STRANGERS IN A STRANGE LAND:

KOREAN ENTREPRENEURS AND THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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This ethnographic study of the small-business membership of a Korean Presbyterian church in the eastern U.S. examines how one set of immigrant families created an institutional solution to characteristic dilemmas of social and cultural capital maintenance and change. Membership in this specific church conferred multiple benefits. Social bonds were strengthened between and across families, resources were shared between those rich in experience or money and those in need, and cultural capital was recreated to impress outsiders and to facilitate the success of members. The analyses reveal a community struggling to both retain and assimilate culture, to both maintain and expand family ties, and to both pursue profits and practice an ascetic Christianity. The church offered its members the habitus of the Puritan ascetic to validate long hours of hard work in commercial activities. The church functioned not only to reinforce Korean culture but also to transmute Korean cultural capital for use in the new world.

Key Words: Social capital; Cultural capital; Christianity; Entrepreneurs; Voluntary organization; Immigrants
Migration is a wrenching, disruptive experience. It tears people from their often beloved homelands, breaks up their families, and forces them into a prolonged, sometimes lifelong period of adjustment to a strange and alienating environment (Light & Bonacich, 1988: 430).

In the States to establish what kind of person a new immigrant is one asks: (1) what church do you go to? or (2) what extended family do you belong to? (Respondent Mrs. Jang, laundry shop proprietor)

Immigration is a recurring process in the historical development of the United States. From the inception of the country as a set of disparate colonies, emigrants have flocked from other countries to the Americas seeking freedom and opportunity. Each new arrival has faced a set of dilemmas including such questions as: How can I prosper in this new land? How much do I need to assimilate to American culture, and how can I learn to do so? How can I retain the familiar and comforting elements of my own culture? In this paper, we examine how a group of Korean entrepreneurial families sought organizational solutions to the characteristic dilemmas faced by strangers in a strange land. In our examination of how a representative church community of immigrant entrepreneurs responded to the sociocultural environment, we hope to enrich our understanding of organizations more generally (cf. Bartunek, 1984).

Koreans are similar to other immigrants in depending on social networks of family, friends and coethnics for information and resources necessary to success. However, Korean-run small businesses in the U.S. typically serve neighborhoods in which Koreans are a minority.
Thus, Korean immigrant entrepreneurs and their families must manage problems associated with cultural differences as part of the daily experience of serving customers who tend to be predominantly native-born Americans. Conflict between Korean merchants and neighborhood residents has reached crisis proportions in several U.S. cities, and has reinforced solidarity within Korean entrepreneurial communities (Min, 1996).

Perhaps because of their social isolation and experience of inter-group conflict, Koreans appear to be particularly assiduous in maintaining ethnic ties: Approximately 75% of Koreans in one study of immigrants to the United States were reported as members of ethnic associations, a proportion considerably higher than that of Chinese or Filipino immigrants (Mangifico, 1988). The evidence suggests that Korean immigrants in the United States strive to maintain high ethnic attachment (Min, 1995).

Previous research has also highlighted the tendency for Korean immigrants to start small businesses (Abelmann & Lie, 1995; Light & Bonacich, 1988). Of all new immigrant groups surveyed since the revised immigration act of 1965, Koreans have moved most quickly and visibly into the small business niche (Waldinger, Aldrich & Ward, 1990). Korean immigrants are more likely than other immigrants from Asia to become small business owners (Min, 1996: 51). In fact, the Korean self-employment rate of 24.3% is the highest rate of any ancestry group in the U.S. (Yoon, 1997: 20).

The predilection of Korean immigrants for entrepreneurship is surprising, given that traditional Korean culture, steeped in Confucianism, tends to denigrate commercial activity. Confucianism relegates entrepreneurs to the bottom of the social hierarchy, thus discouraging entrepreneurial striving. In an apparent attempt to counteract the stifling effect on economic
growth of such traditional beliefs, the military government of South Korea officially discouraged observance of Confucianist rituals in 1972. However, Confucianist values linger on in Korea, finding expression in public disesteem for businesspeople (Light & Bonacich, 1988: 284). Similarly, most Korean immigrant entrepreneurs in the U.S. want their children to avoid entrepreneurial careers in favor of professions more highly regarded from a Confucian perspective, specifically those requiring advanced education (Min, 1996: 52).

