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BECOMING AN ADULT IN THE 'BIG WORLD':
KOREAN TRANSNATIONAL MIGRANTS' NAVIGATING FUTURES

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Becoming an Adult in the 'Big World':

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This dissertation examines the transnational lives of Korean educational migrants and their transition to adulthood by investigating questions such as: How do migrants manage their lives across borders? How do transnational engagements shape migrants' sense of future? In contrast to most sociological research on transnational migration, which is heavily "adult-centered," I pursue answers to these questions through the everyday lives of migrants in young adulthood who are no longer adolescents yet not fully self-sufficient adults. This liminality works as a double-edged sword: it gives young individuals a great deal of possibility and flexibility in their migratory lives, yet it introduces ambiguity and insecurity about their present and future states. My dissertation highlights distinct opportunities and challenges that the "in between" life stage brings to young migrants and how this shapes their migratory experience and life trajectories. I spent three years conducting ethnographic fieldwork in one young Korean migrant community in New Jersey. My findings suggest exploratory and personal developmental factors largely drove young Korean migrants' transnational engagements. This finding differed from scholarly observations on "adult" migrants in whom well-defined goals

primarily for material interests direct their migratory lives. The biggest aspiration of the young Korean migrants was to fashion a well-rounded global subjectivity. Consumption across borders was a medium through which they actualized their aspirations. Everyday interaction with same-age peers who had varied migration backgrounds multiplied reference points for being “well-rounded” and “global.” Through peer group socialization, they also shared “know-how” for navigating migratory life and made “toolkits” essential to their transition to adulthood. The products of these young migrants’ transnational engagements were often imageries or plans about their futures, which were largely oriented to global markets. Later, however, they learned their future projections were constrained by U.S. immigration policies, Korean citizenship policies, and job market conditions. My dissertation engages broad sociological debates on late modern society that contest settled or dichotomous definitions of immigration, citizenship, and identity. Furthermore, it speaks to an increasing number of young people who live for extended periods unanchored to traditional meanings of adulthood, citizenship, or nationality in pursuit of education, professional development, or self-actualization.

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Dedication

To the CYA members who allowed me to build my work on their lives

Preface

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INTRODUCTION

Looking into Young Koreans' Lives in the U.S.: Distinctions, Interactions, and Transitions

"Korea-like" New Jersey

On the way to lunch, my Korean friend Soo talked about her friend's upcoming visit. She was worried about not having enough time to make plans for her friend's visit. She said:

I told her to come with a full plan for what to do and eat while she is here. Then, she teased me, "You know I am going to Korea. In Korea, I eat Korean food and do Korean stuff. Nothing to make a plan about."

The fact is that Soo's friend was actually visiting a town in central New Jersey, not Korea. Compared to her town in Iowa, which lacks a single Korean grocery or restaurant, her visit to New Jersey where 93,679 Koreans reside with a growth rate of 43.4% from 2000 to 2010¹ could in fact be like visiting Korea. In particular, the Korean population is highly concentrated in northern and central New Jersey. More than 60% of the state's Korean population resides in Bergen County, and Koreans make up the largest group of all Asians in the county. The top five municipalities for Korean populations include four in Bergen County: Palisades Park (10,115), Fort Lee (8,318), Ridgefield (2,385), and Leonia (2,369) boroughs, while the fifth is in Hudson County: Jersey City (2,308) (NJ Labor

¹ Of the total 725,000 Asian population, Korean is the fourth largest group (13%) following Asian Indian (292,256), Chinese (134,442), and Filipino (110,650) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Market Reviews 2012). Substantial Korean populations also lived in various parts of Middlesex (7,401) and Hudson (4,791) counties. Multiple large Korean enclaves with well-developed business districts have major social service agencies, religious institutions, and stores with commercial signs in the Korean language, which makes people feel as if they were in Korea.

Soo's friend reminded me of Yebin, whom I met during my fieldwork at a young Korean community in 2009. Yebin took one year off from college in Korea and came to the U.S. to "learn English and broaden [her] perspectives." She enrolled in an English as a Second Language (ESL) program at a large state university. On the first day of school, the realization that there were "too many Koreans" on campus disappointed her. She had been ready to embark on an adventure away from the people, language, food, and culture in which she had been born and raised. Not long after, however, she became amazed by a new discovery in a situation that had been seemingly too familiar to excite her:

Before I came here, I thought Koreans living abroad were all the same. They are *gyopo*². *Gyopo* is *gyopo*, you know. Now, I see they are all different. I have met many Koreans here at the school cafeteria, parties on Thursday nights, my ESL class, and the church meeting. *Gyopos* are so-called "bananas." They look Korean, but their inside is pretty much like *foreigners* [Americans]. No, actually, they also look different—I mean, their style-wise. They have *gyopo* styles. *Iminja*³ is different from *gyopo*. They are still Korean. They speak Korean. But, I feel like they are more likely to have hard feelings about Korea than *gyopos*. There are also so many *yuhaksaengs*⁴ around here. They are their own, too.

This study is about young men and women who traveled thousands of miles from Korea to learn English, experience a bigger world, broaden their

² Meaning Korean emigrants. The term *gyopo* (교포) is composed of two Chinese characters used in Korea. *Gyo* (교) means living outside and *po* (포) means siblings or related.

³ The term *iminja* (이민자) is composed of three Chinese characters used in Korea. *I* (이) means leaving, *min* (민) means citizen, and *ja* (자) means person/people. By the dictionary definition, the two terms, *gyopo* and *iminja* are synonymous but they were differentiated in everyday use.

⁴ Meaning study abroad students.

world views, and/or get away from the brutally competitive Korean education environment. Ironically, however, they ended up living their formative years in “Korea-like” environments, just as Soo’s friend called the New Jersey area “Korea.” This study delves into this contradiction in which young Koreans live their migratory lives and become adults.

These young Koreans are known by many different names that are often used interchangeably by outsiders: Korean-Americans, Korean immigrants, study abroad students, or international students. As Yebin acknowledged, however, each of the names in fact refers to a distinct group of young Koreans, and there are often clear boundaries among them. Nonetheless, they live together in each other’s presence. Their daily interactions with varied groups of Korean migrants shape their experience of migrants’ lives, Korean identities, and views on their futures.

The idea for this study began when I first encountered studies about Korean-American and Asian-American youths’ “homecoming” visits to their home country in search for their roots and a sense of belonging (Kibria 2002). These trips, however, often assure them of their foreignness from their roots because of their Americanized ways of being and living. In the case of Korean-American youths, their typical lack of Korean fluency especially makes them the subject of harsh criticism by native Koreans in Korea, who believe that the youths have lost what they were supposed to keep. In more subtle ways, mundane interactions with native Koreans work to accentuate their “individualistic” (i.e., “Americanized”) ways of thinking and acting and make them feel foreign in their home country. Paradoxically, their otherness cannot be completely othered because it is not free from moral judgment (i.e., they are

different and therefore “wrong”) unlike that of *real* foreigners who are ethnically or culturally unrelated to Korea. During this “homecoming” trip, Korean-American youths come to the realization that America is now their home (Kim 2007). That gives them a sense of getting “closure” in their search for belongingness from Korea. In some cases, the trip deepens their “authenticity dilemma” (Tuan 1999, p. 106) in that they are unable to find their place in Korea while their Americanness is still “incomplete.”

As a sociologist interested in culture and ethno/national identities, I found New Jersey a fascinating research site that can tell us stories from the other direction: how Koreanness and foreignness are claimed and practiced outside of the geographic Korean border. Specifically, I wondered: How do dynamics between native Korean (i.e., new arrivals in the U.S.) and Korean-American/immigrant young individuals play out in a place where all of them are migrants (or foreign) to a greater or lesser degree? What would be at the other end of the “authenticity dilemma”? What can the dynamics in Korean communities tell us about the changing landscape of ethnic diversities in the U.S. in a broad sense? To that end, New Jersey provides an almost natural experimental setting where a large number of Koreans with varied migration histories and background reside (Min 2011).

This study draws on data from my longitudinal and mixed method study of nearly 150 young Korean individuals whom I met through the College and Young Adult community (CYA) from September 2009 to September 2012.⁵ CYA is

⁵ In addition to the fieldwork, I also conducted a survey (N=118) and in-depth interviews. I collected survey data for one year period from January 2011 to September 2012 (see Appendix A for the survey questionnaire). In addition, I carried out in-depth interviews with sixty membership (see Appendix B for interview guidelines).

a sub-group at one of the largest Korean churches (Presbyterian) in central New Jersey. In the following section, I offer a sketch of my fieldwork site. Afterwards, I present three analytical foci—distinctions, interactions, and transitions—that run through this study.

The College and Young Adult Community

For about three years, I observed young Korean migrants' everyday lives in and outside of CYA meetings. The majority of the CYA members were college students, whereas some of them were recent graduates. Typically about 50 members gathered every Friday evening at the church. The regular activity of the Friday meeting began at around 5:30 p.m. with a van ride to transport the members to the church and ended around 10:00 p.m. with a van ride back to the members' homes. Every Friday night during the study period, my fieldwork also began and ended with a ride in the van, which was packed with six to seven members sitting shoulder-to-shoulder and chatting in one big group about light topics.

When the van arrived at the church at around 6:20 p.m., the members had dinner together on the first floor where makeshift dining tables had been set up for them. The dinner time was good for observing group dynamics, interactions, and drawing a big picture of the CYA community life. The dinner time also gave me good opportunities to establish closer relationships with the members while talking in smaller groups. I learned about their migration histories, what made them come to the U.S., and their everyday lives as far as school and friends were concerned. Discussions about which classes they were taking or avoiding and

why gave me a good sense of their desires and struggles as college students and migrants, separately and/or together. Their mundane conversations became my precious data.

At 7:20 p.m., the members moved to the second floor where the chapel for the CYA group was located. The church service began with worship by singing contemporary Christian music. The minister gave his sermon and prayers for about an hour and a half. Around 9:00 p.m., the service ended with the minister's announcements or news about the church, the CYA community, the members, or upcoming events. This service closing gave me good data on the membership flows in and out of the community: why and where the members came from and departed for.

The last official activity of the meeting was the *sarangbang*⁶ gathering. Within the CYA community, the *sarangbang* was a small group usually composed of five to eight members with one of them leading the group. Although the *sarangbangs* were run differently depending on the leader, the overall structure was similar. For about an hour to an hour and a half, the members would check in, talking about how they had been, sharing what was on their mind, and sharing their prayers with other members. At the end of each *sarangbang*, they prayed for each other. The conversation topics were not limited to religious matters: the members talked about school, family, friends, and jobs, as well as religion. During this gathering, the members were encouraged to be very open with each other, and all conversation was supposed to be confidential within the group. Thus, the

⁶ *Sarangbang* literally means love and intimacy (*sarang*), and home/room (*bang*).

members of each *sarangbang* often established intimate relationships.

Throughout the fieldwork, I also participated in several *sarangbang* groups.

In addition, I talked with them in the form of both conversational interviews and in-depth interviews with semi-structured guidelines. I joined the CYA members for informal social activities such as occasional gatherings for meals, coffee, study groups, bowling games, and shopping. In addition to the regular members, I kept in touch with those who sporadically participated in CYA or who stopped coming for various reasons such as returning to Korea, moving out of the area, or other personal reasons. With these members, I exchanged emails or instant text messages, talked on the phone, and sometimes met in person. I refer to all these young Korean migrants whom I met through the CYA community as the “CYA members.”

As shown by the amount of research done at or through ethnic churches, the immigrant church is one of the most common research sites for Korean migrant studies (e.g., Choi and Kim 2010; Choi 2012; Hong 2015; Min and Kim 2002). Yet, Korean ethnic churches appearing in Korean-American/immigrant studies have often been populated exclusively with “old” immigrants who have established multiple subsequent generations in the U.S. Relatedly, studies on youth communities affiliated with Korean ethnic churches have typically dealt with second or third generation Korean immigrants (e.g., Kim B. 2006; Lee and Zhou 2004; Min 2010; Min and Hong 2002). What made CYA distinct from other young adult groups of Korean immigrant churches was its diverse membership composition in terms of migration histories and backgrounds. My survey results⁷

⁷ The statistical data presented in this chapter are based on the survey from January 2011 to September 2012. Thus, my survey data collected do not fully represent demographic characteristics of the CYA membership in the entire period of my fieldwork from 2009 to 2012.

showed that the members who self-identified as “immigrants” slightly outnumbered (52%) those “non-immigration” migrants (48%). The former group indicated those who were born in the U.S. or who immigrated with family with an intention of permanent settlement, whereas the latter included those who moved to the U.S. without family members for educational purposes (e.g., to complete U.S. formal schooling or short-term language programs), employment (e.g., internships or overseas assignment), and short-term travel for sightseeing or visiting family/friends.

The CYA membership composition with a mix of temporary and permanent migrants is largely related to the CYA’s geographic location. The church is surrounded by three large universities and several community colleges. These adjacent schools (two of which are in particular well-known to Koreans in the U.S. and Korea) were an important source of the diverse groups of young Korean migrants that the CYA attracted. About 90% of self-identified permanent migrant members were from large Korean enclaves in northern New Jersey including Palisades Park, Fort Lee, Ridgefield, and Leonia (see Table 1).

