies itself as being “in the middle,” meaning they are moving away from the strict formalities of Korean culture, and they are somewhere between that and assimilating to American culture. A Reum also describes AMI church communities as being in the “radical middle,” which values a balance of both the Spirit & the Word; not just one or the other. Like most Asian cultures, Koreans have a high level of honor and respect integral to their culture, and that inevitably overflows into church culture as well. Pastor Joseph recognizes the tension that exists between the first-generation Koreans who remain committed to the formalities within Korean culture, and the 1.5+ gens who are more acclimated to American culture. He is intentionally working to overcome the first generations’ tendency towards legalism. As Pastor Joseph noted, even good things like prayer can become legalistic. From the outside, what might be interpreted as being extremely committed, devoted and spiritual is sometimes actually legalism. Pastor Joseph noted that the older Koreans only want to sing hymns in church, but they are accommodating to the younger generation, as well as Americans, as they understand the cultural differences. Pastor Joseph mentioned importantly how this COVID season has actually helped people to come out of legalism. He said “when they are forced to have church at home, there is no other option than not to be formal.”

The goal of Remnant Church is to reach the world for Jesus; not just Koreans. This is evidenced by their diverse local and global outreaches and ministries as well as some of the ethnically diverse content on their website. Remnant Church has several different ministries – children’s, youth, young adult, college, and they have several outreaches to the local community, as well as abroad. They have a tutoring program on Saturday’s for youth in the area who are testing far lower than the national average on standardized tests. It is with this outreach and others that they desire to exemplify the love of Jesus to the local community. Church members

are also encouraged to reach out and engage with their social network; friends, family, and coworkers, and invite them to be a part of small groups that meet at people's apartments throughout the city during the week. Pastor Joseph believes it's his job to teach and pastor, and from there it's up to the people to let their light shine in the community, and be the hands and feet of Jesus in the world. Remnant Church also has an outreach at Bowery Mission, which serves the needs of the homeless and hungry in NYC. There is also an outreach called "Harvest in the City: Neighborhood Outreach," whereby they reach out to the local region, sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ, praying for people's needs and building relationships. Remnant Church is also establishing a ministry base in Coban, Guatemala. In 2014, Remnant purchased a former hotel in Coban which is being transformed into a Christian high school to educate and raise up local youth. One of the church elders, John Kim, personally founded the ministry and lives there on a full-time basis as a missionary. Every year, Remnant sends missions teams to hold medical and dental clinics and VBS programs. They partner with local ministries to share the Gospel with rural villages who have never heard the Gospel. Additionally, in 2015, a new church was planted in Asia; however, for security reasons, details are omitted on the website.<sup>3</sup>

### **Brief history of Korea**

Each interviewee described how decades of oppression in Korea has shaped the culture, and attributes nationalism within Korean culture to having been so oppressed, and now having achieved independence.

"Japanese colonial policy consisted of political suppression, economic exploitation, and cultural assimilation. Koreans had no political or civil rights, and high government positions were not open to them; more than 85 percent of the total national wealth was under Japanese control; and no teaching of Korean history, culture, or language was allowed in the schools, where, instead, Japanese history, culture, and language were

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<sup>3</sup> "Outreach Ministry," Remnant Church, accessed August 15, 2020, [https://remnantchurch.org/outreach\\_](https://remnantchurch.org/outreach_)

taught. The Japanese colonial rule over Korea of thirty-five years could be divided into three stages, each of which was significant in establishing certain institutions and procedures: the period of mudan-jungchi, or rule by military force; of munhwa-jungchi, or "enlightened" (liberal) policy; and of Naisun-ilche-jungchi, or "Japan and Korea oneness" policy"<sup>4</sup>

In summary, "The Korean people have been fighting against native feudalism and foreign domination for centuries."<sup>5</sup>

"Particularly during the 1930s and early 1940s, Japan governed Korea with extreme cruelty. As many as 200,000 women were made into sex slaves. Men were used as forced laborers. All people were required to take Japanese names, speak Japanese, and worship at Shinto shrines. And while Japan did pursue industrialization, particularly in the north of Korea, the beneficiaries of the ensuing economic growth tended to be either Japanese, or their Korean collaborators."<sup>6</sup>