Why, given this apparent antipathy on the part of Koreans toward commerce, do Korean immigrants tend to become self-employed entrepreneurs? Researchers have suggested that skills, motivation, opportunities, and belief systems all help explain the Korean self-employment phenomenon. Most Korean immigrants are well-educated urbanites who possess the cognitive skills necessary to learn how to compete in business in a strange land (Light & Bonacich, 1988: 288-289). These immigrants are often mesmerized by the promises of American capitalism (Park, 1997: 29), yet lack transferable human capital, such as language skills and U.S. qualifications, required for white-collar employment in corporate America (Yoon, 1997: 34-37). Korean immigrants tend to migrate into business niches, such as dry cleaning, with low barriers to entry in terms of "capital, technology, and competition from local or large businesses" (Yoon, 1997: 43).

Another contributing factor to the Korean presence in the small business niche is the influence of Christian beliefs and practices. Korean immigrants to the U.S. tend to be Christians rather than Buddhists or Confucianists. Since the arrival of American Protestant missionaries in Korea in the 1880s, Christianity has been "a social movement encouraging modernization, secularism, equality, individualism, and nationalism" (Light & Bonacich, 1988: 292). Over 70
percent of Korean immigrants in the United States call themselves Christians, considerably higher than the 24 percent of the population of South Korea who identified themselves as Christians in the latest census (Lee, 1996), and also considerably higher than the percentage of Christians among immigrants to the U.S. from countries neighboring Korea such as China (32 percent) and Japan (28 percent) (Kim, 1981).

In this paper, we focus on the effects of church membership on the social and cultural capital of members. Korean immigrants have created a set of important institutional arrangements across the United States in the form of Korean ethnic churches (Hurh & Kim, 1990; Min, 1992). These churches provide social arenas for Koreans to meet and interact: Fellowship hours typically follow church services. Churches also provide services to help immigrants adjust to the new country, as well as offering opportunities for the retention of language and culture (see the discussion in Min, 1996: 40-42). Christian churches have spread rapidly among Korean immigrants in the U.S. and today number around 2000, or one church for every 300 Koreans, with the dominant affiliation being Presbyterian. In New York city alone, there are 500 to 600 Korean churches (Yoon, 1997: 183), about half of which are Presbyterian, followed by Methodist (15 percent), Baptist (9 percent) and Catholic (3 percent) (Min, 1992: 1378).

Korean Christian evangelists in the U.S. preach that Korean immigrants are the latest Puritans, called upon to "restore the puritan spirit which was once the invisible foundation shaping this young nation" (Korean pastor quoted in Light & Bonacich, 1988: 292). In one Korean Presbyterian church in New York, the pastor likened Korean immigrants to the early Puritans who arrived on the Mayflower. Members of this particular congregation testified to the transformation of their identities, so that, for example, one man was able to shed his Confucianist
habit of evaluating people according to their educational level, and endorse the value of hard manual work (Park, 1997: 192-193). Korean Christianity, particularly Presbyterianism, has long emphasized such values as the sacredness of work in contrast to the less materialistic emphases of Buddhism and Confucianism (Won, 1977).

Korean immigrant churches, therefore, "play the dual and contradictory role of promoting the American and preserving Korean identity" (Park, 1997: 186). In this paper, we follow up these themes in an investigation of the role of a Korean Presbyterian church in an entrepreneurial community in a major American urban center. We were interested in the following issues. First, how did the church help immigrants resolve the dilemmas of cultural difference and social isolation? Second, what was the connection between church membership and entrepreneurship?

THEORETICAL FRAMING

Our theoretical understanding of the possible importance of ethnic church membership emerged as we went back and forth between the field data and existing research concerned with social and cultural capital. We preview these theoretical ideas here to provide a background for the qualitative analysis that follows.

Immigrants to the United States depend heavily on social capital: the networks of kinship, friendship, and acquaintance that channel information and resources to help network members survive and succeed (see Light & Bhachu, 1993 for a recent discussion). Social capital tends to circulate within relatively closed and stable social systems (such as families) where high levels of trust can be maintained. Further, the development of social capital can be enhanced by an ideology that imposes norms of altruism and reciprocity on individuals (see Coleman, 1990, for a
discussion of these points). Thus, the level of social capital in a social system can depend to an important degree on the norms and values implicit in the cultural system available to group members. A culture that emphasizes community-based ties and trust can benefit people’s economic and social well being (Putnam & Helliwell, 1995).

Immigrants arrive in the United States with cultural competencies shaped by their home countries. These competencies, such as language, technical skills, and commercial expertise, can be considered part of the tool-kit of possibilities from which the individual selects in pursuing opportunities and navigating social situations (Swidler, 1986). The metaphor of the tool-kit emphasizes that cultural competencies represent both limitations and possibilities: A tool-kit that was more than adequate for the home country might be lacking some essential tools necessary for the United States, such as facility with English. Further, a competency, such as entrepreneurial initiative, that was relatively little used in the home country might be of greater benefit in the new environment. Thus, immigrants face the daunting task of modifying the cultural tool-kit they have taken for granted in their home environments.