Table 1. CYA Members’ Migration Trajectory by Self-identified Migration Status (N=118)

	Temporary migration for study abroad	ESL	Permanent migration
From New Jersey	2	-	51
From other state or country	10	-	7
Directly from Korea	36	8	4
Total	48	8	62

Data source: the CYA member address book.

Based on my ethnographic data, however, I am rather confident that the overall trend drawn from the cross-sectional survey data is consistent throughout the three-year period of my field work from 2009 to 2012. For more descriptive data of the CYA member characteristics, see appendix B.

They were mostly children of permanent immigrants including both new arrivals and longer period settlers. Of all CYA members 14.4% came to New Jersey from other state or country for college, internship, or first full time job (n=17). They were early study abroad students (n=10) who migrated alone in their preteens, whereas a similar number of them were children of U.S. permanent residents (n=7). Lastly, 40.7% of the CYA members were new arrivals, the so-called “FOB” (i.e., those “fresh off the boat”). As CYA membership was almost exclusively made up of students from the nearby schools, the number of members reached its peak in the beginning of the school year, when new students joined, and slowly reduced throughout the academic year. Based on my study, it seems that this ebb and flow pattern repeats every year. For the same reason, an individual’s membership usually lasts the same number of years it takes to graduate college or complete an ESL program.

Another source of membership is the wide range of large companies located in New Jersey and New York. A smaller yet steady number of CYA members were those who recently began working in those companies full-time or were participating in internships. This group was also composed of individuals with varied migration backgrounds. Some of them had graduated college in other states and moved to New Jersey or New York for work, whereas others were newcomers from Korea for permanent immigration, overseas assignments, or short-term internships.

Analytical Foci of this Study

Distinctions

Interestingly, many of the members noted differences between their self-identified and legal migration status. About half of the respondents were student visa (F-1) holders (49%). The next biggest group was composed of U.S. citizens by birth or naturalization (27%), followed by green card holders (19%). The remaining 5% fell into the “other” category, meaning they were either on traveling visas, or they did not want to answer the question. For clarity, “permanent” immigration and “non-immigrant” migration as described earlier were self-identified terms that did not necessarily coincide with legal classifications of permanent immigration/U.S. citizenship and temporary non-immigration status, respectively. Strictly following the legal terms, green card holders are immigrants, whereas those of other types of visa holders are “non-immigrant” legal aliens, regardless of their actual intention⁸. Yet, the student visa holder members (i.e., those who are legally “non-immigration” migrants) often identified themselves as “immigrants.” On the other hand, many of the legally “immigrant” or U.S. citizen members self-identified themselves as temporary migrants like *yuhaksaengs* (i.e., study abroad students).

This dissonance between self-identified and legal migration status is a window into the multiple factors affecting how young Korean migrants drew boundaries among them, what the internal distinctions of young Korean migrants meant to their everyday lives, and how they were at play to shape their visions for the future. For example, the time horizon of their futures in the U.S. was one determinant that shaped how members saw themselves as belonging to a certain migrant group, irrespective of their legal migration status or migration

⁸ U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. Glossary. Retrieved June 30, 2014 (<http://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary>).

history. Those who had moved just a few weeks earlier to the U.S. with an intention for permanent settlement called themselves “immigrants,” just like those who had lived in the U.S. for their entire lives. Regardless of their legal statuses, all members who self-identified as “immigrants” were equally concerned with moving their lives forward in the U.S. in a longer timeframe, such as getting a decent full-time job after graduation, obtaining legal rights as permanent residents, purchasing a car, or committing themselves to an intimate relationship. On the other hand, for those whose primary migration purpose was educational attainment, college graduation was often a signpost for the end of their time in the U.S. Irrespective of whether they were green card holders, U.S. citizens, or F-1 visa holders, these self-identified “temporary” migrants were conscious about becoming involved in activities that would require long-term investments.

Conversely, however, legal migration status sometimes worked as the master status of these young migrants regardless of their self-identification. Many CYA members considered themselves immigrants in the sense that all their immediate family members had migrated to the U.S. for permanent settlement. Following immigration scholars, these CYA members would be classified as immigrant generation 1.5 (Rumbaut 2004). Yet, many of them were on student visas, typically because their family members had not obtained green cards or U.S. citizenship despite several years of attempts. This legally classified them as non-immigrant residents and designated their lives as temporary migrants against their will. Their temporary migration status restricted their access to rights and institutional supports that are crucial for permanent settlement in the U.S. For instance, CYA members who had lived in New Jersey since their family

permanently immigrated but were attending school on student visas were subject to the college tuition paid by international students, which is double that paid by domestic students. Moreover, they were not eligible for financial aid offered through their school or state/federal government because such aid is often limited to *legal* permanent residents or U.S. citizens. Inevitably, therefore, the ways in which these young migrants had adapted to U.S. society was quite different from those who were “immigrants” both in legal and self-identified terms, i.e., the ones who have conventionally been studied as immigrant 1.5 or 2.0 generations.

On the other hand, many CYA members who identified themselves as international students had been granted permanent legal residency through a green card or U.S. citizenship. In most cases, these members had been born in the U.S. while their parents were studying or working, moved back to Korea, and then came back to the U.S. for their own education. Other cases include those who arrived in the U.S. alone as early study abroad students and later became entitled to a green card or U.S. citizenship by their sophomore or junior year in college. Even though they considered their migration “temporary,” these members were granted benefits for “permanent” settlers such as paying the same college tuition rate as domestic students.

It is apparent that the conventional dichotomy of immigrant/emigrant, citizen/non-citizen, or permanent/temporary migration fails to capture the complexities of how migrants construct their life boundaries and identities in places and times. As shown, individual migrants can hold multiple migrant identifications. One’s self-identified migration status (i.e., subjective perception of migration purposes) can be indicative of the extent to which the individual is

willing to actively participate in U.S. or Korean society. One's legal migration status (i.e., state-defined migration purposes), on the other hand, regulates the intensity and extent to which the individual become integrated into U.S. society by determining the individual's ability to access available resources, what he or she can/cannot do, and how long the migrant can stay. For some individuals, the self-defined and state-designated statuses collide and make their lives challenging. For others, the two work cooperatively and are conducive to their well-being. In both cases, the two statuses mutually construct the lives of migrants and pave their paths to their future life trajectories. In this respect, I conceptualize a migration status as a marker of varied resources and constraints placed on migrants. In turn, distinction-making of the young Korean migrants at CYA is a window into an intersection of the individual's agency and the state's governmentality and how it becomes embodied in everyday life in the realm of global mobility. All in all, the concept of *distinction* in this study refers to the discrepancies between the migrant's self-identification and the state's designation. At the same time, *distinction* also refers to the variations in migration status, background, and history among the CYA members. These two respects of distinctions are intertwined and play into defining boundaries and meanings of the CYA members' migratory lives in local, national, and global contexts.

Interactions

Researchers have typically divided young Koreans in the U.S. into two groups: children of immigrants and study abroad students. From the receiving country's point of view, the former concerns processes and outcomes of

incorporation among young Korean immigrant 1.5 or 2.0 generation members to U.S. society (e.g., Hurh 1998; Kim 2008; Lee A. 2006; Min 2002). On the other hand, the latter, from the sending country's perspective, is interested in uncovering trends in young Koreans' outmigration mostly for education, and their implications in Korean society. As discussed in the previous section, however, the lives of immigrants and study abroad students in the real world are not as clearly separable as in scholarly works. Although such analytical divisions have intellectual and policy merits, such a division often conceals overlaps and ambiguity between the two groups that, I find, are important to investigate.

My analytic strategy is thus to synthesize the theoretical and analytical separation of young Korean migrants' lives prevailing in the current literature. To embrace diverse groups of Korean migrants in one analysis is, nonetheless, not to flatten differences between the groups associated with migration history, background, self-/state-identified statuses, or the extent to which they are acculturated to U.S. society. Conversely, the inclusive approach not only makes the differences more visible but also helps researchers understand processes through which the differences are made and practiced, as well as their implications. Life is embedded in relations to people, places, and institutions (Somer 1994). The young Koreans in the CYA who had varied relationships with people, places, and institutions interacted with each other on a daily basis. Everyday interactions, thus, set a stage for them to learn differences among them and disparate resources/constraints associated with those differences. Through interactions, moreover, they became more aware of how to act according to their own positions.

Here, two characteristics of the CYA members provide a common base for comparison and contrast among them. First, despite the variations among these individuals in family background, gender, religion, and legal migration status, the CYA members identified identical migration purposes. My interview data show nearly all of the CYA members identified “better educational opportunities” as a primary purpose of migration alone or with family. Other mentioned purposes were self-development, gaining broader world perspectives, or becoming a culturally diverse person. Regardless of their migration status, almost all of them envisioned that their U.S. college education credential would eventually help them to secure their “middle class” life in the U.S. or in Korea in the future.

The second characteristic allowing comparison is that they are the same birth cohorts (from age 18 to 25). From the life course perspective (Riley 1987), this provides similar conditions for the CYA members’ experiences of migratory life. They were all in young adulthood, the life stage full of possibilities, exploration, uncertainty, and anxiety. They also shared interests, excitement, concerns, and difficulties that typically associated to college life. While interacting with each other on a daily basis, differences among the members became remarkably blurry.

Yet, daily interactions also made them to learn their “differences,” particularly in legal migration statuses, mattered to their lives more than symbolically. For example, the members with U.S. citizenship or green cards were officially allowed to have part-time jobs on and off campus, whereas those with other legal migration statuses were not. Those yuhaksaeng members had a psychological buffer that they could go back to Korea if life in the U.S. did not

work out well for them, whereas the “permanent” immigrant individuals were less likely to have that flexibility.

Resources and constraints specific to certain types of migration status were not always readily recognizable. Instead, they were learned in and communicated through interactions in specific contexts. In this process, some members tried harder to overcome constraints and to achieve their goals, while others compromised their dreams. All wanted to be successful in life but success is not for all. These young Korean migrants, who initially saw their futures in similar ways, eventually took divergent life paths that were highly contingent upon their gender, class position, and immigration status. My inclusive approach to take the presumably different kinds of the young Korean migrants into one analysis makes it possible to flesh out how economic, social, cultural, and institutional conditions differently figured in these individuals’ lives and shaped their transition to adulthood and migratory trajectories.

Nonetheless, I want to emphasize that the differences among the CYA members were not always a source of inequality, conflicts, or internal “othering” as many studies have documented (e.g., Song 2010). In the CYA, the differences between CYA members prompted them to work to diversify their experiences and helped them accumulate a variety of resources to build their “toolkits” (Swidler 1986) that they could then utilize to develop life strategies, plan futures, and construct local and global identities.

Transitions

The third analytical focus of this study is “transitions,” which precisely characterizes the CYA members’ lives in young adulthood. I use the concept of

transition with a threefold object in mind. First, the transitional life stage of the CYA members made the “future” a critical component of their everyday practices. The majority of the CYA members were college students or individuals who had recently graduated in the U.S. or Korea. Other members were short-term internship participants or travelers in the U.S. for sightseeing or family/friend visits. Regardless of their purpose for staying or their legal migration status, the places where their lives were unfolding in the U.S. were likely “temporary.” Most CYA members eventually left their school, company, neighborhood, and the CYA to relocate to other regions, states, or countries upon college graduation, ELS program completion, internship contract termination, or the last day of their sight-seeing or family visit. Inevitably, the CYA members’ lives were contoured with the idea of what was next to come. The future lingered in their present in various forms: what to do next summer, how to build a resume, when to graduate college, what to do after graduation, where to get a job, and whether to stay in the U.S. or return to Korea, just to name a few. The CYA members often organized their present lives according to their future projections. The salience of the future lingering in the present mattered equally to all, regardless of their particular migration status.

Second, throughout the study period, the CYA itself experienced periods of transition. When the time came, members transitioned to another place for further graduate school, employment opportunities, or family reunions. Not long after those members left, new members replaced them. Like the previous members, they would also leave the community sooner or later. Although most members were unlikely to return to the community after leaving, some members did return. Many *yuhakseang* members would join the CYA during academic

semesters, go back home to Korea during break, and return when the semester resumed.⁹ In addition, the CYA had a handful of “seasonal” members who went school in other states and came back home for summer or winter break; typically, these members were permanent immigrants.

All of these factors help form the ebb and flow pattern that repeats every year, with the greatest number of members at the beginning of the school year. This is also the reason that the membership turnover rate was high. In fact, less than 20% of the members whom I met in the first year of my fieldwork remained in the CYA by the end of my fieldwork, although the total membership number remained steady. The continuous inflow and outflow of the membership constantly replenishes the CYA community in a process that continues today. The members newly arrived from Korea bring the most updated Korean cultures to the CYA. The members coming from other parts of the U.S. or the world also become important sources that expand the horizon of the CYA members’ ways of living and viewing the world. In turn, the boundaries of culture and identities among the CYA members are under constant reconfiguration.

Lastly, the moves that CYA members make from one place to another place also represent their life stage transition from adolescents to college students and eventually to more self-sufficient adults, as marked by full-time employment, moving out of their parents’ home, and/or establishing their own family. The transition to adulthood also indicates the time to move from one migration status to another. For examples, yuhaksaeng members on student

⁹ Most of college residence halls are closed during official holidays and college breaks. Most of the study abroad student members choose to return to Korea because they do not have a place to stay in during breaks unless they are willing to pay money to rent a place which is likely to equivalent to the price of a round-trip airplane ticket.

visas (i.e., an F-1 visa) moved to temporary employment status (i.e., an H1-B visa) when they graduated college and got their first job in the U.S. Some of them would remain as temporary migrants, whereas others would make a subsequent transition to permanent resident by obtaining a green card or U.S. citizenship. On the other hand, those international students who once regarded themselves as permanent immigrants could become undocumented immigrants when they graduated college without a full-time job and thus their international student status became denounced without a replaceable legal status. Of them, some would remain in the U.S. with a hope of obtaining a secure U.S. resident status whereas others would return to Korea.