### **Social and Historical Context of Koreans in NYC**

"From 1976 to 1990, the Korean diaspora community was the largest group of immigrants to move to the U.S., next to the Mexican and the Filipino community. The high unemployment rate, political insecurity, and military dictatorship caused massive numbers of Koreans to immigrate to the United States in the 1960s through the early 1980s. Their children, largely known as the "second generation," (*gyopo* in Korean) compose the present-day Korean-American community. Unlike the first and second wave of immigrants who were primarily laborers, war victims, or political refugees who had no choice but to immigrate, these Korean immigrants were white-collar workers in Korea who voluntarily moved to America"<sup>7</sup>

"...Over the last thirty years, a large proportion of Korean immigrants have flocked to New York City and several suburban counties surrounding the city, including Suffolk, Nassau, Bergen, and Westchester Counties. As a result, the New York-New Jersey area has become the home to about 150,000 Koreans, making it the second largest Korean population center in this country, following Southern California. Residentially, Koreans in New York are heavily concentrated in Flushing, establishing another Koreatown in the downtown Flushing area. Economically, they have a near monopoly in produce retail, dry cleaning, and several other types of small businesses. Socially,

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<sup>4</sup> Bong-youn Choy, *Korea* (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 2012), 78.

<sup>5</sup> Bong-youn Choy, *Korea* (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 2012), 159.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel Tudor, *Korea: The Impossible Country* (North Clarendon: Tuttle Publishing, 2012), 13, Hoopla.

<sup>7</sup> Soojin Chung, "History of Korean Immigration to America, from 1903 to Present," *Boston University School of Theology: Boston Korean Diaspora Project*, accessed August 27, 2020, <http://sites.bu.edu/koreandiaspora/issues/history-of-korean-immigration-to-america-from-1903-to-present/>.

Koreans in New York maintain strong ethnic networks, represented by churches, ethnic media, and alumni associations.”<sup>8</sup>

### **Social Composition of Christian Koreans in NYC**

“In New York City, 73% of Korean Americans identify themselves as Christians, mainly as evangelical Protestants. There are 144 Korean American Christian churches and independent ministries in the Flushing community district... In New York City, 90% of Korean American Protestants attend church one or more times a week; 77% of the Catholics do likewise... By 1971, Korean Americans had founded six churches in New York City, mainly in Queens. This was the start of a rapid increase in the number of Korean American churches in the Flushing area. The years of 1971 to 1990 were the peak years for Korean immigration into the area... In 1973, one group of Korean Americans started to meet, and by 1983, they had gathered enough momentum to found the Korean American Presbyterian Church of Queens, now a large church in Flushing. Many more churches were founded in the 1970s-1990s. By 1980, there were more Korean Americans (3,794) living in the Flushing area than in any other place in Queens.”<sup>9</sup>

Pastor Joseph noted some of the challenges Korean immigrants have faced while they were emigrating to the United States (until the late 70’s when the U.S. put a stop to immigration from Korea). Many came as highly skilled workers, with education and degrees, but by virtue of not speaking English they could only find menial work. They would do all they could to work hard and provide a good life for their families, pursuing the “American dream.” They have also faced various forms of discrimination historically as well:

“Korean merchants in African American neighborhoods have experienced various forms of rejection and hostility (Min 1996). The victimization of Korean merchants due to their middleman economic role climaxed in the 1992 Los Angeles riots during which 2,300 Korean-owned stores in South Central Los Angeles and Koreatown were destroyed. Hostility against Korean merchants in African American neighborhoods, in turn, has contributed to Korean ethnic solidarity. For example, during the 1990-91 boycott of two Korea stores in New York, many Koreans as well as Korean merchants in the city participated in fund-raising campaigns, collecting approximately \$150,000 to help the "victims of African American racism against Koreans." Also, dissatisfied with Mayor David Dinkin's "lukewarm" effort to terminate the boycott, the Korean community

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<sup>8</sup> Pyong Gap Min, “Changes and Conflicts: Korean Immigrant Families In New York,” *Queens College of CUNY*,

[https://wps.prenhall.com/wps/media/objects/5426/5556351/splash/anthroexperience/ethno4\\_chap2.html](https://wps.prenhall.com/wps/media/objects/5426/5556351/splash/anthroexperience/ethno4_chap2.html)

<sup>9</sup> Tony Carnes, “The Korean American Christians of Flushing, Queens,” *A Journey Through NYC Religions*, May 16, 2017, <https://nycreligion.info/korean-american-christians-flushing-queens/>

organized a demonstration in front of City Hall that drew approximately 7,000 Koreans.”<sup>10</sup>