Cultural capital comprises more than a narrow range of skills. As Bourdieu (1986) makes clear, an individual's cultural capital can include long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body, such as the Puritan ethic of hard work and frugality. Bourdieu refers to this aspect of cultural capital as the habitus, a culturally available role system that facilitates certain choices and career options (Anheier, Gerhards, & Romo, 1995). Thus, Catholic women find it easier than Jewish women to become surgeons, given the Catholic habitus of the nun who accepts ascetic discipline and denies herself children in order to achieve a career that includes authority over men (Cassell, 1996). From this perspective, the individual's cultural capital is embedded in
larger collectivities and institutions. Although culture inheres in the individual, it is shaped by the enduring legacy of institutions. This broader conception of cultural capital is important in this paper as we investigate the possible importance of Presbyterian church membership for Korean immigrants.

In the course of the research, we developed four questions concerning social and cultural capital. The first research question concerns the extent to which the Korean Presbyterian church functioned to maintain and enhance social capital among its members. Specifically, did the church facilitate the establishment of weak ties (Granovetter, 1973) between Korean entrepreneurs engaged in very different lines of business? Did the church provide opportunities to reinforce strong ties of mutual trust? In general, did the church help immigrants overcome social isolation in the new environment? And how did the cultural values inherent in Presbyterian Christianity affect the social behaviors of church members?

Our second research question concerns the extent to which Presbyterian church membership provided cultural training in the Puritan habitus of frugality and hard work (cf. Weber, 1948). It is important to note that, according to Weber (1948: 125), the Presbyterians were the single religious group that "held in all respects strictly to Calvinistic principles," principles that Weber argued were the source of the spirit of capitalism. Following Calvin, the mundane affairs of everyday life are brought within an all-embracing religious influence, and entrepreneurial striving is associated with the highest ethical evaluation. Worldly success is taken as a sign of God's grace (Giddens, 1971: 127-129). Thus, the Korean Presbyterian church may reinforce cultural habits of asceticism, hard work, and involvement in worldly affairs.
These habits may be important to entrepreneurial success in an environment in which other cultural tools (e.g., facility in Korean) are of less benefit.

Our third research question derives from institutional theory (see Scott, 1995, for a review) and concerns the extent to which Korean immigrants start and join Protestant churches in order to establish legitimacy within the new environment. Because of the relative dominance of Protestantism in the U.S., Korean entrepreneurs may be striving to achieve isomorphism with their host culture by founding and joining religious institutions similar to those to which American business people belong.

Our fourth research question concerns the extent to which the Korean Presbyterian church functions to preserve and enhance the cultural tool-kit available to ethnic entrepreneurs by bringing Koreans together for joint services in Korean, by promoting Korean language classes for children, and by providing a center for the revitalization of Korean cultural activities.

METHODS

The Setting

The focus of this research was a Korean Presbyterian church with approximately 300 members located in an urban area home to about 60,000 Korean immigrants. According to the members of the congregation, the church ranked fifth among 170 Korean churches in this area in terms of size of membership and influence on the overall Korean community. Founded in 1974 and expanded in 1990, the church served a congregation of self-employed business owners and their immediate families (about 60 percent of the total membership) together with relatives engaged in other occupations (such as engineering and medicine) and their families. The church was representative of Korean churches both in its affiliation (Presbyterian Christianity, the
dominant affiliation for Korean churches in the U.S. and in South Korea) and in the large number of small business owners among its congregation (Light & Bonacich, 1988; Park, 1997).

The Grounded Theory Approach

To uncover the patterns of social and cultural capital within this community required an insider's knowledge of Korean culture and a detailed familiarity with the community. Participant observers must be well grounded in the organization's culture in order to capture (in a first-order analysis) the themes expressed by respondents (Van Maanen, 1979). A theoretical interpretation of these first-order findings comes later by means of a second-order analysis. Achieving a more dispassionate perspective for this second-order conceptual analysis can be difficult, however, to the extent that the participant observer becomes deeply involved in the field (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991: 435-36). Therefore, we employed both a participant observer (hereafter PO), who interviewed people in the field and participated in community activities; and two outsiders, who helped provide the more objective analysis of the data throughout the process of data collection, theory-emergence, and theory-testing (cf. Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Data collection. The data collection included both formal interviews and informal observations. For the formal interviews, the PO used an interview protocol to prompt responses and guide the conversation, while remaining open to conversational directions suggested by the informants.