All in all, the concepts of distinction, interaction, and transition serve as analytical foci of this study to look into everyday lives of young Korean migrants. They also make it possible to understand the changing landscape of Korean enclaves both in a short- and long-term perspective and the implications on the broader U.S. society.

Navigating Ethnography in the CYA: Indwelling

Before proceeding further to the lives of the young Korean migrants in the CYA, it will be helpful to provide a brief description about my positions in the CYA and in my own study. I had multiple entry points to the CYA which roughly coincided with my life trajectory. I was first an ordinary newcomer to the CYA and later what I had observed at the CYA caught my attention as a researcher who was interested in identities and cultures. During the period of my fieldwork,

my academic career had also advanced from a first year graduate student to a newly-minted Ph.D. candidate. Even after my official fieldwork ended in 2012, I continued participating in the CYA. At my writing stage of this study, I became a Ph.D. job candidate. Similarly, the young Koreans whom I first met at the CYA grew older from a college freshman to a college graduate, a job seeker, or a newly married husband / wife. As I and my informants moved forward with life, I became attentive to what I had not seen before: how these young migrants-including myself-were making a transition to adulthood. With that realization, I began seeing my study in new perspectives and this was my third entry point to the lives of the young Korean migrants in the CYA. At this writing-up stage of my study, I am a mentor and a coach rather than a researcher to many of the current CYA members and the former members who I continue staying in touch. The following sections include detailed accounts of the trajectory of this study.

Entering the CYA as a newcomer

I was first introduced to the CYA by a Korean graduate student not long after I arrived in New Jersey from Ohio in fall 2008. Within the first week after my arrival, I met far more Koreans than I had in the entire past two years back at a small college town in southern Ohio where I studied for my Master's degree. The transition from a small town with a predominantly white population to a big and ethnically diverse university town in New Jersey was in fact a culture shock to me. I occasionally spent time with Korean graduate students who were newly arrived in the U.S. Some of them had a connection to "church people" who were also Korean graduate students but had arrived years before them. They helped

newly arriving students settle down (e.g., picked them up from the airport, gave them a ride for grocery shopping, took them to set up a cell phone and a bank account, etc.). It is obvious that starting a new life is much easier with such help.

Many of the newcomer graduate students followed the “church people” and “checked into” the CYA mostly for the social/practical merits. Religion was rarely addressed in this stage, either by the “church people” or the followers (the “church people” themselves were often not Christian). If they liked the CYA for their own reasons, they continued attending. If not, the first visit would be the last. As if following the rite of passage as a newcomer, I followed the “church people.” They said, “Come with us and have dinner there.” For a graduate student, free food was always irresistible bait, yet my first visit did not develop to serious commitment. Literally, I could not afford time for socializing with people because I was swamped with readings and papers. I participated in the CYA’s weekly gathering only when I could physically or emotionally no longer take being alone working all day. I missed people. Once in a while, sitting in the dark of the church service room with other people was a big comfort. In that way, I attended sporadically but continuously remained a CYA member.

Entering the CYA as a researcher

When I reintroduced myself to the CYA as a researcher in 2009, most of the CYA members already knew me. They showed interest in my research rather than expressing concerns about their lives to be recorded and analyzed. In the first few weeks, some of them even made efforts to give me data because they thought I would be interested in certain things that they had to discuss. Not

surprisingly, however, they soon became oblivious of my presence as a researcher. My title as a Ph.D. student helped me to build relationships with the members. Most of them did not have a clear idea about what the title meant. Still, the “PhD” part helped me earn their respect (in that sense, I was not their friend), while the “student” part made them feel close to me.

As a student, I could easily develop relationships with them because I shared many of their everyday activities such as going to the library, staying up all night to do assignments, getting stressed out because of classes, and worrying about what would come next after graduation. From my own experience as an international student, I could understand what they were going through. I blended in with them quickly, and they treated me as a friend and big sister. I listened to them getting things off their chest through seemingly endless chats about silly things, gossip, and occasional major issues. When I began teaching undergraduate classes in 2010, I was nicknamed “Professor Sister.” The CYA members were curious about virtually everything happening on the other side of a classroom: how to make exams, grade assignments, and think about students, to just name a few. As I responded to them as a “professor sister,” I gradually took the role of a coach for their college life.

I followed many of the CYA members throughout their college years and beyond. I shared many important moments, big and small, with them: when they transferred from a community college to a “real” university, declared an academic major, got a notification about dismissal from school, passed a driving test, received a green card or U.S. citizenship, got a first job interview, broke up with a dating partner, made a decision to leave the U.S.—alongside many more

moments that I do not remember now. Of course, there were many more ordinary days that were simply boring, lonely, or monotonous.

Re-entering the CYA

In the initial phase of this study, I took a transnational approach to understanding diversities among the young Korean migrants. With my primary interests in ethno/national identity, culture, and nationalism, I was focusing on how Koreanness as an ethnic, local, and global identity is constructed in places and circulates across borders. I see identities not only as fluid and penetrable but also as constantly changing and developing. Most importantly, I believe that identities are “dated,” reflecting their place and time. Identities of Korea and Korean, the rapidly changing country and the people who are accustomed to the fast life pace, are always subject to update. In this respect, New Jersey’s large Korean population with varied migration histories and backgrounds is an ideal place to study how Koreanness is dated, redefined, and practiced and yet in some parts resistant to change. A transnational approach (to be discussed in the following chapter in detail) is useful because it theorizes migration as a process of living life which can be embedded in multiple places simultaneously (Levitt and Glick-Schiller 2004). Thus, the links between a host country and a home country are imperative in shaping migrants’ ways of living and being.

As I look back, I came to think I was caught up in my exclusive research focus. Fieldwork was a good teacher that helped me realize that I had relegated people, the actors who actually do the transnational work and identity making, to a second priority of my research concern. Furthermore, I had pigeonholed the

CYA members as Korean and migrants. As I followed their everyday lives over the longer term, however, I could not help but see they were just ordinary “kids” who sometimes acted like they were all grown up and other times became intimidated by the “real world.” They were just young adults who were trying to figure out how to maneuver through their college life with a reasonable GPA, proper internship experiences for their resume, good friendships, and possibly a job offer at graduation. Those issues were easily glossed over when they are predefined as Korean or migrants. At this time in my study, my training in life course perspectives enabled me to see my study in a new perspective.

During my fieldwork, I played many roles in the CYA. I made my best effort to be attuned as a researcher, yet I admit there were many times I was just a friend, a big sister, a professor, or a mentor for the CYA members. Because I was with them for three years, during which time they went through many important—happy, exciting, sad, disappointing, scary, and anxious—moments, keeping myself distant from them and remaining in an “objective” position as a researcher was nearly impossible. Moreover, I could not help but see myself in them, especially my younger self during the years in which I strived to make my way as a young adult, migrant, and international student. The CYA members’ everyday lives—their struggles and aspirations—were constant reminders of the moments when I had felt lost, unsupported, or alone. Retrospectively, I saw that I had been able to bounce back because there was always at least one person at each time of my life when I needed help, support, and guidance. Admittedly, therefore, the stories of the CYA members were filtered through my personal experiences and my relationships with the CYA members as more than a researcher.

While I have retained my interests in transnational practices and identities, in the final analysis this study offers stories of these young Korean migrants making the transition to adulthood while being apart from their families, facing institutional barriers for the first time, and dealing with cumbersome administrative paperwork without sufficient guidance or help from older adults close to them. Stumbling and foundering are inevitable parts of living, and these individuals moved forward with their lives. This study invites readers to witness the journey of these young Korean migrants on their path to adulthood—a journey which is little known to scholars and the public.

CHAPTER 1

Young Korean Migration in Contexts:
Biographical, Local, and Global

The way we live the world is embedded in a particular time and place. Migrants' lives are no exception. To better understand distinct (if not new) patterns and shapes of young Koreans' migratory experiences, it is imperative to situate their migration in contexts in which their migratory lives began, occur, and move forward. To that end, I integrate life course perspectives with transnational migration scholarship, each of which considers "links" of life experience as a central concept on a different level.

Transnational migration scholars have criticized that immigration studies tend to focus exclusively on migrants' lives after immigration in a host country (e.g., Glick-Schiller et al. 1994, 1995; Levitt and Jaworsky 2007). The assimilationist approach takes primary interests in immigrants' incorporation into the new society and/or intergenerational differences in the degree of acculturation (e.g., Gordon 1964). In this conventional view, immigration is understood as a linear process of moving from country A to country B. Being apart, transnational migration scholars emphasize how migrants' lives in their host country is connected to their home country. Throughout human history, immigrants have always remained connected to their home country through their family ties with individuals remaining back home or carrying over material and discursive cultures from their country of origin (Waldinger and Fitzgerald

2004). Yet, it is rather new that, due to the time-space compression, contemporary migrants can live in their host country and home country *simultaneously* (Levitt and Glick-Schiller 2004). For example, domestic work migrants engage in remote care-giving for their aging parents (Mazzucato 2007) or parenting their children back at home via Skype while making a living in the U.S. (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Parrenas 2001). Immigrants participate in various transnational activities in economic (e.g., making financial investments or sending remittances), political (e.g., voting or participating in political campaigns), and social domains (e.g., participating in local community development, maintaining inter-personal relationships, and making regular visits to hometown). The intensity and extensity of such transnational engagements have been exponentially growing among immigrants. From the transnational migration framework, in turn, immigrants' lives in a host country cannot be fully understood without knowing the ways in which their migratory lives are connected to the home country.

A "link" is also central to the life course perspectives. The life course perspectives emphasize the significance of historical time and sociocultural context on individual's development (Bengtson and Allen 1993). The concept of a *birth cohort* is integral to studying such links between individuals' biography and a macro social context. In a seminal work of the life course perspective, Ryder defined a birth cohort as an "aggregate of individuals who experience the same events within the same time interval" (Ryder 1965, p. 845). Paralleling Mannheim's ideas about "generation" (1952), Ryder underscored that "each cohort has a distinctive composition and character reflecting the circumstances of its unique origination and history" (*ibid.*) Thus, *birth cohort* is a useful concept

to understand how individual migrants' life experiences are shared with other migrants who pass through major life events at approximately the same time periods under similar social and cultural influences of their time.

Taking the transnational migration approach and the life course perspective together, this chapter provides a topography of the young Korean migrants' lives in an intersection of biographical, local, and global contexts.

The V-Generation

During the study period, the CYA members' ages ranged from 18 to the mid-20s. When I first began my fieldwork at the CYA in 2009, the oldest members were born in 1986 and the youngest in 1991. Four years later in 2013, the members' birth cohorts were from 1990 through 1994. The average age at migration was 18. The CYA members were born and raised in the period that marked the beginning of Korea's economic, political, and cultural prosperity harvested from national projects of industrialization and urbanization in the 1960s through the 1980s. Amid profound economic growth on a national level, these birth cohort members grew up in highly urban environments with full parental support for their education. Several terms have been used to characterize these birth cohorts, such as the V-generation (i.e., Valiant, Various, and Vivid), the Z-generation (i.e., Digital), or the G-generation (i.e., Global).

Born and raised in this particular sociohistorical time, these birth cohorts differs from older cohorts in their skills, knowledge, needs, and wants. Most distinctively, they grew up in an environment in which the Internet and mobile phones were a taken-for-granted part of daily life. Everyday activities occur

through computer-mediated forms of production, consumption, and communication. For example, social networks are established and maintained through online activities such as “finding friends,” “requesting friendship,” and “making comments” on various channels such as Facebook, Cyworld, Twitter, Skype, or Gmail Chat. Also, cultural and information consumption involves digitalized forms and deliveries such as purchasing services (e.g., smartphone applications, weight watching programs, etc.) and goods through online shopping and overseas shipping orders, or sharing electronic files of music, movies, TV shows, or books.

As many of us have noticed, globalization has brought many fundamental changes in the way we see and live the world. In particular, time-place compression due to the advancement of transportation and communication technology has been celebrated as revolutionary. However, for the Z-generation, like the CYA members, this time-place compression is less likely to be seen as revolutionary or transformative but more as a mundane part of their lives. Since there is no clear sense of “scope” or “boundaries” in Internet-based/computer-based ways of living, a major part of their everyday practices and activities do not change fundamentally with moves did not change fundamentally; rather, the scope became extended after they migrated thousands of miles away from Korea. This fact speaks to the point of transnational migration scholarship: Contemporary migrants can live in multiple sites across different time zones simultaneously, particularly benefiting from the advancement of communication and transportation technology. Of course, the extent to which such developments affect migrants’ engagement with transnational practices varies. Keeping the variations in mind, young adult migrants are one of the populations whose daily

lives are more deeply mediated by the advanced technology than other age groups.

