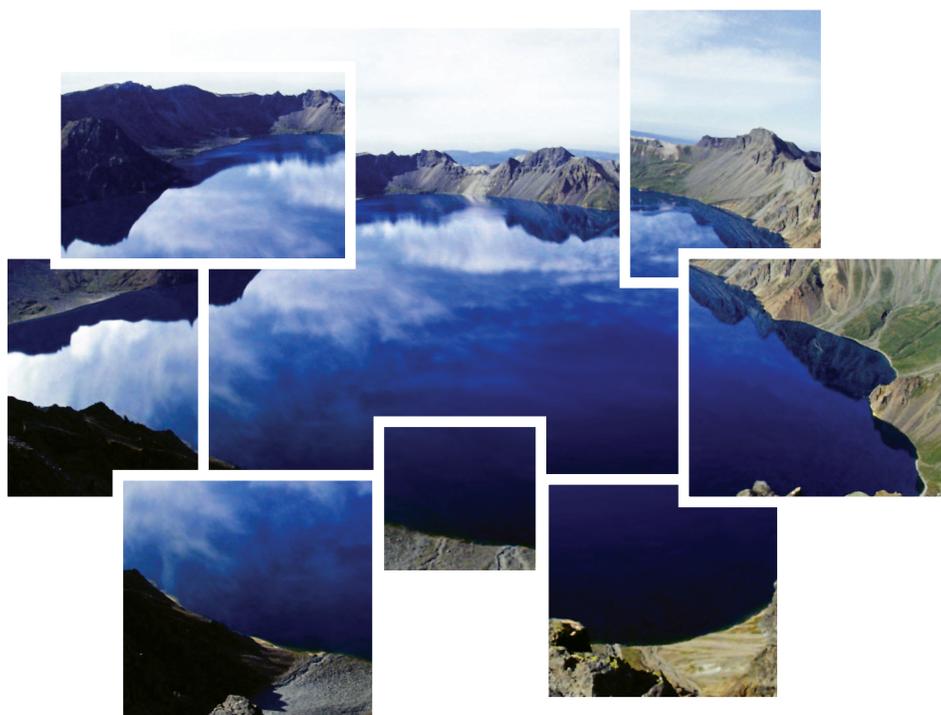


# Mobile Subjects

Boundaries and Identities  
in the Modern Korean Diaspora



Edited by Wen-hsin Yeh

KOREA RESEARCH MONOGRAPH 36

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**Institute of  
East Asian Studies**  
University of California, Berkeley

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WEN-HSIN YEHL

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For the organization of the project in all the stages that led to the current volume, we would like to thank, at Korea University and Berkeley, the individual efforts of Sungtaek Cho, Hong Yung Lee, John Lie, Kevin O'Brien, Steve Vogel, and the late Jon Gjerde. For their invaluable intellectual input and advice we would like to thank those who have served as discussants and respondents in Seoul and Berkeley, especially Seomin Kim, Hong Yung Lee, Yumi Moon, Kyu Hyun Kim, and Ken Wells. For their outstanding program and administrative support, we would like to thank Aaron Miller, Hilary Finchum-Sung, Martin Backstrom, Caverlee

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# Introduction

WEN-HSIN YEH

One of the most powerful driving forces in modern Korean history concerns the construction of a unified nation centered upon the Korean peninsula, a construction that in turn would be predicated upon the construction of a shared heritage of a people who trace their common ancestry to the mythical Tangun. In this regard, the Koreans, like many other people of East and Southeast Asia, have experienced their modernity in terms of nation-building and the transformation of the population from royal subjects to full national members.<sup>1</sup>

But in the long stretch of the twentieth century, the Koreans have also set themselves apart from the Japanese, the Chinese, and others with a national construction that has privileged an ethnonationalistic discourse at the expense of alternative constructions of collective identity.<sup>2</sup> Much of this development has to do with the specifics of Korea's modern history. In the late nineteenth century, the educated Korean elite, thanks to the signing of the Sino-Japanese Treaty of Shimonoseki, took up in earnest their search for a Korean people and a Korean nation. The idea of a modern Korean nation was born when the peninsula was caught between the