The PO (the first author) was a Korean national who had lived in the United States for three years. He participated in church activities, visited informants' stores, held meetings with church members, and conducted in-depth interviews with eight informants.
Selected from the church membership to maximize representation from the entrepreneurial community and the church hierarchy, the interviewees included: six entrepreneurs, the church pastor, and an assistant church minister (known as the "educating minister" because of his responsibility for the congregation's theological education). The entrepreneurs included proprietors of the three most popular small businesses owned by church members: laundries, grocery stores, and fish and vegetable shops. The informants ranged in age from 35 to 60, and included seven men and one woman. The sample of entrepreneurs included two church deacons and one church elder.

All interviews were conducted in Korean. Many of the questions focused on the possible importance of the church for the development and maintenance of social contacts. The protocol included such questions as: Could you tell me about your business? What are the common problems that you face every day? Why did you join the church? What do you think is the role of the Korean church in the Korean community?

The informal data collection consisted of observations by the PO in several community settings. The PO attended church services, taught children at the Korean language school affiliated with the church, and visited (by invitation) the homes of church members on several occasions. All interviewed church members were fully informed of the PO's research interest in the church, and confidentiality was guaranteed to all respondents.

Field notes, in the form of a diary and meeting summaries, were also kept throughout the research. The PO's notes were audited by another ethnographer who reviewed the written field notes, transcripts of interviews, journal entries, documents, and analysis sheets. This procedure helped to ensure the dependability and confirmability of the study (cf. Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
Data analysis. Following a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990), we developed our conceptual analysis through a continuous interplay between theory and data collection. The conceptual arguments used to frame this paper emerged in an iterative fashion as tentative reflections during data collection were followed by detailed content analysis, reflection and discussion between the co-authors, return to the data, and a continuing cycle of reflection and discussion.

Through content analysis, we attempted to understand the processes of social and cultural capital circulation within the Korean church. Three primary sources of data were used for this content analysis: (1) field notes; (2) the tapes and transcripts of interviews; and (3) documentation relating to the activities of the church. In the content analysis phase, we relied on Spradley's (1979) concepts of domain and taxonomic analysis to identify first-order findings. Domain analysis involves grouping categories of facts under symbolic domains. For example, Table 1 illustrates how the domain entitled "Clan Society," an in vivo code (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) related to family cohesion, emerged from an analysis of quotes from interviews with informants.

Insert Table 1 about here

Taxonomic analysis involves analyzing the relationships among the domains using the informants’ interpretations as the focus. In domain and taxonomic analysis, we included (translated) terms close to the words and phrases used by informants to preserve the informants' meanings (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).
FIRST ORDER FINDINGS

The Clan Society

Three extended families and their allies dominated Church membership, according to the informants. Each of the three families consisted of 30 to 40 people, and together these family members comprised about 30 percent of the entire congregation. The remaining members of the congregation tended to align themselves with one of the three family groups.

According to the assistant church minister, this dominance of family groups made the church resemble a "clan society in the primitive ages." This minister suggested that Koreans are much influenced by Confucian beliefs, and therefore tend to gather as clans, to attach great importance to clan hierarchies, and to share a collective consciousness. One of the informants stated that the extended families, led by deacons or elders, were the pressure groups that made the important decisions in the church. For example, the selection of the current pastor was aided by the sponsorship of the Park family.

This extended Park clan (totaling 44 family members) was formed around Mr. Park, the head of the family, the nuclear families of his sister and three brothers, and the nuclear families of a brother and a sister of Mr. Park’s wife. Two elders, five deacons, and nine acting deacons represented the family in the church hierarchy.

The Park clan included 10 nuclear families, and 6 of these families owned and ran small businesses. All of these small businesses were grocery stores. One informant suggested that families like the Parks possessed a "package of necessary resources" for starting particular businesses, including elements such as: financial resources, information about good locations, and supplier contacts. He added that prior to starting his own laundry business he was much
helped by the opportunity to examine the layout and machines of an existing laundry shop owned by a church member.

Respondents were in agreement concerning the importance of family ties for the success of their small businesses. For example, Joowon Lim, owner of a fish and vegetable shop, described the typical business as consisting of a husband, wife, and children. According to the assistant minister, additional family members tended to be recruited from Korea because of the labor-intensive nature of the small businesses. The extended family was also important, he said, because of the financial resources and business knowledge available within the larger group.

**The Benefits of Church Membership**

One informant (Mr. Kim) suggested that it was church membership that helped Korean immigrants.