While globalization designated by the time-place compression or the borderless world largely shapes the modes and domains of the young individuals' everyday activities, it also nurtures them to be more adaptable to globalized environments and cultural diversities around the world. Importantly, it also constructs their visions of life and futures on a global scale. In Korean society, in particular, the young generations grew up with the prevailing discourse of globalization and more precisely a high value of English proficiency as a means to achieve the ideal of becoming "global," which I discuss more in detail in the following section.

"Korean Education Exodus" Since the Late 1990s

Migration for education is not new hitherto in any other society (e.g., Zhou 1998). In the past two decades, a new form of transnational migration increased from the Asia-Pacific region, as people re-located to the U.S. to pursue the better opportunities for children or for educational attainment rather than for economic opportunities (Fong 2011; Kobayashi 2012; Kwak 2002; Huang and Yeoh 2005; Waters 2005). Korea is one of those Asia-Pacific countries from which people have crossed (or are willing to) borders for educational attainment to the U.S. Yet, not only the escalating rates but also individual and societal costs feature Korea's case as rather unique, historically. The following sections offer backgrounds of this "Korean education exodus" (Lee-Chung 2008); its origin, process, and consequences.

During the 1990s, when the CYA members were born, Korea was undergoing an all-encompassing societal transformation (Byun 2010; Koo 2007). In the mid-1990s, globalization swept the country and became a major national project. More specifically, the 1997 International Monetary Fund crisis was a pivotal event that brought a restructuring of the Korean economic, political, and social system under the extensive influence of neo-liberal economic principles. One consequence of this restructuring was the education system reform in the late 1990s, which is the most directly relevant to the current study.

As Korea became more closely integrated into the global economy, English proficiency became a measure of intellectual competence and sociocultural capital (Kim 2010; Koo 2007; Park and Abelman 2004; Song 2012). In the wake of the “English education fever” (Chung 2008) from individuals and industrial sectors, English education in secondary school¹⁰ faced increasing criticism as being outdated because of its heavy focus on English grammar, literacy, and audio-lingual centered curriculum. On the other hand, privatized sectors for English education began rapidly growing. In response, the Korea government changed the English language educational policy in 1997. The new policy first introduced the English subject requirement for 3rd graders¹¹ and put the educational focus on practicality in communication rather than grammar/literacy skills (Chung 2008; Lee 2007; Song 2003).

As many scholars have noted, the desire for high English proficiency and a Western university degree is not a new social phenomenon in Korea as they have always been status symbols that would facilitate upward social mobility. Yet, the

¹⁰ Secondary education is public and mandatory.

¹¹ The English subject had used to be a requirement for 7th graders and up.

demand and pressure for English proficiency have been unprecedentedly higher in recent decades than ever before (Koo 2007). Parents added emphasis on early English education. The expenditures for English education have rapidly increased in the aim of fostering native-speaker-like proficiency.¹² Korean families spend about \$15 billion per year on extracurricular English lessons (Chun and Choi 2006). More than 80% of elementary students in Korea take some form of after-school private English education program. Such education expenditures marked the highest record in the world (Ihm et al. 2007). Such a large investment in English education, however, has not yet satisfied Korean parents and their children in its cost-benefit efficiency (Park 2009). In addition, many Korean parents are discontented with the infamously competitive and stratified Korean schooling system. In comparison, many parents perceive the U.S. or other Western educational systems to be easier, less competitive, and more congenial (An 2011; Koo 2007). In this social circumstance, sending children abroad to acquire English and/or U.S. academic schooling seems to be a rational choice for middle-class families.

Statistical figures showing the remarkable rates of out-migration among young Koreans are readily available, both from the U.S. and Korea. About 27,350 students at pre-college age migrated abroad for English study or school in 2008, which reflected a marked increase from 1,840 in 1999. The Korean governmental report estimated that a total of 216,867 students at pre-college age (i.e., early study abroad student population) went abroad to study from XX to 2008 (KEDI 2008). The majority of them (72%) departed for English-speaking

¹² Eun, Seon-Hwa. *Contextual autonomy in EFL classrooms: A critical review of English teaching methods in South Korea*. Diss. Ohio State U, 2001. Ann Arbor: UMI, 2001. AAT 3031198).

countries including the U.S. as the most preferred destination (32%). Also, Koreans make up of 10% of the total international students in U.S. higher education institutions (IIE 2010). This number puts Korea in a third place among the top sending countries of study abroad students to the U.S. following China and India, each of which have more than 27 times the population of Korea.

The large number of Korean educational migrants makes the point clear that studying abroad is not necessarily a luxury enjoyed by a few elite families. Instead, researchers have characterized this social phenomenon as a strategic practice both on a familial and societal level in response to institutionalized consequences of increasing global modernity in Korean society (e.g., Byun 2010; Koo 2007). During the East Asian financial crisis in 1997–98, Korea received the International Monetary Funds (IMF) loan, which required a restructuring of the economic system (e.g., corporate liberalization or the increasing flexibilization of labor). The unemployment (and underemployment) rate radically increased, and the cash flow sharply decreased. The country underwent greater polarization of the class system. In the midst of widespread societal anxiety, the confidence of the middle class faltered.

In response to the hardships of unemployment, business failures, or declines in property value, many families chose to leave the country permanently to secure middle class positions for their family (An 2011). Alternately, many parents chose to send their children abroad for English education and/or schooling in the U.S. when they were in their pre-teens or early teens. These young Koreans migrated to the U.S. in different forms, including several family structures. For example, in “geese families,” the father remained in Korea to support his wife and children abroad, and in a “drop and run” arrangement,

Korean professional fathers dropped their families in the U.S. after their business and returned to Korea. Still other young migrants arrived as “parachute kids” who entered the U.S. alone and lived by themselves or with their relatives or legal guardians (Chung 2008).

The expected benefit from migration, whether temporary or permanent, came at a profound cost. Financial expenses for tuition and living costs were the most immediate ones. These negative side effects have emerged as social problems that many parents who sent their children abroad ended up spending their savings or selling their assets to pay for tuition and living costs. News media have publicized situations in which parents remaining in Korea are even in debt after running out of their life savings. The problems also extended beyond the financial. Marital and familial risks were profound due to financial expenses for tuition and living costs, split households, or the lack of parental supervision for teenaged children abroad, as well as psychological burdens for parents and children living apart (e.g., An 2007; Byun 2010; Chung 2008; Koo 2007; Lee 2007; Song 2008). In the case when the entire family moved to the U.S. for the children’s education, the parents paid high prices in various ways including giving up their stable jobs and social status in Korea and starting their lives over in a new place which often led them to downward mobility (Fong 2011; Chung 2008). In fact, many studies have documented the various financial and psychological burdens experienced by educational migration families (e.g., An 2007; Byun 2010; Chung 2008; Koo 2007; Lee 2007; Song 2008).

Realistically, however, their willingness to embrace these profound costs for their children’s “better future” was indeed a high-risk gamble. Rewards that the parents or their children expected to gain from English proficiency and/or

the U.S. education credentials were ambiguous or unguaranteed. Nonetheless, the “push factor” of educational migration has been growing strongly, driven by increasing economic insecurity among middle class Koreans, the high demand for English proficiency in business sectors, the cost-effectiveness of English education, and the general dissatisfaction with the highly competitive Korean education system.

The young Korean migrants in this study were part of the first wave of recent Korean education migration.¹³ Most of the self-identified immigrant members were accompanied by their parents who wanted to secure their children’s future after the 1997 IMF crisis. The majority of the members who migrated alone around the similar time period came to the U.S. before their college years in the form of “geese families,” “drop and run,” or “parachute kids.” Lastly, most of the short-term visiting members enrolled in ESL programs to gain English proficiency or social/cultural capital which is almost a prerequisite for Koreans college students when looking for a job.

Overview of This Study

Up to now, I have offered backgrounds about the origins of young Korean migrants in the recent decade according to biographical, local, and global dimensions. I hope this information helps readers better follow the subsequent chapters of this study.

¹³ The news story defined the Korean students who left Korea between 1994 and 2000 as the first generation of ESAs. The first generation Korean ESA students have now entered a profession after finishing their study (Choi 2012).

- Chapter 2: I introduce diversities of the young Korean migrants in the CYA in terms of migration histories and backgrounds. Such diversities were manifested through the CYA members' distinction-making in two aspects. First, they made distinctions among the members (e.g., "born," "living," "studying," and "visiting"). Second, they made distinctions between their self-identified status and legal classification as a certain type of migrant. My analysis provides detailed accounts of the social, cultural, and legal factors involved in this distinction-making practice. One of the important findings is that the individual members' position as a certain kind of Korean or migrant was not fixed but was relationally defined in situations and changed over time. Daily interactions of the CYA members in specific institutional and interpersonal contexts were a vehicle through which they engaged in the process of defining what it means to be Korean and migrant as well as learning what implications such differences had on their everyday lives.
- Chapter 3: The CYA members with varied migration statuses and histories shared their purposes of migration: to learn English, to have a "better" education, to experience a "bigger world," and to live "better" futures. Of these goals, the CYA members understood learning English to be the primary means to achieve the rest of the goals, yet it often became an ultimate goal. The desire for English fluency worked as a disciplinary rule that shaped not only the CYA members' everyday experiences but also the meanings of their migratory lives. This chapter reveals how the strong desire for English fluency worked against their pursuit of "becoming global" or "experiencing the bigger world" in reality.

- Chapters 4, 5, and 6: The main theme of these three chapters is the significance of age peer socialization for young migrants in navigating migratory life. Located between adolescence and adulthood, the CYA members were in need of guidance from their parents or older adults as they grew to be self-sufficient adults, but such guidance was often limited for them for various reasons. In some cases, their parents lived in Korea so they were not knowledgeable about migratory life. In other cases, their parents were new migrants who were equally struggling to become accustomed to their life transition in the U.S. In addition, these young migrants lacked economic independence and social experiences of the “real” world. Compensating for these challenging conditions, age peer socialization played a significant role for the CYA members to develop their “toolkits” (i.e., a repertoire of strategies of action) (Swilder 1986) necessary to make a transition to adulthood. The young migrants shared knowledge, skills, and strategies that they had developed through lived experiences. While doing so, they crafted their possible futures and learned the “know-how” to actualize them. I explain this process using three distinct but interrelated models of “poking” (Chapter 4), “modeling” (Chapter 5), and “consulting” (Chapter 6).
- Chapter 7: I focus on how the young migrants, who had once envisioned their futures in similar shapes, took divergent paths to their futures. In particular, this chapter focuses on citizenship policies in the U.S. and Korea, which presumably work independently from one another but simultaneously figure into young male migrants’ lives, creating gender, class, nationality, and age-specific predicaments. Young male migrants of

Korean nationality, who are obliged to participate in military service, find that their mobility across borders is under strict Korean state surveillance. While female migrants often “choose” to return to Korea if they cannot find an employer who will sponsor a secure working visa for them, few male migrants enjoy such a “luxury”; consequently, many males risk becoming criminalized by Korea and the U.S. While living in the U.S., if they fail to update the necessary paperwork to “delay” their military service, the Korean state often designates them as military dodgers and restricts travels. Not having the option to return to Korea, young males who lack a secure visa sponsorship from an employer are much more likely to become “illegal” in the U.S. than their female counterparts. Consequently, this chapter highlights how future planning and living—which are ostensibly individualized process—are in fact shaped by larger forces such as gender, class, migration status, citizenship policies, and regulations, to name a few.

Chapter 2

Identity Work in Flow: When “Temporary” Migrants Meet “Permanent” Immigrants

In the CYA, there is a constant flow of people newly arriving, settling in, or leaving. This is a partial reflection of the Korean population trends in the U.S. which mark a higher proportion of status adjusters¹⁴ than any other immigrant groups (Min 2011)¹⁵. Underlying this trend is the recent radical increase in the number of new arrivals who enter as non-immigrant migrants (i.e., temporary immigrant status) such as international students, temporary workers, visitors, and so forth, but subsequently change their status to that of permanent residents. A huge number of Korean international students have mainly contributed to the presence of an unusually large number of temporary residents in the Korean immigrant community. Inseparably, these Korean international students form a major portion of the status adjusters because they change their status after completing their undergraduate and/or graduate education in the U.S. (Min 2011). New Jersey and New York in particular draw many Korean temporary migrants such as employees of Korean government agencies or firms, visiting scholars, interneers, and international students, and geese families (consisting of mothers and students) because of the proximity to Korean government agencies in Manhattan and large business districts in nearby Korean

¹⁴ Status adjusters are those who entered the United States previously on another, non-immigrant status and changed their status to permanent residents in a given year.

¹⁵ Korean immigrants have a substantially larger proportion of status adjusters (81%) than total immigrants to the United States (59%) and all Asian immigrants (56%).

enclaves (e.g., Flushing in New York, and Palisades Park and Fort Lee in New Jersey) (Min 2012).

As briefly critiqued in the previous chapter, Koreans residing in the U.S. are referred to as Korean-Americans or Korean immigrants. When distinctions are made among them, the legal terminology of immigration divides them into “immigrants (i.e., permanent settlers)” and “non-immigrants (i.e., temporary legal aliens).” Yet, a number of people live in between these two ends in constant processes of making decisions about whether to settle in and/or adjust their status, or leave. Located in this landscape of Korean migrants, the CYA is an ideal place to see how meanings and boundaries of migratory life are constructed and negotiated.

