

## Koreans

### Population, Gender Ratio, and Family Formation

Prior to 1965 the Korean American population was quite small. About eleven thousand agricultural workers, predominantly men, were recruited for Hawaiian plantations before 1905. Most had been recruited by an American from Hawaii who had moved to Korea in 1902 and had been granted authority by the Korean government to arrange employment for laborers abroad. They were used primarily as strikebreakers when Japanese laborers challenged poor working conditions.<sup>157</sup> By and large they were recruited from an unemployed urban class, although many were illiterate farmers from northern Korea, which was suffering from drought and economic difficulties.<sup>158</sup> Because of the very limited nature of their immigration, after an initial surge from 1902–5 Koreans ceased to be perceived as a threat by most laborers on the West Coast.

TABLE 7

*Comparison of Korean American Population with Immigration  
by Decade and the Immigration Law in Effect, 1910–1990*

Decade ending	Population	Immigration in prior decade	Law in effect in prior decade
1910	5,008		Gentlemen's Agreement
1920	6,181		Gentlemen's Agreement
1930	8,332		Gentlemen's Agreement and 1924 Act
1940	8,568		1924 Act
1950	7,030 <sup>a</sup>	<sup>b</sup>	1924 Act
1960	11,000 <sup>c</sup>	7,025 <sup>d</sup>	1924 Act, then Asian-Pacific triangle in 1952
1970	69,150	34,526	1952 Act, then 1965 amendments
1980	357,393	267,638	1965 amendments
1990	798,849	336,000	1965 amendments

SOURCES: Knoll 1982: 138; Gardner et al. 1985: 8, table 2; Xenos et al. 1987: 252–53, table 11.1; 1959 and 1961 *INS Annual Reports*.

<sup>a</sup>Hawaii only.

<sup>b</sup>INS did not begin to count Koreans separately until 1948, when 39 entered each year until 1952.

<sup>c</sup>Foreign-born. This figure increased to 38,711 by 1970 (1975 census, p. 117). However, according to Hyung-Chan Kim, in 1965 there were 2,165 immigrants and 4,717 nonimmigrants of which 1,027 were naturalized (H. Kim 1974: 26, table 1).

<sup>d</sup>Calculated from table 14 of 1959 and 1961 *INS Annual Reports*.

When Korea was a protectorate and then a possession of Japan from 1905 to 1945, it was subject first to the restrictions of the Gentlemen's Agreement and then to the 1924 Act. These restrictions had little effect, however, because Japan refused to allow any significant Korean emigration. From 1910 to 1924 it permitted the same picture bride policy for Koreans as for Japanese, so that women could immigrate by marrying Korean immigrants already in the United States.<sup>159</sup> About 950 came to Hawaii, and 115 to the mainland.<sup>160</sup> Between 1910 and 1918, 541 refugee Korean students came without passports fleeing Japanese persecution. They campaigned against Japanese domination of their home country and became leaders in the Korean American community.<sup>161</sup> After 1924, however, further immigration was prohibited under the ineligible-to-citizenship bar. Until the Japanese defeat in 1945, when Korea was partitioned into two autonomous states, the only other Korean arrivals were several hundred who came via China, Europe, and Japan.<sup>162</sup>

Thus Korean immigration in the first half of the twentieth century never neared the numbers of the Chinese, Japanese, and Filipinos. The population, which stood at 5,008 in 1910, increased to only 8,332 in 1930 and to only 8,568 in 1940 (see Table 7). The overwhelming majority lived in Hawaii.<sup>163</sup>

Even after the partition of Korea in 1945, few were able to immigrate. North Koreans were immediately restrained by their military-dominated government. And South Koreans and other Asians continued to be excluded under the 1924 Act after the repeal of Chinese exclusion in 1943. From 1948 to 1951 the Immigration and Naturalization Service recorded a total of only 128 Korean immigrants.<sup>164</sup>