I have had instances where I did lend money to some people. There are those who say they don't know anyone else outside of the church. The church significantly helps out people who come to the U.S. for the first time and who are in these situations. If there were no church, it would be extremely difficult. Through the church, people who come here for the first time receive a tremendous amount of help in adjusting to the new culture.

Family members within the Korean community tended to attend the same church, according to our informants. One informant (Mr. Lee) described the pressure he experienced from family members concerning church attendance.
I had not gone to church in the last year and a half. My reason for coming back to church is that my parents and sisters questioned why I wasn't going to church. Because of that pressure, I started going to church again. I work six days a week and my only day off is Sunday. It is hard for me to give up my only day off and go to church. Even now, I don't want to go, but if I don't, my relationship with the family will suffer and that's why I am forced to go to church.

This informant added that working life in the U.S. tended to revolve around the family more so than in Korea, because it was more difficult in the U.S. to have friendships and to manage time. Family members tended to live in different areas surrounded by Americans, so the church provided a place for the family to get together and catch up at least once a week.

Mr. Kim, who was an elder of the church and a grocery store owner in his mid-50s, explained how joining the church had a dramatic effect on his career, resulting in his acquisition of a small business. As a young man in Seoul, South Korea, he worked as a policeman. He emigrated with his wife to the U.S. in 1974 at the invitation of his sister, who had emigrated earlier. At the time of his emigration he was in his mid-30s and had no plan to become self-employed in the U.S. The Kim couple initially stayed with Mrs. Kim's sister and husband, who were founding members of the church. Through this connection, the Kims were allied with one of the most prominent church clans. The membership of the church in these early days was about 60 people.
Mr. Kim found unskilled work in the U.S. for several months, and then was surprised when he was asked by one of the members of the church congregation if he wanted to take over the running of a corner grocery store in a predominantly white working class city neighborhood. Mr. Kim had no previous experience running a store, and had no plans to go into this kind of business, but he accepted. He preferred to draw upon family help for financing from his nine siblings, rather than risk getting involved in one of the Korean rotating credit associations (the "gae"), which he characterized as "dangerous." After five years of running his first store, he bought his current store in a predominantly African American city neighborhood, and has remained there for 17 years, building the business up until it employees 3 extra people besides himself and his wife. Following Mr. Kim's emigration, six more of his siblings came to the U.S., and joined the church.

In Mr. Kim's case, therefore, network connections made in the church radically affected the course of his career. But church networks also served more social needs. The church acted as a social club for Koreans, according to one grocery storeowner. The church held social functions after services, and also organized regional meetings and youth group meetings. People attended to meet other Koreans, because they felt lonely, and because they wanted to make friends.

The assistant church minister suggested that in Korea people found a social affinity with others from the same region or school, whereas in the U.S. Korean immigrants found affinity through their church and family. He said that the church played a central function in everyday life. For example, a ceremony such as Korean independence day tended to be organized by church members even though officially it was hosted by the secular Korean Association. Thus,
he said, Korean immigrants found a new identity with the church and its congregation. One informant added that Koreans tried to expand their churches not just for religious reasons but because "the expansion of the church signifies a higher prestige for the officers of the church and for the church itself."

One grocery storeowner confirmed that church in the U.S. and church in Korea were different. He said that new immigrants felt that they had to attend church in the U.S. whether or not they attended church in Korea. He suggested that the church provided emotional support.

Some entrepreneurs and professionals (such as realtors, mechanics, doctors and lawyers) who dealt mainly with Korean customers benefited from church membership because they met potential customers at church activities. One informant mentioned the example of a realtor who changed church memberships frequently to find prospective Korean customers. For most church members, however, who bought and sold mainly from non-Koreans, church membership provided no direct commercial networking advantages, according to this same informant.

**Church Activities and Business Success**

Church members who acquired official status (such as elder) within the church tended to proclaim this fact in business advertisements in the local Korean newspapers. An informant noted that whereas in Korea staff positions in the church were appointed, in the U.S. they were elected. The election process was very competitive, and therefore to hold an office in the church was to achieve public recognition of status.

Attending church itself was associated with success according to the assistant minister: "To dress up in a suit to go to church symbolizes your success in America," he said. Mr. Kim, the church elder, discussed the public benefits of church membership as follows.
Since I read the Bible very frequently and also keep a Bible at the cash register, everyone knows I am a Christian. Most of the customers are glad that I read the Bible. Only two people, so far, didn't like it and actually ran away. It seems to me that those people who don't like the Bible are followers of Satan. Many Americans are glad to see Koreans reading the Bible and having the same religion as them because they think most Koreans believe in Buddhism.