In this chapter, I elaborate on how the CYA members developed distinctions among themselves as various types of Korean and migrants, and the implications on their everyday lives. Here, I emphasize that identity and identification developed in the web of relationships in which each of them was embedded (Mason 2001). In that respect, daily interactions among the CYA members were a key mechanism of their identity work through which they engaged with defining, communicating, and practicing what it means to be Korean and migrants, and making distinctions among the members. Inseparably, integral to meaning and distinction-making was the specificities of the interactional contexts. A more traditional view on migrants’ ethnic identity has tended to essentialize it with a finite set of cultural traits which are presumably unique to each ethnic group. To the contrary, the lives of the CYA members highlighted the distinctly relational and context-specific nature of identity work. This chapter stands alone as an analytical chapter. At the same time, details of

migration histories and backgrounds of some CYA members in this chapter give a sketch of the overall CYA membership compositions and help readers to proceed throughout this study.

Self-Identification: Born, Living, Studying, and Visiting

During one Friday night gathering, the minister ended the service by introducing a new member: “This is Hyunjoo. She just arrived from Seoul to visit her uncle. She will be with us for about two weeks. Let’s all give her a warm welcome!” After the service, Boyoung, a *sarangbang* leader, took the new member to a small conference room where five other members were waiting. As a usual ice-breaking ritual, Boyoung suggested that the members go around and introduce themselves to the new member. She began, “Hi, my name is Boyoung, born in ’88 [1988], a college senior, and I live here.” Soo was next: “Hi, a college senior as well. Also, born in ’88. I study here, majoring in biology.” Other members followed as if reading a script. “Welcome, my name is Chanho. Born in ’88, here in America [paused, looking around the members]. I am just kidding [laughed]. I live here. I am a junior. Oh, I also work in the City.” Other members took their turns. “Hi, I am Sujin. I am a *yuhaksaeng*, too. A sophomore.” “I am Youngin. Born in ’87. I just moved from Long Island for my new job here. Oh, used to be a *yuhaksaeng*, too.” The last member said, “My name is Yoonho. I am just visiting.” Noticing that Hyunjoo did not understand what “just visiting” meant, Yoonho clarified it for her, “I am here *only* for a short term for an English program.” Boyoung added, “Yoonho is leaving in two weeks, going back to Korea. We are so sad.”

This snapshot of one *sarangbang* gathering captures how the individual members identified themselves and therefore differentiated themselves from others. Boyoung and Chanho introduced themselves as those “living” in the U.S., whereas Soo and Sujin referred to themselves as “studying”/“*yuhaksaeng*.” Yoonho, interestingly, emphasized the very nature of the temporariness of his presence in the U.S. By doing so, he de-emphasized the significance of his residence in the U.S. which had been nine months at that time of the gathering described above. This clearly shows that he was distancing himself from the other members, whom he might have regarded as being more seriously committed to life in the U.S. for a longer period, if not forever.

Yoonho’s reaction resembles Yebin’s in the Introduction chapter, when she described various Korean migrants she observed. When I asked where she would put herself in those groups, she balked at the idea of associating herself with “migrant” identification: “Me? I am none of them. You know I just came over here only for a short time.” Besides Yoonho and Yebin, I heard the same answers from many other ESL students. Their resistance, ironically, showed a consistent pattern among these self-identified passersby and rendered a distinct category which I named “visiting.” All in all, the four categories of “born,” “living,” “studying,” and “visiting” were used on most of the occasions when the members referred to themselves and each other. In between, there are transitional categories like “working” with which Youngin addressed herself.

Distinctions by “Look”

Whereas the four categories are the explicit rules for the members' self-identification, distinction-making also takes place through other peoples' looking at them in distance. Before the service got started one Friday evening, I was sitting by Woori at a dining table for dinner. She was looking around and stopped at one member standing in line for food. "Must be new here," Woori said, "seems like a *yuhaksaeng*." When I probed her, she explained how she could tell:

You know "*gyopo* style." The way they dress, put on make-up ... you can easily tell by that. *Yuhaksaengs* never wear North Face fleece. Do you see him [the presumably new member] wearing glasses with thick black frames? That is one sign, for example. You only see them on *yuhaksaengs*, especially newly arrived. What else ... the square-shaped backpack. *Yuhaksaengs* have a nicer hairstyle. I mean their hair is nicely trimmed, colored, waxed ... something like that. They look like they care too much, you know in comparison to others' looking more natural or, I guess, like they don't care.

Woori was a "living" member who immigrated at age 10. She rattled off the visual cues to distinguish *yuhaksaengs* or newcomers: female *yuhaksaengs* trimmed their eyebrows fuller/thicker whereas sharp/thinner eyebrows were *gyopo* style; male *yuhaksaengs*' pants were tighter than those worn by non-*yuhaksaeng* males. Woori's comparison was starkly similar to the aforementioned Yebin's in the Introduction chapter. Yebin felt that Koreans who had lived in the U.S. for a long time seemed to care a lot less about how they looked. Contrasting herself in Korea where she and her friends wore high heels everyday on her college campus, Yebin said she was surprised when she became accustomed to wearing sneakers and not wearing makeup for class. That was actually one of the reasons she liked being in the U.S.: caring less about how she looked and how other people saw her. Throughout informal and formal interviews with the members, I continually heard the similar answers from the relatively new members in the U.S. In fact, what was common or trendy in Korea was registered as being fancy,

cool, or nice with a connotation of being excessive. This further indicated an FOB¹⁶ characteristic (“fresh off the boat,” i.e., newly arrived), distinguishing them from others who had been in the U.S. for a longer period.

On the other hand, new arrivals often noticed characteristics of longer settlers (i.e., Korean-Americans and Korean immigrants). In the scholarly literature, the terms *Korean-American* and *Korean immigrant* (or *Asian-American* and *Asian immigrant* in general) have often been used interchangeably (e.g., Tuan 1999; Kibria 2002; Vo and Bonus 2002; Kim 2007). For the CYA members, the two terms referred to two distinctive groups of people. The CYA members actually replaced the term *Korean-Americans* with the Korean word *gyopo*¹⁷ to refer to those who were born and raised in the U.S. whereas they replaced *Korean immigrants* with *iminja*¹⁸ to note those who emigrated to the U.S. Sunhong, an exchange-student from Busan in Korea, gave me her thoughts on the two groups:

¹⁶ Many of the CYA members were aware that the word has a pejorative meaning in its origin. Yet, they used the term more casually in a way of emphasizing freshness of new comers.

¹⁷ The term *gyopo* (교포) is composed of two Chinese characters used in Korea. *Gyo* (교) means living outside and *po* (포) means siblings or related.

¹⁸ The term *iminja* (이민자) is composed of three Chinese characters used in Korea. *I* (이) means leaving, *min* (민) means citizen, and *ja* (자) means person/people. By the dictionary definition, the two terms, *gyopo* and *iminja* are synonymous. Yet, the CYA members differentiate them.

I guess I can tell *iminja* like to talk about negative things about Korea: too crowded there, too competitive, something like that. They also sometimes ask me, “Do you guys have this stuff in Korea?” Of course, we do. They have no idea how disappointed I was with the backward look of the U.S.; even Manhattan was disappointing when I first arrived. I am not sure why they do that. Life quality in Korea is a lot better than in the U.S. Things are more convenient, clean, fast, well-maintained, polished. *Gyopo*, on the other hand, seem to have more positive attitudes about Korea. My older cousin was born and raised in the U.S. He is like what people call “banana” or “Twinkie.”¹⁹ He has never been to Korea but misses Korea a lot and talks about good things about Korea all the time.

Sunhong’s interview complemented Yebin’s impression that *iminja* have a “negative attitude toward Korea.” Sunhong felt they were more critical about Korean society. “They might have hard feelings on Korea,” she speculated. “Korea used be a backward country, and they left. Now, Korean lifestyle is more modern and up-scale.” On the other hand, *gyopo* who have never been to Korea are more favorable to Korean society because they are nostalgic about the country.

In addition, language fluency is another factor that the CYA members used to differentiate *iminja* and *gyopo*: the former with a lack of English fluency and the latter with a lack of Korean competency. Yebin described the differences between the two groups: “*Gyopo* speak Korean as they do English. They *butter* Korean.” Then, she mimicked “battered” Korean with an English accent. “On the other hand,” she continued, “*iminja* ... they mix Korean and English. Their English is not as good as *gyopo*.” Interestingly, the new arrivals in the CYA noticed the English fluency of longer settlers before they remarked upon their lack of Korean fluency. A number of studies have highlighted how Korean-American youths visiting Korea had to confront native Koreans who harshly judged their lack of

¹⁹ “Banana” and “Twinkie” (i.e., yellow on the outside, white on the inside) are racial slurs representing an Asian American who has lost their heritage. Although the terms have a pejorative origin, the CYA members use them not necessarily with such an intention. In fact, those who use these terms are mostly new arrivals like Sunhong or Yebin who are not very familiar with the negative connotation of those terms in American contexts.

Korean language competency and disqualified them as “real” Koreans (Kim 2007). In contrary, the relative newcomers, thus supposedly the most “real” Korean, were more alert to the English fluency of *gyopo*. In this particular context, Korean immigrants who lacked English fluency were looked down upon (e.g., “not as good as”).

In fact, a keen interest in English fluency overshadowed the lack of Korean fluency in those who were born and/or raised in the U.S.²⁰ Some of them tried to speak Korean as much as possible, whereas others did not use Korean at all. Yet, I never witnessed the CYA members blame or dismiss them because of their lack of Korean fluency. In many contexts, the CYA members used English or mixed English with Korean anyway, regardless of their Korean/English fluency because the combination made conversations flow smoothly when they talked about their daily lives which took place in English-speaking environments. The members switched, almost automatically, to English from Korean when some members were more comfortable with English. At the end of my fieldwork, I also observed that the Korean of some members had remarkably improved and other members acknowledged it. Other than that, there were few occasions that caused the Korean incompetency of the “born” members to be noticed. Instead, the CYA members were more sensitive to their English fluency and that of other

²⁰ Almost all CYA members speak fluent Korean. In a three-year period of my fieldwork, only two out of approximately one hundred members did not speak Korean at all although they understood other people speaking Korean; Serah and Jessica. Both were born in the U.S. to their permanently immigrated parents and raised in the U.S. (so called immigrant generation 2.0). Two members, Philip and John, were those who mixed Korean and English and openly said they were more comfortable with speaking English. Philip is so called Korean immigrant 3.0 generation, born and raised in Hawaii whereas John immigrated to the U.S. at age five and grew up in Texas. There are only three members whose Korean was slightly English accented; Sujin (*yuhaksaeng*) and Joon immigrated at age nine.

members, to the point that English fluency constantly appeared as a topic of conversation (Chapter 3 substantively deals with the language issue).

Tables 1 and 2 summarize the ways in which the CYA members made distinctions among themselves by self-identification and visual cues observed by others, respectively.

Table 2. CYA Members' Self-identification

Born	Living	Studying	Visiting
Born and raised in the U.S.	Immigrated with family with the intention of permanent settlement.	Migrated alone or with siblings and/or mother for schooling.	Staying for short-term ESL program, internship, family/friend visit, or sight-seeing.

Table 3. CYA Members' Distinctions by Visual Cues

	<i>Gyopo</i>	<i>Iminja</i>	<i>Yuhaksaeng</i>	FOB
Represents	Born	Living	Studying	New arrivals
Language Fluency	English, Korean with English accent	Mix of Korean and English, not fluent in English	Fluent both in Korean and English	Not fluent in English
Appearance	<i>Gyopo</i> style	Korean style but more casual	Korean style but more casual	Overly meticulous
Perception about Korea	Missing, nostalgic	Negative, critical	Modern, advanced	Modern, advanced

All in all, the term *born* used for self-identification is what newcomers often see as a second generation Korean-American or *gyopo*, whereas the *living* can be interchangeable with the term *iminja* to denote those who have lived in the U.S. for a fairly long time. The term *studying* is identical in meaning to the term *yuhaksaeng*. On the other hand, some who have been in the U.S. for a longer period identify newcomers like Sunhong, Yebin, and Yoonho—despite their

reluctance to be labeled in any manner—as “just visiting” or so-called “FOB.” As such, the CYA’s distinction rules provide a more nuanced sketch of internal diversities among the young Korean migrant groups than the conventional dichotomy of immigrant and non-immigrant/temporary migrant.

The Distinction: More Complex Than It Seems

In reality, however, the distinction rules were not applied as neatly as in the tables above. The CYA members’ actual profiles (Table 3) demonstrate this point more clearly.

Jiwon and Joon were almost identical in their age, immigration status, and the length of living in the U.S. Both Jiwon and Joon identified themselves as “living,” yet the rule of language fluency and appearance differentiated them. In particular, others recognized Jiwon as an *iminja*, consistent with her self-identification of “living,” whereas Joon was often mistaken as *gyopo* because of his oversized “hip hop” style shoes, jeans, T-shirts, and a snapback cap, as well as his “American” body language. Another pair, Boyoung and Soo, also showed almost identical characteristics in language fluency and appearance as well as their age and the length of living in the U.S. The newcomers often saw them as *iminja*, yet Boyoung identified herself as “living” whereas Soo called herself a *yuhaksaeng*. The case of Kim and Sujin gives another interesting comparison. Based on their language and appearance, the CYA members often assumed Sujin was a *gyopo* and Kim was a *yuhaksaeng*. In reality, Sujin was a *yuhaksaeng* and Kim was a “living” member. The final comparative pair of Minbaik and Jaeho adds an important dimension to the distinction rules which is often not immediately recognizable by appearance: legal migration status. The two male members showed almost identical visual cues. Moreover, they first moved to the U.S. at almost the same age. Minbaik immigrated with his family at 10. Since then, he had been living in the U.S. for his entire life. He naturally identified himself as one “living here.” However, he always checked off the box for “international student” whenever he had to fill out paperwork. Jaeho, on the other hand, moved to the U.S. as an early study abroad student at age 9. He moved back and forth between the U.S. and Korea for every summer and winter break. He always referred to himself as a *yuhaksaeng*, yet he was officially a U.S. citizen.