Between 1952 and 1965 South Koreans demonstrated an increasing interest in immigration to escape political unrest, social turmoil, and economic instability. The Korean War (1950–53) had caused great damage to the economy, and the failure to conclude a peace treaty left the threat of renewed confrontation with the North ever present.<sup>165</sup> South Korea relied heavily on U.S. aid to finance its postwar reconstruction. The lack of resources and the need to support a large army caused high inflation; by 1957 the economy was showing a net decline.<sup>166</sup> The lack of economic opportunity at home combined with the close American ties forged during and after the war caused many Koreans to view emigration to the United States as a desirable option. Many Americans felt sympathy for Koreans and their cause, although certainly some resented the idea of American soldiers dying over a Korean "problem."<sup>167</sup>

The Korean American population managed some impressive growth even before the 1965 reforms. The McCarran-Walter Act's repeal of racial exclusion and assignment of a minimum quota of one hundred<sup>168</sup> opened a small window of opportunity. Yet more Koreans—especially military wives and adopted orphans—were able to enter. Between 1952 and 1960, 6,993 Korean immigrants entered,<sup>169</sup> and 10,179, primarily nonquota immigrants, arrived from 1961 to 1965.<sup>170</sup> They and their children born in the United States pushed the population to about 45,000 by 1965,<sup>171</sup> a fivefold increase from the 1950 population of approximately 7,500 (see Table 7).

The ratio of men to women as of 1965 had become fairly even. Only 10 percent of the laborers who migrated to Hawaii from 1902 to 1905 were women, many of whom married non-Koreans.<sup>172</sup> The emigration of Korean picture brides between 1910 and 1924 helped provide some balance, yet by 1930 the population was still 66 percent male.<sup>173</sup> In the late 1950's and early 1960's, Korean immigration was increasingly dominated by women who entered through military marriages and adoptions under the 1952 nonquota provisions.<sup>174</sup> From 1959 to 1965, 70 percent were women, 40 percent of whom were 20 to 39.<sup>175</sup> Many were known as war brides because of their marriages to soldiers who fought in the

Korean War.<sup>176</sup> About 40 percent were girls under the age of 4, who were adopted by families moved by the huge number of orphans left after the Korean War.<sup>177</sup> Because the population was so small prior to 1952, a disproportionate number of women immigrants in the years following the 1952 Act accounted for the nearly balanced gender ratio by 1965.

### Geographic Distribution and Residential Patterns

Koreans were attracted to the West Coast soon after they were allowed to immigrate. Plantation representatives recruited them to work in Hawaii after Chinese exclusion. But eventually some of them were attracted to the West Coast after railway companies sent representatives to Hawaii. From there railroad workers were recruited to work in agriculture again. Two thousand Koreans had arrived in San Francisco by 1907, and by 1910 small groups of Korean farm laborers were scattered up and down the West Coast. Dinuba and Reedley in California's San Joaquin Valley became centers of small but flourishing communities. The expansion of agriculture in southern California created more jobs for Korean farm workers there.<sup>178</sup> In addition, Denver, Seattle, Salt Lake City, and Butte, Montana, had numbers of migratory Korean miners and railway workers who formed small, isolated farming communities. Like the Japanese, these farmers were able to sustain a rural life because within ten years they were able to form families with the thousand picture brides who arrived from Korea.<sup>179</sup>

In 1940 the population was predominantly rural, but like the rest of American society, became increasingly urbanized during and after World War II. As students and refugees entered in the 1920's and 1930's, small communities developed in New York, Chicago, Washington, D.C., and some college towns in the East and Midwest. By 1945, eight hundred Koreans lived in Los Angeles, three hundred in New York City, and three hundred in Chicago.<sup>180</sup>

Small residential and business areas emerged in these cities usually within or next to a larger Asian enclave, where certain needs, such as for specialized groceries, could be met.<sup>181</sup> Although supporting Korea's independence brought Koreans together as well,<sup>182</sup> establishing economic networks was a high priority. And though issues of race and a sense of comfort in numbers helped establish these enclaves, the intensity of the racial hostility that led to Chinatowns was not present. An emphasis on an economic impetus for the enclave would continue after 1965.