This church elder confirmed that his customers actually addressed him as "Elder."

This same informant strongly rejected the idea that the church had any connection with promoting business.

You don't really talk about money in church. You should be focusing your attention on God and the teachings and not bringing business inside the church; it just doesn't seem at all appropriate.

Like other members of the church hierarchy, this elder was both a teetotaler and a non-smoker. Further, he said that he spent any free time he had from work on church activities rather than playing golf or engaging in other leisure pursuits. The church pastor emphasized that, "Protestant Christians have to work hard to make this a better world." He criticized Buddhism because it "secludes itself from people and society" and avoids being involved with "worldly things." One respondent confirmed that he believed his salvation depended on his personal beliefs and behaviors, including a personal belief in Jesus Christ. Salvation did not depend at all on the intervention of the pastor or other people.
The Isolation of Koreans and the Role of the Church in Promoting Korean Culture

The assistant minister said that Korean churches in general and his church in particular had no contact with American churches. His church was founded, not as a branch of an existing denomination, but at the initiative of several Korean small business owners who appointed a non-denominational immigrant pastor trained in South Korea. According to those who organized the establishment of this church, its founding was a local event unconnected with any other established church either Korean or American. At first, the church had no affiliation with any specific Christian doctrine, but in 1990 the third pastor, who had been trained in a Presbyterian theological college in South Korea, insisted that the church become a Presbyterian church. The church affiliated with the Korean American Presbyterian Churches Association, a group that maintains a weak link to the Korean Jesus Presbyterians association (of South Korea), but has no link to current U.S. Presbyterianism.

According to our informants, the social life of most church members involved exclusively other members of the congregation and tended to exclude Americans. A church deacon said that he felt "very nervous" when a new American customer entered his laundry shop because "the new customer might not have the same patience as the old customers." The main reason for this nervousness toward American strangers, he said, was the language barrier.

I can handle communicating with broken English to my customers,

but how can I go to a social function such as a picnic and hold a conversation for hours?

The deacon confirmed that apart from the limited contact with customers, Korean entrepreneurs in this community did not usually seek relationships with Americans.
Koreans, he continued, tended to interact with members of their own community, speaking Korean, eating Korean food, and practicing Korean culture. The church played an important role in promoting Korean culture by, for example, holding Korean language classes on Saturday mornings for about 100 students taught by ten teachers, some of who were Korean Ph.D. students. The principal of this Korean language school mentioned that he borrowed video tapes on Korean culture from the Korean consulate to teach the community's children: "I think it is crucial that we teach our kids Korean language and culture to maintain the importance of the Korean ethnic church in our society. If our second generation can't understand Korean, why would they attend Korean churches when it is a lot easier to go to American churches?"

SECOND ORDER FINDINGS

Church membership, according to our respondents, was an overwhelmingly family affair. Social cohesion was maintained and enhanced within the Korean entrepreneurial community through the regular contact between family members attending church functions. Intense pressure was sometimes placed on family members to attend church, and this was interpreted by one respondent as an effort to preserve family unity by bringing scattered family members together at least once a week. New immigrants, respondents suggested, felt obliged to attend the Presbyterian church to which their relatives belonged even if the immigrants were not churchgoers in Korea. From the point of view of social capital, therefore, the church functioned to promote cohesion within extended family groups.

The church also brought members of three extended families together, thus promoting cross-family ties. Church members frequently aided fellow church members in their businesses by providing know-how, contacts, and start-up capital. Thus, the high degree of trust established
on the basis of church membership facilitated the flow of resources both within and across families.

Within this relatively closed social system, social capital effects showed up not just in the form of family cohesion and the availability of business resources, but also in the form of social support and affiliation. Some people attended church events to ease loneliness and to meet others. The church organized events at which church members could interact with other Koreans. For these Korean immigrants, isolated during their daily lives within communities of non-Koreans, church services and other church activities helped maintain social identity.

The social benefits of church membership should not obscure the evident religious devotion of at least some of the members. The assistant minister provided instruction in the Calvinistic doctrine on which Presbyterianism is based to church members. Because church members believed that their religion required active involvement in the world, they saw no contradiction between leading a religious life and pursuing business profits. Thus, one elder of the church made a habit of reading the Bible in his grocery store, and criticized those customers who were offended by this as "followers of Satan." As Giddens (1971: 129) has commented, “labor in the material world, for the Calvinist, becomes attributed with the highest positive ethical evaluation.” The church pastor criticized Buddhism because it promoted seclusion from the world. The Weberian thesis of a connection between Presbyterianism and worldly striving appeared to be supported in this case.