These simple comparisons make it evident that there is no easy way to classify the individual CYA members into single fixed categories. Most clearly, self-identification, other people's perceptions, and legal migration status do not go hand in hand. In addition, there are many more dimensions that comprise the differences among them, but the three most readily recognized components are intertwined and work in a complex manner. As briefly shown in Table 3, the individual CYA members held multiple positions in their distinction rules; in any given context, one dimension might become more salient than others. In the longer term, their positions changed over time with and without their intentions as they grew older.

Identity Works in Flow

Integral to the complexities of the distinction-making was the CYA membership composition with diverse migration histories and backgrounds. Another confounding factor was the continuing inflow and outflow of the members which made the working rules of the distinctions relational and ever changing. Living in a highly transitional time as young adults, the CYA members' lives were hardly settled in their current places. The student members attended four-year universities, community colleges, or short-term language programs. Some were short-term visitors in the U.S. to see families and friends, or to participate in internships from other U.S. states or Korea. Others were in transition from school to school, school to job, or an old job to a new one. When they graduated, transferred to another college, accepted a new job offer, or got married, they left the group to seek employment,

further their education, or establish their own family. Not long after a group of the members had left, however, new people would arrive in the area for reasons very similar to those that caused the members to leave the community. These new people would join the CYA, continuing the cycle of membership.

The ongoing flows of people joining and leaving the CYA cause constant shifts in the reference points for understanding who members are as migrants, Korean, and young adults. The constant flows of the membership set up contexts in which young Korean migrants experience and communicate about “Koreanness.” The member composition at a certain time point in the CYA produce a particular set of standards. Thus, in the CYA, the members’ identities as migrants and Korean is eminently relational to people with whom they interact and is context-specific in a given situation. The shifting designations continually change the understanding of whose style is more Korean-Korean or Korean-American, or who speaks Korean or English better than whom.

One day in April of 2010, I joined a lunch gathering of Soo, Sujin, and Jinhee. They filled me in on what had happened in the CYA over the past few weeks when I had missed the Friday gatherings at the church.

Jinhee: We have a new face in our *sarangbang* last week. You did not see him yet. He is from Texas.

KYS²¹: How is he?

Soo: His name is John. All the boys in our cell are best friends already. They hang out every day.

KYS: What do they do?

Sujin: Joon looks after him.

KYS: What do you mean?

Soo: Joon kinda teaches John this and that.

²¹ Initials of the author’s name.

- KYS: Joon? He is new himself here too.
 Sujin: I know. Isn't it funny? He bridges Seungho and John.
 Soo: You know, Seungho is *really* FOB. John is a *real* Twinkie.
 KYS: What does Joon teach?
 Soo: How to hang out with Koreans. Informal rules in CYA.... Oh, he teaches *Korean*, too!
 KYS: Does he? I remember Joon didn't speak Korean very well when he first came.
 Sujin: I know. I think that is really funny. But, Joon's Korean has been improved a lot²². In comparison to John, Joon speaks Korean *really* well. I am telling you, John is a *real* Twinkie.
 Soo: Look who is talking. You sound like you were never like them!
 Everyone laughs.

Three female members, Jinhee, Soo, and Sujin, were talking about three male members of their *sarangbang* group: Joon, John, and Seungho. Seungho, the same age as Joon, was an ESL student who was not very confident with his English. Seungho's appearance was marked by the trendiest fashion at that time in Korea, such as thick black glasses frames, lightly colored hair, tight jeans, and a stylish, square-shaped backpack. This appearance made him a typical "FOB" in the presence of other members who had been in the U.S. for a longer period. In contrast, Joon used to stand out by his *gyopo* character particularly because of his unfamiliarity with the difficult Korean vocabulary and his "American style" body language and outfit.²³ This simultaneously made his Koreanness relatively minimal when compared to other members. Joon's Korean-Americanness became outstanding particularly when he

²² In the CYA group, it is not only interactions through which the members' Koreanness are assessed as more or less in relation to other members. The members also change. As noticed by Jeon, Joon's Korean has greatly improved. In addition, his "Gyo-Po" style has been gradually replaced to "Korean-Koran" style throughout the fieldwork. In other words, Joon is much more Korean now than first time when he joined the group. Thus, this "relational" nature of the members' identity in interaction with others and in their own life time makes analysis more complicate.

²³ A "gyopo style" is a term that Koreans in Korea or Korean new arrivals in the U.S. uses to describe their impression on those longer settlers in the U.S. in an all-encompassing manner from their outward looking (e.g., outfits, hairstyle, make-up style, skin tone, or body language) to language fluency, mindset, and more.

was with Seungho, a “real FOB.” As Joon and Seungho grew closer, Joon often worried that Seungho was rather shy in learning English and afraid of making mistakes. To help Seungho practice English, he made efforts to speak only English when hanging out with him.

A few months later, Joon’s Koreanness was elevated when John, a “real Twinkie,” showed up at the CYA. Before coming to New Jersey, John’s social circle was primarily composed of those who were like himself, born and raised in the U.S. John understood but did not speak Korean. In comparison to John, Joon’s lack of Korean vocabulary became ignorable and his Korean fluency was more than enough to teach John the necessary rules to socialize in the CYA. Most of the rules were related to the Korean culture of age-seniority which was perhaps largely irrelevant among those socialized in the U.S. This culture of age-seniority included the proper way of addressing older members as well as appropriate table manners (e.g., younger ones set the table for all at the table, wait until older people begin eating first, and so on). In addition, Joon taught John popular Korean lingo and instructed him on girl music bands, online games, and websites for “sharing” music and movie files electronically.

At the end of the abovementioned excerpt, Soo’s remark (i.e., “Look who is talking. You sound like you were never like them!”) implied that Sujin had experienced a similar transition. Like Joon, Sujin was one of the members characterized by the *gyopo*: particularly her fluent but noticeably English-accented Korean, naturally tanned skin tone, and thin and sharp eyebrows. Her *gyopo* character became less salient when Joon first joined the CYA and was later almost unrecognizable in the presence of John. Remembering a few months earlier when

other members had helped Joon find the right Korean words, Sujin felt it funny that he was teaching John Korean. This in turn made Soo, who remembered Sujin's first time at the CYA, see it as funny that Sujin made such a remark. As such, when the members defined Koreanness and Korean-Americanness, certain cultural and social aspects became more relevant than others depending on the given context. In the case above, Korean language fluency was the most relevant measure for Koreanness, and it was calibrated in relational terms among the specific members Soo, Sujin, Joon, Seungho, and John: Joon's Korean fluency was perceived as low in relation to Sujin's but high in relation to John's.

The relational and context-specific measures of Koreanness/Korean-Americanness in the CYA have significant implications for the discussion of migrants' identities. Theories of immigrants' identities in the U.S. have evolved around the concept of acculturation/assimilation. That is, ethnic distinctiveness eventually fades away as immigrants integrate into the mainstream society (Child 1943; Warner and Strole 1945). Notably, the studies of migrants' identities developed with European immigrant groups who settled down in the U.S. over one century ago (Foner 2000, Foner 2005; Perlmann 2005). As the European immigrant groups have largely assimilated into the U.S. societal structure (e.g., movement out of ethnically concentrated neighborhoods, improved occupational status, and intermarriage) over the past decades, their ethnic distinctiveness has become largely inconsequential in their lives; thus, it has remained only symbolically (Alba 1990; Waters 1990; Gordon 1964). This so-called "straight-line" assimilation theory projecting ethnic distinctiveness to be eventually neutralized was driven by the historical

contingencies: specifically, inflows of European newcomers significantly declined due to restrictive immigration laws passed in the 1920s, the Great Depression in the 1930s, and later World War II (Jimenez 2008). Consequently, subsequent generations of these immigrant groups were those who were born and raised in the U.S. and thus show few immigrant characteristics (Jimenez 2008). In other words, the studies of migrants' identities has its theoretical foundation in the peculiarities of the early European inflows, which were characterized by permanent settlement, long immigrant history, and little experience of internal replenishment. Since the second half of the last century, however, this straightforward integration paradigm was confronted with challenges when non-European immigrants began arriving in the U.S. In particular, the segmented assimilation theory (Portes and Zhou 1993) stressed remarkable diversities in socioeconomic status in the U.S. that could lead assimilation processes down divergent paths.

This decade-long discussion has recently experienced further complications as immigrants' engagement with their country of origin has unprecedentedly increased due to advancements in technology that are more affordable than ever before. Departing from the assimilation-centered approach, transnational migration scholars have focused on the connectivity in immigrants' lives between their country of origin and their country of settlement. Glick-Schiller and her colleagues (1995) referred to transnational migration as "a process whereby immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded, border-crossing linkages-real or imagined-between societies of origin and reception" (p.48). Immigrants' transnational practices involve border crossings of material goods, currency, and actual bodies of people such as by

visiting the home country, communicating with people living there, sending remittances, or partaking in political/religious activities. Without having to physically move across borders, furthermore, immigrants also engage with their home country through cognitive and affective ties established by the values, ideas, practices, and resources circulated between the borders (Levitt and Jarworsky 2007). In this perspective, immigrants' identities cannot be understood by their cultural or ethnic distinctiveness formulated within a host country. Instead, it is imperative to understand immigrants' identities in configuration of multiple relationships to more than one state (Glick Schiller et al. 1995, p 48).

Throughout the theoretical and empirical development in the literature, what has little changed is the tendency to presume there are finite sets of culturally and thus ethnically distinct features with which to essentialize immigrants' identities. In simple terms, ethnicity is often differentiated from race in that it is characterized mainly by cultural traits—language, dress, food, holidays, customs, values, and beliefs—which are distinguished from those of other ethnic groups (Alba 1990, p. 76), particularly a dominant ethnic group in a host society. Ethnic identity is commonly understood through the narrative of how “we” are different from “them” (i.e., white Americans) (Espiritu 1997). When ethnic identity is discussed among co-ethnic immigrants, the “we” versus “them” approach often remains strong (e.g., Waters and Jimenez 2005; Jimenez 2008) in the form of conflicts between long-time settlers or “old” immigrants and new immigrants (Shin 2012). Here, “authenticity” becomes a key to making distinctions (Verkuyten 2005). New arrivals from a country of origin challenge the “authenticity” of the older immigrants'

ethnic/cultural traits as being “Americanized” (e.g., Colombo et al, 2009). Inter-generational comparative studies have also presented similar “authenticity” claims. In this case, the “Americanized” identity of subsequent immigrant generations has often been portrayed as a source of conflicts with older immigrant generations who want to maintain their “authentic” cultural identity.

Such authenticity claims work only with the premise that there is a finite set of culturally/ethnically distinct features and a standard for measuring how much of it one has. Importantly, such contents and measures are shared by a large number of people in the ethnic community. Here, a possible counterclaim is that it becomes quite difficult to determine who is “authentic” or not when the measures are constantly changing. As previously shown, the CYA is a place where young Koreans with varied migration histories and backgrounds gather together. Some of them never left Korea until they came to the U.S. for college, whereas others were born and raised in the U.S. In the middle, some of them migrated to the U.S. as young children or teenagers. Also, a section of the members are much more “transnational” in that they were born in Korea but grew up in multiple countries like China, Japan, Singapore, Philippines, Canada, New Zealand, England, or Rumania before arriving in the U.S. The wide array of migration histories and backgrounds of the CYA members speaks to the point that their socialization as Koreans also inevitably varies. They have different ideas and practices of being “Korean.” Such variations work to diversify the contents and measures of their identity as Korean and migrants. There is no fixed line to mark one group as old and another as new; that is, an individual is an old immigrant only in relation to specific people in the given

context. In turn, one has multiple referential points for his or her Korean migrant identities. Furthermore, the referential points constantly change from time to time depending on the interactional context, and also over time as the CYA membership composition changes seasonally or annually. Thus, one never stays at the same position in his or her identity work but constantly moves. The relational and context-specific identity work thus makes distinction-making an endless process. While the members communicate about and practice what it means to be Korean, they craft Koreanness in their terms and define the measures relevant to their daily lives. In this way, the members developed their grouping rules regarding *gyopo*, Korean immigrants, *yuhaksaeng*, and FOBs, each of which is distinguished by language fluency, stylistic appearance, resident status, self-identification, and mind-set. This finding re-conceptualizes internal distinctions as a generative process rather than a source of conflicts as shown in many studies through the concept of internal othering (Song 2010).