### Careers and Socioeconomic Status

Early Koreans were predominantly agricultural workers, but the arrival of students and political refugees resulted in some occupational variation. The students and refugees who entered between 1910 and 1940 struggled economically. Most students had to work in low-wage jobs as farm laborers, factory workers, cooks, waiters, chauffeurs, janitors, houseboys, stevedores, and dishwashers, while women worked mainly in sweatshops.<sup>183</sup> But some demonstrated a facility for small business. By 1920 they started laundries, restaurants, retail groceries, and shoe repair shops.<sup>184</sup> Korean-owned hotels also could be found throughout California and Washington.<sup>185</sup>

Especially early on, Korean laborers suffered from the same intense racial animosity that the Chinese and Japanese experienced. The mainstream often made little distinction between Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans. In one highly publicized event in 1913, Korean farm workers were attacked by an angry crowd of white workers and thrown on an outbound train because the crowd had mistaken them for Japanese.<sup>186</sup>

Of the men who entered after the 1952 Act, a noticeable proportion described themselves as professionals, managers, or the like. Without a doubt, the majority of those entering at the time were unskilled women and children. But 6 percent between 1959 and 1963 were classified as professionals and managers.<sup>187</sup> Thus the immigration laws facilitated the entry of some professionals from Korea even before the 1965 changes, although this effect was not as substantial as for Filipino immigrants.

### Asian Indians

#### Population, Gender Ratio, and Family Formation

A few Asian Indians immigrated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Unlike the other groups, Indian workers could explore prospects in British Empire colonies. They were a better option than the United States, which represented a longer, more arduous, and more expensive journey. The few laborers who took a chance on the United States, along with a small number of more educated Indians, accounted for a total from 1881 to 1917 of only about seven thousand.

India was ineffective in acquiring strong immigration rights for its

## Korean Americans

### Population and Gender Ratio

#### *Population*

The expansion of the Korean American community has been remarkable. Families had begun reuniting and growing before 1965; still growth came slowly, and in 1965 the population totaled only about 45,000. By 1990, however, it was almost 800,000—nearly a staggering eighteenfold increase in 25 years.<sup>115</sup> The 1965 reforms and deteriorating economic and social conditions in Korea set the stage for emigration.

After 1965, there was virtually no emigration from the closed Communist dictatorship in North Korea. In the 1960's and 1970's, South Koreans' right to dissent or to criticize the government was sharply restricted, and the government maintained complete control over the media. The Korean Central Intelligence Agency became infamous for its unlimited authority to investigate or detain political dissidents.<sup>116</sup> The Korean War had crippled the economy, and a dubious reconstruction plan made the country depend on foreign exports, raw materials, and capital investment. The economy was left vulnerable to recessions in the Japanese and American markets, even though it has performed well compared with other industrialized nations.<sup>117</sup>

Between 1969 and 1971 Korean immigration more than doubled from 6,045 to 14,297,<sup>118</sup> and in 1987 it topped 35,000.<sup>119</sup> More than 620,000 entered between 1966 and 1990.<sup>120</sup> In fact, Koreans have since 1973 been the third largest Asian immigrant group behind Filipinos and Chinese.<sup>121</sup> By 1980 an incredible 81.9 percent of the community was foreign-born,<sup>122</sup> second only to that of the newly developing refugee Vietnamese American community. Since 35,000 Koreans immigrate each year, the proportion of foreign-born will remain high for some time.

After the 1965 reforms a noteworthy share of Koreans (though not as many as Filipinos and Indians) came as occupational migrants, but eventually the use of family categories dominated (see Tables 9 and 10). In 1969, for example, 23.2 percent of Koreans entered in the occupational categories, and an additional 11.6 percent took advantage of the newly created investor category. Immigrants who entered through these occupational categories were able, in time, to petition for their relatives

under the family categories, so more began to come as family members. In 1969, for example, 64 percent of Korean immigration came through family categories, and that figure rose to 91 percent by 1988, when those entering through occupational categories declined to less than 9 percent.