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<sup>1</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

<sup>2</sup> Gi-wook Shin, *Ethno-Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006). Ethnic nationalism, with the three thousand *ri* [Korean, villages] of the peninsula and the mythical genealogy of Tangun, was not, of course, the only probable form of collective identity available to the Koreans in their modern days. Alternative possibilities had presented themselves at various moments in the construction of collective identities, and elite politics evolved around border-crossing conceptions of race and class as well as universal norms of civilization. More for historical reasons than logical necessity, the bloodline as an organizing category triumphed over all alternatives—so long as the Koreans are yet to fulfill their national aspiration in the creation of a unified and independent Korean state, coextensive in territorial reach with the imagined homeland of the historical Korean nation and people.

warring empires of China and Japan.<sup>3</sup> Prior to this moment, the Chosun court and the *yangban* elite had held up, to be sure, their vision of a Korean kingdom. They had also done much to build their version of centralizing Korean institutions. Yet after Shimonoseki and in light of the looming crises, Korean elites saw the defenselessness of their traditional institutions and caught glimpses of a different construction of the Korean nation. In this new vision, the nation was to be centered upon the power of the people instead of the prestige of its rulers. Thanks to a new wave of intellectual mobilization, "Korea" came to embody, by the turn of the twentieth century, a Korean-speaking people who shared a history and a natural geography coextensive with the reach of the Korean peninsula. Korean intellectuals of the late nineteenth century turned to disciplines such as archaeology and linguistics to find the symbolic resources for the historical construction of a Korean nation and its people. They used learned disquisitions as well as popular writings to advance the idea that there was an inalienable connection between the Korean people and their land. They argued that calling the peninsula their homeland was the birthright of the Koreans as descendents of Tangun. The demands were strident, precisely as their realization seemed threatened or even doomed.

Yet as the crises deepened, the people of the peninsula found themselves becoming the most mobile subjects in East Asia. Millions of Koreans were uprooted from their homes in the subsequent decades of wars and colonialism.

Japanese annexation of Korea took place in 1910. Colonial policies of expansion, modernization, and assimilation unleashed socioeconomic dynamics that challenged the established Korean ways of life of the nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> The number of Korean subjects sojourning in Japan in 1945 was estimated to approach 2.4 million.<sup>5</sup> Another 1.5 million Koreans were said to have crossed the northern rivers into Manchuria to help bring the Manchu homeland under Japanese imperial sway. By the first quarter of the twentieth century, Korean presence in the sparsely populated Russian Far East was so significant that it prompted Stalin's government to force their relocation to the Soviet Republics in Central Asia.<sup>6</sup> As

<sup>3</sup> Andre Schmid, *Korea Between Empires: 1895–1919* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> John Lie, "The Discriminated Fingers: The Korean Minority in Japan," *Monthly Review* 38, no. 8 (1987): 17–23.

<sup>5</sup> Figure derived from Lori Watt, *When Empire Comes Home: Repatriation and Reintegration in Postwar Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2009), 26, 91n93.

<sup>6</sup> Terry Martin, "The Origins of Soviet Ethnic Cleansing," *The Journal of Modern History* 70, no. 4 (1998): 813–861. Also Tamara Troyakova, "Transnational Migration and Identity Transformation in the Russian Far East," and Alexei Starichkov, "Ethnic Koreans in the Russian

ONE

# Korean Migration in Nineteenth-Century Manchuria

*A Global Theme in Modern Asian History*

KWANGMIN KIM

On June 1, 1872, three Korean spies—Choe Chongböm, Kim Taehŭng, and Lim Sökgŭn—crossed the Yalu (Korean, Ap’nok) River to begin a six-week journey through the Sino-Korean borderland. They traveled on behalf of Chosun Korea’s Huchang County. A mere year earlier, the people on the northern side of the river had engaged the army of Huchang County in a fierce skirmish remembered by the locals as the Battle of Marokpo (Horse and Deer Dock). Huchang County prevailed in this war over timber-cutting rights.<sup>1</sup> Following the conflict, Huchang County officials sent the spies to collect information about the people who remained—and who might seek vengeance at any time. Huchang County was thus especially interested in obtaining information regarding the military preparedness of the community.