Another important insight gained from my time with the CYA is that the constant flow of people forces the meaning of Koreanness to be continually refreshed. Every year, new arrivals to the U.S. with temporary migration status outnumber those with immigrant status at disproportionate rates.²⁴ While staying “temporarily” in the U.S., temporary migrants seek out communities of similar ethnic backgrounds for various reasons such as housing, socializing, or support for long-term settlement. When the magnitude and frequency of such flows of

²⁴ In 2010, 46.5 million people entered the U.S. with temporary nonimmigrant visas, which was nearly ten times the number of people who entered the country with legal permanent resident status (476,049) (DHS Office of Immigration Statistics 2011).

“temporary” residents increase, this seemingly natural and banal practice can be an influential force that brings newness to the ethnic immigrant community and changes the dynamics of community life. Likewise, up-to-date Koreanness flows in the community through many of the long-term immigrants who regularly travel to their home country. In the CYA, there is also a constant flow of people circulating between the two countries. Many have stressed that communities and interactions in the virtual world have substantially changed or even replaced the lives of people in the real world. Nonetheless, relationships with “real” bodies are unreplaceable as culture is carried, displayed, and transmitted through the physicality of people’s bodies. In this respect, daily interactions among the members in *person* are important driving forces to constantly update the contents and measures of Koreanness. This finding speaks to my point that the discussion of migrants’ identities requires more flexible perspectives going beyond the framework of either giving it away (i.e., assimilation to the dominant culture) or preserving it. Culture is ever-changing, and so is the ethnic culture of migrants: it is not a pre-completed set of properties that people can either lose or preserve. Instead, it is a work in progress. People live with the processes and products of the work. The CYA community exemplifies one kind of transnational space in which migrants’ identities are circulated and continually refreshed. The lives of the CYA community shed light on the changing landscape of ethnic communities in the U.S. under the influence of transnational moves of contemporary migrant populations.

CHAPTER 3

Language Fluency, a “Bigger” World, and “Better” Futures:
Ambiguity and Contradiction

Joonhyuk was eight years old when he first came to the U.S. alone for one year. He recalled the day his mother asked if he would like to go to the U.S. to learn English. A few days later, he would find she had already picked a school for him, finished a visa application, arranged a guardian to take care of him, and purchased a round-trip airplane ticket.

I was attending English *hagwons*²⁵ anyway. So, when I thought of going to the U.S. to learn English it felt like going a new English *hakwon*. That was my first thought. The next thing was ‘wow I will get on a plane,’ which sounded so cool to me at that time.

His recollection precisely shows he took the idea of moving to the U.S. as going a new English *hakwon* in Korea. It would be only further from home than his current *hagwons* but more fun like, as he put, “going for a summer English camp or adventure.” One month later, his parents took him to an airport. Before letting him get on a plane, they said “do not worry about anything like doing well in school. Speaking good English would be just enough by the time to return home.” Considering a big pressure on children to do well all school subjects in Korea, it must have felt like going for a vacation, as he put, when his parent said English was

²⁵ A for-profit institute, academy, or cram school (Korean: 학원).

the only subject that he would need to study. In fact, he enjoyed his time in the U.S. He played soccer on a widely open field after school, importantly “the real grass lawn field!” which was uncommon in Korea. That is one of the best memories of being in the U.S. Both Joonhyuk and his parents were satisfied with the trial of educational migration. One year after his return, the entire family permanently moved to the U.S. for his education and future.

Joonhyuk’s story is quite typical among the CYA members. Their parents told them they would leave for the U.S. alone or with family. Only a few weeks or months later, they got on a plane. My survey data show 95% of the CYA members indicated their migration purpose was their education (English education and/or U.S. formal schooling). This number statistically proves my frequent encounters with the CYA members speaking about their migration during more casual conversations: They came to the U.S. because it is “better to study in the U.S.” and they could “learn English faster.” There might have been other reasons that the parents did not share with their young child. The parents might have had financial difficulties and not been optimistic about their families’ futures in Korea particularly during the late 1990s economy recession which roughly coincided with their migration timing. The parents might have had other intended meaning underlying “learning English is just enough” but their young child did not catch it. Nonetheless, the CYA members, who migrated as a preteen or early teenager, learning English faster and studying in a better environment were the only reasons through which they understood why they had to move to the U.S., leaving behind their school, teachers, and friends. They

never had a chance to think about the purpose of migration or to dream about their new lives in the U.S. in their own terms.

When I asked them why they thought their parents considered learning English and “better” education so important that they even had to move to the U.S., returning answers were abstract and generic: it was to have “better futures.” Prompted further, “better futures” were indexed as having “broader world views” and “more opportunities” in life in the “bigger” world. Altogether, they were presumably to achieve the goals when they became able to “work with people from different parts of the world.” They would equip such abilities through English fluency and/or educational attainment in the U.S. This is the CYA members’ basic logic to make links between those ideas that drove their migration for the future. Despite my relentless attempts to take “broader world views” and “more opportunities” to a ground level and tease out by which tangible ends and means they were understood, their answers continued making a circle around those ideas. Through long conversations with a number of the CYA members, I found many of them found the interviews or the conversations with me were almost their first time to actually try to put the meanings of their migration into a perspective. I decided to stop prompting them further as I came to thought that I would not be able to have interviews without prodding them to a certain direction.

Instead, close observations during the fieldwork offered me better chances to catch the CYA members’ understanding of “more life opportunities,” the “bigger world” and “better” futures. In this chapter, I focus on what and how the young migrants talked about their motivations and goals of migration which were often

articulated through their desire of “speaking English well.” The heavy weight of “speaking English well” on the young migrants’ shoulders almost turned it to a final end of their migration. The eminently instrumentalist value of English fluency conversely works against their (or their parents’) ultimate goals of “broadening world views” and experiencing bigger world.

“Do you speak English well?”: English Fluency as a Desire and a Discipline

Given the centrality of “speaking English well” to the lives of the CYA members, it is not surprising that English steadily appears in everyday conversations. It lurks in their mind and abruptly spring out even when English is the least relevant issue at a given moment. On the first day at my *sarangbang* meeting in 2009, I introduced myself as a PhD student. Immediately after, Chanhoo (“living”) exclaimed “Wow, you must speak English very well.” Later I found this was not a coincident happening on that particular day. When Mijeong first joined the *Sarangbang*, she introduced herself as “living here” and her family was living at Edge Water. Her buttered pronunciation of “Edge Water” triggered Chanhoo’s curiosity: “Oh! [Wow], do you speak English well?” As Mijeong was avoiding a response, he prodded her, “You don’t have to be modest. You must speak English better than me.” The question almost always opened up a conversation that other members commented on their own English in comparison to each other. The comparisons were often accompanied with self-criticism about their own English and at the same time envious feelings about others whose English was better than

their own. The seemingly blunt question however did not seem bothering to them. Even the new members reacted to it as if they were familiar with such a question.

Chanho's question "do you do [speak] English well" implies more than a simple curiosity. As the most instant goal of migration, English fluency is indicative of their success in migration. In a longer term, it is a proxy for assessing the potential to achieve "broader world views," "more life opportunities," and "better futures." Such a link between English fluency and "better" futures speaks to the notion of "linguistic capital" (Bourdieu 1977 [1991]). Under extensive globalization, linguistic ability is more than an ethnic/cultural identity marker but a resource which makes language speakers "more marketable commodities" (Kang 2012; Heller 2004, p 474). Global markets differently valorize languages depending on the position of the country in which the language is spoken. Undoubtedly English is one of the languages possessing the highest market value as the language of economically, politically, and culturally powerful country (cf. Park 2009; Pennycook 1994).

When language fluency carries a value as capital, who has more of it becomes a central concern among the same market participants. In this respect, the question, "do you speak English well?" is the CYA members' measure of their rank in the hierarchy of the English language capital. In CYA English fluency is always measured in comparison *within* the members rather than to those speaking English as a first language. Many studies on Korean educational migration highlight that the linguistic capital that these young migrants achieve is meant to enable them to get ahead in the competition among the same Korean nationals who also imagine their futures in

the “bigger world.” Thus, the young Korean migrant communities are an extension of the Korean local system of competition (Park and Lo 2012). This exactly reveals the contradictory nature of Korean educational migration which on a surface level pursues going beyond the boundary of Korea in the name of “getting broader world views” and “playing in a bigger world” and yet, converges again on the Korean domestic class structure.

The CYA members were acutely aware that speaking fluent English is everybody’s interest. This also hints why they consciously act humble about their fluent English in CYA. Asked the question, not many people would frankly answer they speak English fluently. Laughing away the question is usually the best answer or “my English is okay” is an alternative. They try not to be pretentious about their fluent English as they know it can be a sensitive issue for other people who do not speak English as much as they wish. And they want to avoid making other members feel bad about their English or having conflicts with others due to jealousy.

As discussed in the previous chapter, there is a general assumption about language and cultural identification (Min and Chung 2012; Alba 1990): When someone speaks English-accented Korean, that indicates they are *ieeseh*²⁶ and thus speaking not fluent Korean, whereas perfect Korean is a sign of new arrival to the U.S. and thus speaking not fluent English. This assumption works only with an assumption of a linear link between language, culture, and ethnic identity. Language fluency of the CYA members deconstructs the conventional equation. Almost all members speak perfect Korean not only without English accent but also with trendy

²⁶ Korean American/Korean immigrant second generate.

slangs, lingos, and style. Directly asking “do you do [speak] English well?” is thus the only way to gauge each other’s rank in English fluency.

Once English fluency is perceived as capital, its *quality* becomes important. By now, it became noticeable that the CYA members were conscious about how well one *speaks* English. Although Chanhoo (and many other members) downplayed his English fluency, there is much evidence to disprove him. Since at age ten, he attended schools in the U.S. and was majoring in accounting at a well-known public university in New York City. He had a couple of summer internship experiences in non-Korean owned companies. Yet, he still evaluated his English not very good. Apparently, “doing fluent English” is not the same with being able to study, work, and live in English-speaking environment. In other words, “fluent English” requires more than functional capability as a means of communication. Many studies have documented young Korean migrants’ (and their parents’) high interests in fluency in spoken English (Kang 2012; Shin 2012; Song 2012). The measure of fluency is whether one’s English *sounds* like native-speaker (e.g., pronunciation, accent, intonation, or fluency). Other components such as contents or logic of one’s speaking are usually not the primary concern.

The following excerpt illustrates how “good” English fluency is appreciated and the way it yields power dynamics in CYA. During diner time, the minister and Jinhee (“*yuhaksaeng*”) were sitting at the same table. For extracurricular activity, Jinhee was DJ’ing on one of her college radio shows.

M :I listened to your radio show this weekend.

H :Did you really? (being shy) It’s embarrassing.

- M : Your English is excellent. You were not born in the U.S. were you?
I was impressed.
- H : Well..T..h..ank you. (being shy). I should work harder to improve my English ...There are so many people speaking English very well.
- M : I wonder if it is ever going to be possible that I speak English well enough so I don't get stressed out because of English....
- H : Your English is really good. I know you are just saying that to make me feel better.
(They laugh together).

Jinhee devoted her time and efforts to develop programs of her show: she read all messages from audiences and picked some of them to read on the show. She paid attention to news and events on campus and share them with audience. According themes and topics of the day, she selected songs to play. Jinhee's English fluency should be the least substantial components of her show. Yet, her "excellent" English was the first thing that caught the minister's attention and it was the only topic throughout the entire conversation about the radio show. Here, Jinhee's "excellent" English is indexed with her English without Korean accent, namely "native-speaker" like English. This was implied the minister's question if Jinhee was born in the U.S. The minister, who came to the U.S. as a *yuhaksaeng* himself like many other CYA members and Jinhee, was very conscious about his own English fluency. At that time, the minister was in a M.B.A program. Before getting admission to the program, he must have passed English tests such as TOEFL and GRE. He was taking graduate level courses in an American University. In the conversation above, nonetheless, the minister was not different from Chanho who always asked other members if they do [speak] English well and made a joke about his own Korean accented English.

As the most desirable object, speaking fluent English is present everywhere. It is what the CYA members quickly recognize about other members and openly

compliment on. The desire for fluent English speaking is so strong that it could even reverse the status hierarchy in the community as shown between the minister and Jinhee. The minister, who is in much higher status as an older male leader of CYA, revealed his self-consciousness about his “not good enough” English and envious mind to Jinhee, who is a young female college sophomore and an ordinary member of the community. This in turn enabled Jinhee to give the minister a pep talk.

Moreover, the desire to be a “native-speaker like English” as a measure of “good” quality intervenes in social relationships outside of Korean communities. Here, it is noteworthy that the notion of a “good” English is highly racialized in that it precisely refers to *White American English without particular accent of Southern or Eastern regions*, which are often further regarded as standard,” or “authentic” English. The desire for “speaking English well” is thus inseparable to the desire for having “foreigner” friends. In a literal sense, “foreigner” means all non-Korean people. In the context of learning English, it frequently points to “American,” more precisely “white American.”

Joonhwan (“*jogi yuhaksaeng*”) entered college in the Fall of 2011. In the beginning of the semester, we talked about a new beginning of his life in college. I learned he was living on campus.