### *Gender Ratio*

An unusually unbalanced gender ratio in the Korean American community—72.3 men to 100 women in 1980<sup>123</sup>—is accounted for by the predominance of women among Korean immigrants between the 1952 Act and the 1965 reforms and after the new 1965 immigration categories. The perpetuation of this ratio appears likely. In 1989, for example, 18,942 Korean women immigrated compared to 15,275 men.<sup>124</sup> This contrast is striking since men slightly outnumber women in Korea.<sup>125</sup>

There are several reasonable explanations why women dominated Korean immigration, beyond the fact that men were petitioning for families.<sup>126</sup> Over the last 25 years Korean female nurses were trained for work in U.S. hospitals by specially established companies in Korea.<sup>127</sup> Between 1965 and 1977, for example, over seven thousand of these nurses entered the United States.<sup>128</sup> Many other Korean women who immigrate prefer the employment opportunities in the United States to those in South Korea. Korean women perceive relatively progressive views on gender equality in the United States.<sup>129</sup> Marriages between U.S. servicemen stationed in South Korea and Korean women also contributed.<sup>130</sup>

### *Geographic Distribution and Residential Patterns*

Since the Korean American population was very small compared to Chinese, Japanese, and Filipinos in 1965, its current geographic distribution may represent how Asian Americans might have distributed themselves in the absence of stringent controls. In any event Korean American settlement choices seem to be relatively free of the lure of pre-existing ethnic enclaves, and that would seem to explain how they were dispersed.

Although early Korean laborers went to Hawaii, the Japanese ban on Korean emigration in 1905 precluded them from establishing communities there before 1965. They were prohibited from responding to the plantation recruitments that drew so many Japanese and Filipinos to the islands. Lacking well-established Korean American communities,

Hawaii still has not attracted many Koreans. In 1990, for example, only 3.1 percent resided in Hawaii—a small share when compared to the large proportion of Japanese (29.2 percent) and Filipinos (12 percent).<sup>131</sup>

Thus the 1965 amendments' easing of controls over Asian immigration dispersed Korean Americans throughout the United States. Unlike Chinese, Filipinos, Japanese, and Vietnamese, less than half (44.4 percent) live in the West. Almost 23 percent live in the Northeast, 19.2 percent in the South, and 13.7 percent in the Midwest.<sup>132</sup> Just under 32.5 percent of the entire population is in California.<sup>133</sup> But Koreans can also be found in New York (12 percent), Illinois (5.2 percent), New Jersey (4.8 percent), Texas (4 percent), Virginia (3.8 percent), and Washington (3.7 percent).<sup>134</sup>

### *Urbanization*

By the 1960's South Korea's economic gains had extended primarily to its commercial and industrial sectors. As the country moved to industrialize, the gap between urban and rural living standards widened. From the mid-1960's to late 1970's, South Korea's urban population rose from about 28 percent to 55 percent because of rural migration to the cities.<sup>135</sup>

In 1989, 7,808 Korean immigrants settled in the Los Angeles–Long Beach–Anaheim area, 3,336 went to New York City, 1,854 to Washington, D.C.–Maryland–Virginia, 1,384 to Chicago, and 1,075 to Philadelphia.<sup>136</sup> Thus in New York and Illinois about 85 percent reside in New York City and Chicago,<sup>137</sup> and 92.5 percent in an urban-suburban environment.<sup>138</sup>

A significant 20 percent of Korean immigrants choose to live in southern cities, especially in Virginia and Texas.<sup>139</sup> This unusual attraction for the South appears to be attributable in part to a judgment that these areas present good economic opportunities. Relatives and other immigrant friends might follow for social as well as economic reasons.<sup>140</sup>

### *Ghettoization*

Compared to other Asian groups, the emerging Korean American community has made very different choices regarding the resettlement options presented by the 1965 reforms. For example, unlike Filipino Americans, Korean Americans have not clustered in large residential enclaves, though some small pockets have developed. In 1980 more than 37,000 resided in the New York City–Newark–Jersey City area,<sup>141</sup> but the

tendency of Korean immigrants has been to scatter throughout the suburbs after attaining some economic success in the cities.<sup>142</sup> They have tended to cluster in urban neighborhoods related to business interests. Koreans in New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago have established pockets of businesses.<sup>143</sup> Most of these businesses are small, with some catering to Korean ethnic tastes. Others serve African Americans or Latinos who reside in the area. Unfortunately, some Koreans in places such as Los Angeles and New York have been involved in well-publicized conflicts with African American residents and customers.