At the same time, church members were aware that membership in a Protestant church afforded legitimacy in the American context. The business owners valued the legitimacy gained when American customers and other important elements of the environment became aware of
their Christian faith. This is well illustrated by the respondent who mentioned that his customers referred to him as "Elder." In their own Korean newspapers, business owners were proud to display their church titles in commercial advertising. The church itself and its continuing success was mentioned as a source of institutional pride for church members, particularly members of the church hierarchy. The process of attending church was itself symbolic of success in America, according to the assistant minister. The evidence suggests, therefore, that part of the attraction of membership in the church was due to the perceived legitimacy of the church in an American context. Korean immigrants valued the opportunity to display the similarity between their values and those of successful Americans.

Part of the paradox of the church community, however, was that the church functioned not only to promote an isomorphism between members' values and those of the institutional environment, but also to apparently maintain a distinctive Korean culture. Church members reported little contact with Americans apart from necessary commercial transactions. Despite having lived in the U.S. for 20 to 40 years, many members of the sample had difficulty conversing in English. Respondents said that they preferred to interact with other Koreans, to speak Korean, to eat Korean food, and practice Korean culture. The church was active in providing extensive Korean language classes for children. Thus, the church was clearly an arena in which the entrepreneurs and their families strove to maintain the tool-kit of Korean culture.

The pressure to assimilate to American culture and yet to maintain Korean culture was felt by all respondents. The church itself can be seen as an expression of this tension, overwhelmingly Western in its ideology of asceticism combined with worldly success and striving, yet overwhelmingly Korean in its language, customs and membership. The church
functioned as a safe haven for immigrants whose daily lives were dominated by striving in the host culture. The church offered, however, not a pure Korean culture, but the possibility of a transformed Korean culture, one adapted to a country that the Korean immigrants perceived to have been founded by Puritans and run by church-goers. Church members disciplined themselves in a Protestant ethic admired by the members of the society in which they lived. Thus, the church offered a *habitus* to members, a new role system for a new country, a cultural blueprint of how to be Korean in a society activated by Protestant Christianity and the spirit of capitalism.

**CONCLUSION**

Our research questions concerned the extent to which the Korean Presbyterian church maintained and enhanced the social and cultural capital of the congregation. We found strong evidence for social capital effects. In particular, the church provided an arena for the maintenance and enhancement of both strong ties (between family members) and weak ties (across family groups and occupations). Valuable resources such as business loans, business advice, contacts, and social support were available to church members. Families tended to develop business expertise in particular niches such as neighborhood grocery stores, and shared this expertise with other church members interested in setting up similar businesses in other areas.

One of the distinctive aspects of this ethnic community was its dispersion in space: The community only came together at church functions. This dispersion may have reduced possible competition between the entrepreneurial families, and enhanced the value of the church as an arena for social cohesion. Membership in the church required ritual practices, such as adherence
to a weekly discipline of attendance, and, for the more devout, ritual prohibitions of such worldly pleasures such as tobacco and alcohol. As Durkheim (1973: 177-186) suggested, such religious ceremonies and prohibitions help bind together dispersed individuals who pursue their own egoistic interests in the profane world of commerce. Durkheim emphasized that the distinctive aspect of religious thought was the separation of all things into two classes: the sacred and the profane. The clan itself possesses sacred qualities that are recognized and enhanced by members gathering for church ceremonies (Giddens, 1971: 108). Religious ceremonials enable clan members to feel part of a collective ferment, utterly different from the profane world of utilitarian activity.

Our analyses also revealed the importance of the church as a cultural training center for Korean immigrants seeking worldly success in a new country. Not only was church membership associated with success in America, it was also seen to confer legitimacy on Koreans operating businesses in an overwhelmingly Christian environment. Additionally, for these intensely busy entrepreneurs and their families, the church was the place where a distinctly western belief system (Calvinist theology) was available in a Korean context and language. Thus, the church functioned not only to reinforce Korean culture but also to transmute Korean cultural capital for use in the new world.

Membership in the Korean Presbyterian church conferred multiple benefits, therefore. Social bonds were strengthened between and across families, resources were shared between those rich in experience or money and those in need, and cultural capital was recreated to impress outsiders and to facilitate the success of members.
Further research is needed, however, on the possibility that Korean immigrants find in the Presbyterian church support for beliefs and practices they bring with them from Korea. The extent to which immigrants’ beliefs, values, and behaviors are changed by their membership in the church is not readily apparent from the data we collected. It may be that Korean immigrants, relative to immigrants from other countries, are more open to adopting new religious beliefs. According to the latest census figures (Lee, 1996), about 49 percent of the South Korean population has no adherence to any particular religion. Those immigrants with little or no religious preference may well be more open to conversion to belief systems prevailing in the new environment than immigrants who arrive with strong religious affiliations already in place.