Prior to this ethnographic project, I had never experienced being a part of a Korean church, nor had I ever thought too much about diasporic congregations here in the U.S. In my observations of the different services, I have witnessed a high degree of formality, particularly within the Korean church (verses the English ministry). During the services, the men are all wearing suits, and their manner is very formal and respectful. The Korean church has a choir wearing matching robes. From my observations of interactions between leaders and members at different services and events (e.g. church and retreats), there is always a high level of respect and deference. I have been blessed watching the services, and I have been touched by the sincerity of the members of Remnant Church. The very first service I ever witnessed, a Friday night prayer and worship service, literally brought me to tears. I could immediately feel the presence of God during worship. Even though I couldn't understand anything they were saying, the presence of God crosses all barriers and knows no bounds, and was evident in their worship. I was deeply touched by watching people from a culture very different than my own worshipping God in their own cultural context. It was truly precious. The majority of their Zoom meetings have begun with everyone chatting, very friendly, then the Pastor or another leader would speak anywhere from one-half hour to one hour and beyond. I didn't notice any particular evidence of male domination in these meetings, but rather a group of fellow believers having a time of fellowship. (Besides the fact that by and large it was always men leading the meetings.) In researching their YouTube and social media, I was surprised to see they had a woman speaker at a church retreat.

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<sup>10</sup> Pyong Gap Min, “Changes and Conflicts: Korean Immigrant Families In New York,” *Queens College of CUNY*, [https://wps.prenhall.com/wps/media/objects/5426/5556351/splash/anthroexperience/ethno4\\_chap2.html](https://wps.prenhall.com/wps/media/objects/5426/5556351/splash/anthroexperience/ethno4_chap2.html)

Their Instagram page is very active, has excellent graphics, and seems to really keep the church informed with what is going on. There are always a lot of words of encouragement. The church has also made Pastor Joe available three times per week via zoom during the COVID season, and Pastor Joe's wife, Hannah Chung, a certified counselor, has been made available for counseling. Although they have an English service, and seem to be making an effort to reach beyond Korean culture, the church still seems to have a Korean emphasis, as the majority of the pictures on their website and Instagram page are of Koreans. Their Korean website is also far more detailed than the English website; such as more pictures of Pastor Joseph Chung and his family, and more detailed contact information for different leaders and home groups.

Pastor Joseph made it clear he is trying to move away from the formality and legalism of the first-generation Korean culture. As A Reum said, he is doing this 'slowly.' It is not something that will happen overnight, these huge, cultural seismic shifts for those who grew up in a very different culture. But Pastor Joseph believes it's his job to move everything towards the center of the will of God, and away from the ways of man. He doesn't want to see his church culture defined by man-made culture. Pastor Joseph also noted, surprisingly, that the church doesn't have strong, if any, transnational relationships.

Remnant Church is truly a remarkable church, creating a space for those in Korean culture to come and feel comfortable in their own skin and hear their native tongue. It is also a place that is welcoming to the local culture, and seeks to embody and represent the kingdom of God, which is full of diversity. It is truly a unique church, one that I have never seen anything like before. Although they have true cultural tensions and barriers to overcome, by the grace of God they will reach a place where everyone can be at peace with the trajectory of the church and the leadership structure, and move towards establishing the kingdom of God here on earth.

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8/23

Interview with Pastor Sunhi

10+ years – like 20 years – 6 years as children’s pastor – in seminary 5 years

Children’s Pastor

A lot of women pastors are part time in Asian churches

Grew up in Korea – came at 18

First generation Korean Americans who live in Diaspora grew up in Korea came to U.S. later in life after 20’s, their view of women is not wrong or discriminatory, but grew up with a very conservative view

Depends on denomination – mainstream churches have more male pastors – AOG & PCA (Presbyterian) & Methodist Korean churches here in US have women pastors

Pastors wives’ supporters raising children – 4-5 children

Sunhi feels pushback for being a woman pastor – cultural wall

Because they are so used to it, they give more respect for men

Cultural differences & tensions between first generation and 1.5+

Generation gap – cultural gap

First gens grew up in Korea, education, worldview, based upon cultural values of 1970’s, 1980’s,

Cultural values in America very different than Korea – challenges, disparities

Even in marriage, husband happy for her just to be a wife

Fellowship pastors- not preaching

7-9 worship service (9-10pm)

? What should we be looking for?  
(Lakers jersey)

Presence of God evident from beginning - brought me to tears

Singing Too & Julie

Not much interaction between  
NY Capt.