At the same time, Huchang County also wanted to know what had attracted Koreans to the area in the first place. By the 1870s, Koreans of the northern counties were defecting from their towns and villages and crossing the river in large numbers. Huchang County officials viewed this development with suspicion. Reports circulated that many migrants believed that the area across the Yalu and Tumen Rivers was a paradise where Jin’in (True Person) or Ko’in (High Person) resided. The Huchang county officials asked the spies to collect information about this rumor.

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<sup>1</sup> For a brief explanation of the Battle of Marokpo, see Yu Sung-ju, “Choson Hugi Sogando Ijumin E Taehan Ilgochal: Kangbuk Ilgi Ui Haejae E Pucho” [Korean immigration to the western Kando during the Late Chosun Period: An introduction to Kangbuk Ilgi], *Asea yon’gu* [Asia Research] 59 (1978): 302.

TWO

## Status and Smoke

### *Koreans in Japan's Opium Empire*

MIRIAM KINGSBERG

Japan was an opium empire, in which the revenues of state-sponsored and state-sanctioned drug trafficking financed the conquest and administration of East Asia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>1</sup> Beyond its economic role, opium also fulfilled important ideological functions as a signifier of racial status. Imperial Japan was characterized by a strong awareness of both ethnic confraternity and difference. Within a pervasive consciousness of race, imperialists deployed opium to mutually constitute the (allegedly) abstinent, elite Japanese and the “addicted” and therefore inferior indigenes they came to rule. Borrowing ideas from Social Darwinists in the West, prewar Japanese thinkers cited the relative absence of opium use in the home islands as a sign of the superior racial and cultural “fitness” of the Yamato people.<sup>2</sup> By contrast, they deemed narcotics consumption among other Asians an expression of degeneracy and ineptitude for self-sovereignty. This binary had obvious uses within the ideology of expansionism, legitimating the Japanese as both liberators freeing the “slaves of the poppy” and as new masters guiding their charges from depravity and backwardness to civilization and enlightenment.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Following the conventions of both the primary and secondary literature, I use the terms “opium,” “opiates,” “narcotics,” and “drugs” interchangeably, except in cases where greater clarity is desirable.

<sup>2</sup> Kikuchi Yūji, “Ahen mondai ni kanshite (2),” *Dojin* 4, no. 4 (1929): 25–32. Writers presented Japanese “fitness” in both racial and cultural terms. As Michael Weiner observes, these categories were seen as functionally equivalent in the imperial age. See Michael Weiner, “The Invention of Identity: ‘Self’ and ‘Other’ in Pre-War Japan,” in *Japan's Minorities: The Illusion of Homogeneity*, ed. Michael Weiner (New York: Routledge, 1997), 1–16.

<sup>3</sup> Inoue Kōbai, “Ahen kyūshoku taiken ki (ni),” *Dōjin* 4, no. 7 (1930): 25–34.