The economic class of most Korean immigrants accounts for the relative absence of inner-city Korean ghettos. While some working-class immigrants have begun to reside in Koreatowns, such as in Los Angeles, most Korean immigrants are young and educated, and from the urban elite or middle classes of South Korean society.<sup>144</sup> They can afford to live in suburban neighborhoods. Instead of staying in touch by establishing suburban enclaves, they use churches for regular meeting places and often establish a center for social and cultural gatherings.<sup>145</sup> This relatively educated class does not have the same desire or need to live together as have working-class professional Filipinos.

### Careers

The professional and nonpreference investor categories established by the 1965 amendments facilitated the entry of a substantial number of wealthy and professional Koreans. As noted above, in 1969, 23.2 percent of Korean immigrants entered in occupational categories (which include professionals), and 11.6 percent entered on nonpreference visas, which were primarily used by investors (see Table 9). Between these two categories, then, over a third in 1969 had professional job skills or sufficient funds to start a business.

Like Asian Indians and Filipinos, many potential immigrants began tailoring their training to meet the technical requirements of occupational categories.<sup>146</sup> The demand for specialized training was so strong that schools and companies in Korea were established solely to teach skills that would qualify.<sup>147</sup> Doctors, nurses, and pharmacists entered these training programs in large numbers. By 1977 thirteen thousand Korean medical professionals were working in the United States.<sup>148</sup>

Once Koreans had developed family ties in the United States, they were able to immigrate more easily through the family unity categories.

Since those immigrants are not required to demonstrate that no qualified workers are available for particular jobs, they are able to obtain visas much more quickly.<sup>149</sup> By the 1970's, moreover, many Korean war brides became naturalized.<sup>150</sup> Naturalization created new ways of requesting the admission of relatives, since citizens under the 1965 amendments could petition for parents, married sons and daughters, and siblings.<sup>151</sup> At the same time, the practice of bringing in wives for native citizens that had started before 1965 continued through the next decade.<sup>152</sup>

Some commentators attribute the late 1970's decline in the Korean use of occupational categories to the decade-long recession that plagued the United States.<sup>153</sup> The greater demand for family reunification visas, however, probably was more significant. Immigration law changes in the 1970's also contributed. In response to intense lobbying from the American Medical Association, which feared competition by specially trained Koreans, the laws were amended in 1976 to limit the number of foreign-trained physicians and surgeons entering the United States.<sup>154</sup> Most of these doctors could not enter to practice medicine unless they passed an American national examination and were competent in English. As a result, the number of Korean-trained doctors who could enter was substantially reduced. A 1977 change in the procedures for professionals that imposed more requirements on employers also made the professional entry route more onerous.<sup>155</sup>

Although 90 percent of all Korean immigrants enter through family categories today, many are of the same class as the professionals and investors who first immigrated through the occupational and nonpreference categories. So while the proportion of Koreans who have entered in the occupational categories has decreased in the last fifteen years, the absolute number of professionals has not. In 1969, 1,164 immigrants indicated that they were professionals or managers prior to entry. This figure rose to 3,955 in 1972, 2,782 in 1985, and 3,109 in 1989.<sup>156</sup>

Since the community is over 80 percent foreign-born and 35,000 immigrants are added annually, its career and economic profile reflects the characteristics of Korean immigrants. Again, the numbers alone tell much of the story. For example, 25 percent of foreign-born Korean Americans are employed as professionals or managers, and 24.8 percent overall. A high percentage of Koreans are employed in service jobs (16.5 percent) because 19 percent of recent Korean immigrants report holding that sort of job.<sup>157</sup> The share of Koreans employed in blue-collar service,

farming, factory, and laborer occupations (47.7 percent) is comparable to that of the general population (45 percent).<sup>158</sup>