Wooden piano guitar + singing men  
I wish I knew that they were singing

Worship crosses language barrier of adoration

Dressed casually in pastor

Began w/ prayer worship - prayer

Amen + Hallelujah - cross-cathedral

Rom. 8:28 - one of four scriptures Kurt Ege  
"workmaker" never stops working"

expounded on Surin Rom 2:28

"This is FACT" "irrefutable fact of fact"

"we know this"

"He has shown you, men, what is good -  
to do justice, to love mercy, to walk  
humbly before your God."

"Jesus Christ"

And hope does not put us to shame be God's  
love has been poured out in our hearts  
through the Holy Spirit who has been poured out

"Cornerstone"

Prayer - presence of God  
been towards key - beautiful city view  
Presence of God

Prayer "Jesus Christ"  
w/ worship

Precious worship - presence of God -  
brought to tears AGAIN

Precious humble

"In Christ Alone" Cornerstone - Casey player

8-2

funeral

Sunday service

man in suit read what seemed like opening prayer of a kind

Pastor comes on, collecting thoughts

Pastor seems very humble

Pastor also seems to be reading from a book

very formal in suit

Background is a wood wall, simple, pretty

"For you joined my inward parts, You knit me together in my mother's womb" - in English

\* "I am so awfully and wonderfully made"

Speaks some Scriptures in English

seems very kind and thoughtful

"Jesus Cristo"

\* "Amen?"

I wish I knew what he was saying

wonder frame in front of pulpit (?)

Very compassionate + passionate

Seems to be pleading w/ people

Seems to really love about people

Pastor started to choke up as he's speaking about something - I want to know what (!)

\* "Bittersweet"

\* "so she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her..."

speaking of Hagar

had closing prayer w/ piano in background

Very humble before the Lord

"Amen"

8/20  
Interview  
w/ Pastor  
Joe

1991 - youth ministry - D.C.

SS

99 - 34% College/Eng mer. pastor  
-2005 Thanksgiving Church - A06 - advised  
(denom. affil.)

2005 - 40yr - married 2 kids  
40, restless, mental - leave pastor,  
cultural gap  
Senior pastor invited him -  
Church w/ true congregation  
~~25-30~~

Founding  
Pastor

Started w/ 2nd gen Asian America - Eng  
Speaking

2006 -> NYC

Network of Churches

3 yrs. - Church plant in N.J. - for 2 yrs

Relocated w/ another pastor - new Church

Philly - Grace & Covenant Church - 6 years

Superior - Remnant Senior Pastor -

resigned due to moral failures

Pastor of Korean Congregation.

Associate Pastor Care, training

Eng service - lives

Harvest ministry

- ministries

1. - Home work Korean comm
2. - Church of Korean comm.
3. - transnational connections
4. - challenge + up. of Korean church

Start tutoring prog

evangelism

-> 1. Alpha

Net - Korean school

young evenings

2. Late 20s - Korean imm. - highly educated -

no Eng / Sacrificial - do anything for kids - hard rain

- lots of prayer

Seoul

Men. goods - Goods not wanting that  
legislation

3. Korean firstborn - etiquette - honorably  
older - non-humans

4. Challenge - do not being to be closed  
Exchange students - Companies

2nd, 3rd, 4th year

app - Amer. cult. - not limited to Korean  
non-Confucian

East coast Korea  
- moved to Queens

## 8-16 Sunday Service

The Pastor was away this week so there was another person (man - I am guessing an older) filling in for him. At the beginning of the service he said "we're going to have to be really nice to Pastor Joseph when he comes back." He periodically spoke small snippets of English throughout his message.

He seemed a little nervous, kept drinking his water but he had a good lighthearted attitude about him. He was very friendly wearing a suit and tie tie.

He seemed very dedicated and sincere, and serious, but also friendly looking and smiling. He stood on the church platform, he was intro'd by another leader who seemed to be reading announcements maybe; also very formal in a suit + tie (it was very pretty).  
→ The speaker also mentioned "Honduras" at least twice; I wasn't sure the first time but when he said it a second time I was sure he said Honduras. I know they have a mission in Guatemala but I wasn't sure why he was talking about Honduras.