THREE

## Women on the Loose

### *Household System and Family Anxiety in Colonial Korea*

SUNGYUN LIM

#### **Introduction: Mobile Women as Social Problem**

On June 22, 1925, *Tonga Ilbo* published a story about a runaway wife entitled, “With an Awareness That Women Also Needed Education, a House-Wife Runs Away from the ‘Doll’s House’.” With a title that was an obvious pun on Henrik Ibsen’s famous play, the article relayed a story about a woman named Yu Chin-kyöng, who ran away from her home of a “respectable family” (*myöng’mang’ga*) in a rural town.<sup>1</sup> According to the article, upon hearing that her husband, who was staying in Japan for education, had moved in with a Japanese “modern woman,” Yu realized that “women too must learn,” and ran away to Seoul in the dark of the night. After putting her child to bed, she sneaked out of the house, and stepped onto a train headed for Kyöngsöng (Seoul). The following morning, the aghast in-laws found three letters, addressed to the father-in-law, mother-in-law, and husband. In the letter to her husband, Yu reportedly wrote, “It is my utmost regret (*chölgchönji han*) that I have not had education. I wish that you marry a good wife who is chaste and wise (*hyönsukhan yangchö*) and lead a happy life.” In Seoul, she enrolled at a women’s school (*kyöngsong mo’nyö chahak’kwan*). When she was pressed by her natal parents to return home, Yu shaved her head, threatening that she would rather enter a Buddhist nunnery than return home.

Together with reportage on the alarming rate of divorce, the article expressed a heightened anxiety in Korea about women who were

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<sup>1</sup> Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* was introduced to Korea in 1921 in a translation printed in the newspaper *Maeil Sinbo*. Kim Suk-yi, “Yibsen ui yesulgwa sasangi hanguk kundae munhak e kichin yonghyang,” *Sisa mundan* 20 (December 2004): 59.

FOUR

## An Indispensable Edge

### *American Military Camptowns in Postwar Korea*

W. TAEJIN HWANG

A central sequence in Sin Sang-ok's 1958 film, *Hell Flower* (Jiokhwa), intercuts a cabaret show and dance party inside a U.S. military camp with a group of Korean men stealing goods out of this installation. While the gyrating dancers on the stage engross the American servicemen, accompanied by Korean women bused in for the dance, two of the women slip out and approach the GIs guarding the garrison perimeters. As the two women seductively distract the American guards, a group of Korean men penetrate the installation through the barbed wire fence. The scene of the men loading and then driving off with the stolen goods is juxtaposed with the lively dancing inside. The multiple seductions and desires of the American military camp—as the place of sexualized entertainment and coveted American goods—as well as the “labor” of the inhabitants of the contiguous and interdependent Korean camptowns are masterfully captured in this scene. In the camptowns (*gijichon*), communities that developed adjacent to or near U.S. military installations, Korean women worked in the sex industry while the men facilitated the selling of American goods in the Korean black market. It is here in the camptown, caught between “Hell” and “Flower,” that Sin Sang-ok situates and depicts the postwar nation in transition.

Clustered around American military camps *within* the geopolitical borders of postwar Korea, camptowns served as “borderlands” between two sovereign states. Camptowns are conceptualized as borderlands to denote their multiple geographies—as physical sites delineating territorial boundaries as well as militarized socio-economic and border-cultural spaces emerging from the “lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a

FIVE

## U.S.-Educated Elites and the Phenomenon of Study Abroad

JANE CHO

On June 17, 1965, *Chosun Ilbo* proudly presented the success story of a Park-Lee couple.<sup>1</sup> Donning graduation regalia, the pair held up their diplomas and beamed into the camera. The article boasted that even the American media buzzed with excitement over the accomplishments of this son and daughter of the “Land of the Morning Calm.” It praised the husband-wife pair for becoming the first married couple in the long history of the American University to receive their doctoral degrees on the same day. Then the news articles turned to personal details. Though they had prestigious degrees, Park and Lee came from humble backgrounds fraught with hardships that many Korean newsreaders could relate to. The couple spent their formative years enduring the dire consequences of a regime change and the devastation of civil war. Park, along with his seven siblings and parents, had fled to Pusan, the southernmost tip of Korea, where the family rebuilt their lives from the ground up as war refugees. Lee, on the hand, had lost both her parents early in her life, and her older brother had raised her. When the Korean War struck, the orphaned brother and sister fled to Pusan, and there the couple met. Even amid a civil war, Lee had studied assiduously and gained acceptance at Ewha University. After a year at Ewha, she finalized her plans to get an American education and left for the United States. The following year in 1953, her boyfriend Park also vowed to earn the highest degree—an American doctoral degree. Park spent a year at another elite Korean university and then headed

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<sup>1</sup> Won-su Chŏn, “Kat’ŭn nal ka’t’ŭn hakkyosŏ pubu paksa kach’i t’ansaeng: Pak Chŏng-su Yi Pŏm-ju ssi Miguk Amerik’an Taehak esŏ hagwi” [Same day, same school, the birth of an educated couple: Doctors Pak Chŏng-su and Yi Pŏm-jun from American University], *Chosun Ilbo*, June 17, 1965, 7.