We suggested that this particular church offered its members the *habitus* of the Puritan ascetic to validate long hours of hard work in commercial activities, and the data are supportive of this reading. Previous research has described the long hours and ascetic existence of Korean immigrant entrepreneurs (e.g., Light & Bonacich, 1988). Further studies of similar church communities would help decipher the relative importance of isomorphism with the host community on the one hand, and cultural training in the spirit of capitalism, on the other.

One possible comparison group might be the Irish who arrived in the U.S. in large numbers during the nineteenth century. This was a time, like the present, of massive immigration to America. The Irish experience resembled the Korean in several ways. First, many of the Irish emigrating as a result of famine in mid-19th century Ireland came from the Gaelic-speaking West of Ireland and spoke little English (Kenny, 1998). Second, the Irish in America tended to organize themselves around their churches (Dolan, 1975). Third, the Irish,
like the Koreans, were seen as distinctly different from the majority of Americans, and experienced considerable inter-ethnic conflict and discrimination (Clark, 1982).

The differences between the Irish and Korean experiences might also be instructive. The Irish, unlike the Koreans, tended to cluster together in ethnic communities in the vicinity of the church (Dolan, 1975). Further, the Irish who arrived during the mid-19th century and later tended to be Irish Catholics (although many Protestant Irish had arrived in earlier decades). Far from starting their own independent churches, these Irish Catholics were served by expansions of the existing Roman Catholic church (McAvoy, 1969) and by networks of church-related institutions such as Catholic schools (Clark, 1982). Further, these Irish Catholics tended to derive from rural farming backgrounds rather than from middle-class urban backgrounds. The small shops, so distinctively a part of the Korean experience, appeared to be less so of the Irish Catholic experience. The Irish tended to move initially into paid unskilled employment. The majority of Irish entrepreneurs tended to be not shop keepers but independent builders and contractors (Clark, 1973). The Irish also tended to be active politically, reaching early prominence in both Democratic and Republican parties in cities such as Philadelphia (Clark, 1982).

Ethnographic records concerning the experiences of Irish Americans in the 19th century are unfortunately not available to provide a detailed comparison with the daily lives of recent Korean immigrants. Our study of a Korean community can only begin to offer insight into the complex dynamics of entrepreneurial striving, social cohesion, and cultural adaptation. Clearly other groups have struggled with similar dilemmas and have forged solutions that both resemble and differ from those we have described. We have revealed a representative community
struggling to both retain and assimilate culture, to both maintain and expand family bonds, to both pursue profits and practice an ascetic Christianity. Each migrant to the United States faces the age-old question: How can I retain my family bonds and cultural identity and yet thrive in this new land? Within the cultural mosaic of contemporary America, Korean ethnic churches offer one set of institutionalized solutions to the emigrants’ dilemma.
REFERENCES


TABLE 1

Example of Domain Analysis

The Clan Society

- Three large extended families take up approximately 40 percent of the entire congregation of this church.
- Each family is comprised of 30-40 members.
- This resembles the clan society in the primitive ages.
- When an influential member of the family attends a certain church, the rest of the family tends to follow that person to that church.
- Koreans are influenced by Confucian ideas and therefore they tend to gather as clans, to attach a great importance to the clan hierarchies, and to share a collective consciousness.
- Each extended family is led by either an elderly female deacon or a male elder.
- The extended families are the pressure groups who make the important decisions in the church.
- Because the three big extended families have a significant influence on church activities, people who do not belong to these three extended families tend to become closer to one of these three big extended families.
- Even though they belong to the same extended family, family members do not live in the same area. Once Koreans are financially established, they tend to live in neighborhoods that are predominantly occupied by Caucasians.
- The church provides a place for the families to get together and catch up at least once a week.
• "I had not gone to church in the last year and a half. My reason for coming back to church is that my parents and sisters questioned why I wasn't going to church. Because of that pressure, I started going to church again. I work six days a week and my only day off is Sunday. It is hard for me to give up my only day off and go to church. Even now, I don't want to go, but if I don't, my relationship with the family will suffer and that's why I am forced to go to church."

• Through social gatherings after the service and youth group meetings, members of large extended families become acquainted with other church members beyond their own families.
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