The proportion categorized as professionals, managers, and executives is also comparable to the proportion for the general population.<sup>159</sup> This figure, though, includes a high percentage of small-business owners. In 1980, there were 90 Korean-owned businesses for every thousand Korean Americans. In the general population those figures were 64 per thousand.<sup>160</sup> Between 1982 and 1987, the number of Korean-owned businesses in the United States more than doubled from 30,919 to 69,304.<sup>161</sup> In Los Angeles alone, Korean Americans operated 5,701 small businesses in 1987,<sup>162</sup> and 40 percent of Korean household heads and 34 percent of their spouses described themselves as proprietors.<sup>163</sup> In New York, where Korean Americans dominate the greengrocer business, 34 percent of the men run small retail businesses.<sup>164</sup> In the metropolitan areas with the most business-intensive Asian American communities (Dallas-Fort Worth, Houston, and Atlanta), Koreans have business rates of 130 or more per thousand.<sup>165</sup> These high rates of small-business ownership are more noteworthy when one considers that few of these immigrants had pursued merchant vocations before coming to the United States.<sup>166</sup>

From 1969 though the mid-1970's, the high percentage of Koreans operating small businesses stemmed partly from use of the nonpreference investor category available to those buying or starting American businesses.<sup>167</sup> Confronting strong barriers in the job market, lacking English fluency and knowledge of American customs, facing persistent discrimination, and refused a foothold in white-collar occupations, other Koreans turned to small business almost by default.<sup>168</sup>

Newly arriving immigrants, in turn, perceived their predecessors as successful in small businesses and were encouraged to try their hand. And, as more and more Koreans opened small businesses—such as the greengrocers in New York City—they established business and supply networks that made it easier for later arrivals to set up their own shops. The Korean small-business community has in fact become its own ethnic labor market.

Income figures reveal that family income is comparable to that of the general population, though there are more workers in Korean families.<sup>169</sup> The median income for Korean American full-time workers (\$14,230) is lower than that of white Americans (\$15,570). Recent arrivals are earning less still.<sup>170</sup> Not surprisingly, a wide discrepancy exists between men and women (\$17,360 for men versus \$10,260 for women).<sup>171</sup>

And foreign-born women earn less than if they were born in America (\$10,070 versus \$12,760).<sup>172</sup> A higher proportion of Korean American families (13.1 percent) than white American families (7 percent) fall below the poverty level.<sup>173</sup> Most of the poor are American-born who hold service jobs. Of recent immigrants, 11 percent fall below the poverty level,<sup>174</sup> compared to only 6 percent of those who immigrated between 1970 and 1974.<sup>175</sup>

## Asian Indian

### Population and Gender Ratio

#### *Population*

The Asian Indian American community increased from perhaps 50,000 before the 1965 reforms to 815,500 by 1990. During this period over 446,000 immigrated to the United States.<sup>176</sup> Not surprisingly, the population was over 80 percent foreign-born in 1980.<sup>177</sup> Since 1983 an average of more than 25,000 have entered annually.<sup>178</sup>

Immigration reform occurred when India had the highest rate of enrollment in postsecondary education of any low-income industrializing nation.<sup>179</sup> The Indian economy is divided between a small, relatively high-salaried modern sector and a large, impoverished traditional agricultural sector.<sup>180</sup> Demand for better wages created a great demand for higher levels of education.

Political and economic uncertainty engendered by the failure to meet economic expectations since Indian independence contributed to a willingness by many to leave. The economy has not been able to keep pace with the demand for modern-sector jobs, leaving many highly educated persons who cannot be absorbed.<sup>181</sup> Unemployment, frustration, and resentment have created conditions favoring emigration.

Throughout this period relations between the United States and India modulated. Immediately after the 1965 reforms India suffered a food shortage and sought U.S. aid. The United States delayed its response to survey the extent of the shortage and was severely criticized for its inaction. Then in 1971 it intervened on the side of Pakistan in the Indo-Pakistani War, and India's victory forced better relations.<sup>182</sup>

But even initially strained relations during this period could not