## Homes on the Border

### *Ethnicity, Identity, and Everyday Space in Yanbian*

YISHI LIU

The form of rural Korean Chinese dwellings has changed in response to deep social and political fluctuations since the arrival of Korean migrants in Yanbian in the middle of the nineteenth century. I argue that housing construction practices have helped to continually reinforce ethnic Korean identity. By examining state policies in connection with Korean Chinese rural houses in Yanbian, this study affirms the role of the state in constructing ethnic identity.<sup>1</sup>

Oriented toward China's frontier, adjacent to North Korea and Russia, Yanbian Korean Chinese Autonomous Prefecture is the largest administrative entity in Jilin Province. Subdivided into six municipalities, the prefecture is presently home to 806,000 Koreans.<sup>2</sup> Koreans began migrating to this region in the late nineteenth century, due to nationwide famine in the

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<sup>1</sup> A portion of this paper appeared as a field report in *Traditional Dwelling and Settlement Review* (Fall 2009), under the title "Constructing Ethnic Identity: Making and Remaking of Rural Korean Chinese Houses in Yanbian, 1881–2008." The initial research for this paper was made possible by a grant from the Academy of Korea Studies (AKS) in Seoul and the Institute of East Asian Studies (IEAS) of the University of California at Berkeley. The author acknowledges and appreciates AKS support and other fellowships from IEAS. The author took all the pictures and redrew the surveying sketches, except where sources are specified.

<sup>2</sup> According to a 2002 provincial survey, this area covers approximately 42,700 square kilometers. The prefecture consists of six municipalities: Yanji, Longjing, Helong, Tumen, Dunhua, and Hunchun; and two counties, Antu and Wangqing. For more details on the distribution of the Korean minority in China, see Zaixian Zhu, "Dui Zhongguo Chaoxianzu ren kou fen bu yu te dian ji qi fa zhan qu shi de fen xi" [Analysis of the distribution of the population and characteristics of China's Korean minority], in *Chaoxianzu yanjiu luncong* [Research Series on the Korean minority], ed. Research Centre on Nationalities of Yanbian University, vol. 5 (Yanji: Yanbian University Press, 2001), 223–49.

SEVEN

## Exit, Voice, and Refugees

### *A Case Study for Understanding Political Stability and Emigration in North Korea*

IVO PLSEK

The 1990s were a particularly difficult period in the life of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). The disintegration of the Communist Bloc in the early 1990s was a major blow to the regime in Pyongyang. Deprived of Soviet subsidies and favorable terms of trade, for the first time in its history, the DPRK had to survive on its own. Sustaining itself, however, turned out to be beyond the state's capabilities. The North Korean economy recorded an immediate economic slump and soon the government began to repress domestic consumption with the campaign "Let's eat two meals a day." Then, in 1995 and 1996, the country suffered from heavy floods that were followed by a severe drought one year later. These natural disasters exacerbated the already desperate economic situation. A massive famine broke out, setting off a large refugee movement from the DPRK.

Under these circumstances and with the example of East Germany's collapse fresh in mind, many journalists, governments, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) began to think that North Korea's political machine could likewise disintegrate under the pressures of emigration. This, however, did not happen. How did Pyongyang survive the crisis? And how close was North Korea to a regime implosion similar to that of East Germany (GDR) in 1989? The objective of this chapter is to answer these inquiries. To do so the chapter is organized as follows: First, I provide a short historical comparison of the DPRK's emigration record during the Cold War with the developments in the 1990s, to show that the refugee crisis was indeed unprecedented in Korean history, not only in its scope but also in the way North Koreans managed to leave their

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