- | | |
|----------|---|
| KYS | :Do you have a roommate? |
| Joonhwan | :Yes. My roommate is white. He is in ROTC. I think I am very lucky. |
| KYS | : Lucky? |
| Joonhwan | I was so worried about what if I got assigned a weird one. You know, drinking, doing drugs, bringing girls to a dorm room... My roommate seemed to be a good guy. As I said, he is in ROTC. Also, I can speak English while living with him. All my friends are envious of me. None of them has an American roommate. |

Joonhwan's "luck" is described through three attributions of his roommate; race (white), affiliation in ROTC, and American. All the aspects made Joonhwan content with the roommate assignment. A ROTC roommate, supposedly well-disciplined, gave Joonhwan a big relief because he would not disrupt Joonhwan's daily life unlike an undisciplined (or "weird") roommate. As he explicitly put, however, his lucky feeling was more likely from having a white American than a "good guy" roommate so he would be able to use English every day. This is also what made his friends envious of him" roommate.

Under a great desire and pressure made Joonhwan anxiously look for opportunities to practice English as much as possible. His anxiety was reflected on the comments on his friends. His friends lived with Koreans or people from other countries [non-English speaking] so they "ended up" speaking all Korean or "broken" English. In comparison to his friends, he could learn "authentic" English in a natural setting, which is the most ideal condition for learning English for him. Clearly, Joonhwan's white American roommate is objectified as a good English conversation partner before a person for having good friendship. Moreover, he was the only one among his friends who had a white American roommate. That rareness added more value to his luck. He said it was really difficult to have such a roommate "as if hitting a lottery." As a matter of fact, roommate assignments were actually done by lottery.

"Everyone Speaks Perfect Korean."

Whereas English is an object of achievement, Korean language fluency is taken for granted in two ways. First, the CYA member builds the legitimacy of speaking fluent Korean through a claim of Korean identity and, second, the utility in global market. The CYA members' language practices reflect complex links between language competence, ethno-national identities, and other social identities. As mentioned in the previous chapters, almost all CYA members speak fluent Korean regardless of migration histories or backgrounds. In a three-year period of the fieldwork, only two out of approximately one hundred fifty members did not speak Korean at all although they understood other people speaking Korean; Serah and Jessica. Both were born in the U.S. to their permanent immigrant parents and raised in the U.S. (i.e., *gyopo* or *ieeseh*). There are only three members whose Korean was slightly English accented; Sujin (*yughaksaeng*), Joon ("living"), and John ("living"). This surprised Tina when she first joined CYA in 2012.

Not many CYA people know I was born in the U.S. Actually, nobody asked me where I was born. Many people seem to assume I came to the U.S. like many of "Living" or "Studying" members here. I guess that is because I speak Korean? Many of my friends talk about how well I speak English. I think that's funny. I am telling you, I was born here, in the U.S.! Aren't they supposed to be talking about me speaking Korean well? People take for granted speaking Korean well in CYA because everyone speaks Korean well like Korean-Korean.

Taking the notion of language as ethno-national identity marker, immigration literature often documents that English fluency and heritage language fluency tend to have a mutually exclusive relationships. That is, whether immigrants speak the language of a host country is indicative of acculturation to the dominant society, and thus results in losing the language of their origin (Min and Chung 2012; Alba 1990).

Yet, the language fluency and practice of the CYA members complicate this overly simplified correlation. Except for the abovementioned five members, the CYA members speak contemporary Korean in a stylistically up-to-date manner (e.g., youth slang). As Tina mentioned, “everyone” speaks perfect Korean (i.e. no English accent at all), even those who were born and raised in the U.S. like Tina, Philip, Jen, and Jackie.

Since almost all the CYA members speak perfect Korean, Korean fluency is usually not subject to their attention unless the taken-for-grantedness is disrupted. One week before Yoonho returned to Korea in 2009, my *Sarangbang* members gathered in a small restaurant to throw a farewell party for him. Yoonho had just finished his nine-month long ESL course and would return to his sophomore year in college back in Korea. Amid lively chatter and laughter, one Korean word from Bobae (“living”) ignited a quibble between Joon and Sujin.

- Bobae : I saw you walking with a girl. Is she your new girlfriend?
 Joon : How does she look?
 Bee: : She was ah-dahm (아담)
 Joon : What is ah-dahm (아담)?
 Bobae : It means small or petite.
 Sujin : When did you come to the U.S.? (in a somewhat offensive tone)
 Joon : At ten. Why are you asking? (in a somewhat defensive tone)
 Sujin : Then, how did you not know the word?
 Joon : ... How about you? (seems offended) When did you come? Why does your Korean sound not like Korean?
 Sujin : What? I DO speak Korean like Korean, don't I? (looking around others and seems to need help.)
 Soo : Right, Sujin speaks Korean much better than you [Joon]. At least, she doesn't mix English and Korean in speaking as much as you do.

Joon and Sujin were those who had “*gyopo*” character in their dress, hairstyle, make-up, language fluency, and body gestures (see Chapter 2). In the conversation above,

these two members were arguing about each other's Korean fluency. Sujin made a point that Joon should have known the Korean word, *ah-dahm*, since he had not been in the U.S. long enough to forget the word. Joon caught Sujin's tone criticizing his Korean fluency and got offended. Instead of defending himself (or his Korean competence), Joon also pointed out Sujin's lack of Korean fluency. He made a point that Sujin's English-accented Korean was equally unacceptable.

This snapshot of the Yoonho's farewell party illustrates how Korean language fluency is claimed through authentic Korean identity. As Korean, they should have a certain level of Korean vocabularies not to mention literacy skills. At the same time they should speak authentic Korean or "like "Korean-Korean" as insisted by Joon. The claim for "perfect" Korea fluency is grounded in a moral stance. In the particular context above, less than "perfect" Korean fluency is defined through a lack of Korean vocabulary and English accented Korean. The quibble ended by Soo (*jogi yuhaksaeng*) who judged that Sujin's Korean was better than Joon's *because* Sujin spoke Korean without mixing English *as much as* Joon did. As such, evaluations of Korean fluency take place in comparisons among participants in the context through specific referential points in the given situation. As almost all members speak perfect Korean in CYA, their standard for Korean fluency is rather high. Jiwon (living) said "there is no excuse for those who *moved* to the U.S. to be unable to speak perfect Korean especially when the members *born* in the U.S. speak perfect Korean." This language practices in everyday life involve in developing their own criteria of Korean fluency (i.e., Korean vocabulary, Korean fluency without English accent, or mixing Korean and English). In this respect, speaking less than perfect

Korean is assessed as unacceptable quality of Korean fluency. Such an evaluation works to put a blemish on authentic Korean identity (i.e., Korean like “Korean Korean”). Thus, Sujin’s search for a support from other members to prove her Korean was as fluent as “Korean-Korean” was also her attempt to redeem her Korean identity.

Fluency both in Korean and English as Power

From a different angle, the value of fluent Korean means more than adherence to Korean ethno/national identity. Here, the concept of language as capital is also useful to understand the way the CYA members talk about Korean fluency. People’s idea of language and language use is socially constructed as embedded in specific local and global contexts (Kang 2012; Chand 2011). The post-1965 Korean immigrant parents often focused on English acquisition of their children in order to better incorporate into the U.S. society. Korean immigration scholars interpret it as parents’ response to the depreciation of the Korean linguistic capital and identities in the U.S. mainstream society and dominant global markets (Baynham and De Fina 2005; Block 2006; Blommaert et al. 2005a, 2005b; Maryns 2005). As a result, later generations of post 1965 Korean immigrants often lose their heritage language ability.

Extensive globalization, however, has generated a great demand for multilinguals who can mediate groups across language boundaries. This has resulted in repositioning “minority languages” as marketable assets (Heller 2003). Korean is

one of those “minority languages” whose value has recently been reevaluated. Along with remarkable economic growth of Korea in recent decades, the ‘Korean Wave’ (*Hallyu*), the profoundly increasing popularity of Korean popular culture particularly in Asian markets, aids the Korean language and culture to gain global currency (Shin 2012; Lin and Tong 2008). The elevated position of Korea in business, information-technology and cultural sectors in global market gives parents and their children optimistic estimations about Korean language fluency as an asset (Shin 2012; Block and Cameron 2002; Heller and Martin-Jones 2001; LaDousa 2005; Wee 2003).

The CYA members were aware that speaking both Korean and English is advantageous for them. In the spring of 2013, Minsoo participated in a career fair in NYC which was hosted by Korean Chamber of Commerce and Industry in the U.S. but not exclusively for Korean applications. He had interviews with three well-known Korean companies each of which has its U.S. head-quarter in New Jersey. When I asked him to describe his experience of the first interview, he began “There were four Korean applicants including me and three Korean interviewers.” He went on describing each of the people in the interview room by their language fluency and appearance/fashion style in a very similar way that the CYA members distinguish different groups of Korean (see chapter 1 and 2). The first interviewer, he described, was a perfect bi-lingual. By that, he meant no Korean accent in English and no English accent in Korean. The second one was a “Twinkie”: he understood Korean but only spoke English. The last one was a “Korean-Korean” who was able to

communicate in English but his English was not very fluent. The first two mostly asked questions in English whereas the last did in Korean.

The way he portrayed the three interviewees were not different but with a little more details about their work experience and qualifications.

The first applicant was a typical “Twinkie.” When the interviewer number three asked questions in Korean, he answered in Korean but not fluently. He had to pause between words, mixed Korean and English. And he had English accent in Korean. He did not have impressive work experience just like me. Well, the second one seemed like having lived in the U.S. for a long time. She must have been a *yuhaksaeng*. She spoke both Korean and English fluently. She had some interesting experiences including an internship in the British embassy in Korea. The third one was a bit older than the rest. A typical “Korean-Korean” guy. He spoke English well but with the typical Korean accent. He had much more work experiences than the rest of us and foreign language certificates like Chinese.

I asked him who he expected to get the position. “If I were the interviewers,” he replied “I would choose the older Korean-Korean guy.” His explanation was the applicant went to college in Korea and served his military duty. That made him more familiar with Korean organizational cultures. That would be very important because the company is still a Korean company although it is located in the U.S.” Except for the applicant, Minsoo said he would choose himself as the next qualified applicant: “because I speak both Korean and English fluently, which could also mean that I know both cultures.” He went on to say that if the Korean companies looked for applicants to work in their U.S. headquarters, ability to adapt to both cultures should be definitely an advantage, which he thought he had more of than the rest of the male applicants. During the interview, he switched his language mode accordingly depending on the questions asked in Korean or English. By doing so, he showed he spoke not only fluent but also proper Korean following strict rules of

honorifics and speech levels. That would differentiate him from other “Twinkies” who did not acquire appropriate Korean politeness conventions (Lo 2009; Park 2006). He clearly understood his language competence both in Korean and English as indexing not only linguistic ability but also malleability of interpersonal and organizational cultures. Moreover, he knew how to use it to maximize his value as a job candidate.

The high value of bilingualism both as linguistic and cultural malleability was constantly promoted in CYA. One Friday night, the minister was giving his sermon. The subject of the day was “dreams.” He began the sermon with his own dream that brought him to the U.S. four years ago at his age twenty eight.

Missionary work for Korean youth was not an easy job for many reason. I had expected that before coming to the U.S. Yet, I had many “practical” difficulties. The language barrier was the first and biggest obstacle. There were many issues that Korean American youth had but could not really get into deep in their mind because I was unable to communicate with them linguistically. Moreover, I could not understand many of their issues because we grew up in different cultures. [...] Look at yourself. All of you speak both Korean and English. You should know that is a great strength that you have. You understand both cultures, Korean and American. That is *your* power. Don’t waste your time by complaining that you don’t have a dream. Find the way you can use your power to set your dream and make it come true. Don’t complain you don’t have anything special. You already have all.

Before coming to the U.S. he thought he would study hard to learn English for his lifelong dream to look after Korean children and adolescents who were born and raised in the U.S. Unfortunately, he soon realized his English would not get improved as quickly as he had expected. It took him a couple of years to admit it would be nearly impossible to pursue his dream in a practical sense so he had to

find a new one. Looking back his own path, the CYA members were in a much better position. The CYA members' "power" would enable them to work with Korean, Korean-American, American, and people from other countries who speak English as foreign language. Expectedly, in turn, the CYA members' dreams are to unfold on a wider ground than the minister his own.

Studies concerning immigrants' incorporation or adaptation to the U.S. often work on the implicit assumption that the U.S. mainstream society is a place to which (im)migrants need or want to become incorporated. On the other hand, studies specifically on temporary migrants often highlight migrants' relationships with the U.S. society as exclusively instrumental; a place where they make money so they can support their families in their home country. Yet, there are always grey areas in between. As the minister stated, their "ground" does not have to be limited in the U.S. local society but go beyond to anywhere they can communicate in Korean and/or English. The minister reminded the CYA members of their power as linguistically and culturally bi-lingual.

The CYA members see the U.S. as a place where they could acquire linguistic, cultural, and social capital which they can use to have "broader perspectives," "culturally diverse experience," and "more life opportunities." To summarize, the CYA members came to the U.S. to "play in the bigger world," they say. A destination of the CYA members' futures is widely open to the "bigger" world and thus loosely defined yet. The so-called mainstream U.S. society might or might not be *the* place for their desired opportunities and "better" lives. Whereas making successful life in

the U.S. was *the* “American dream” of Korean immigrants in the past decades, it is *one* of these young migrants’ “global” dreams.

The Harder Work and the Sooner Play

The imageries of a link between “better” futures and becoming “global” are constantly reified in CYA. So was their belief in both Korean and English fluency as a token to achieve them all. What is interesting is the pressure for speaking fluent English is so potent that it can often make the young migrants oblivious of their goals which they pursue to achieve it.

Parents of the CYA members sent them to the U.S. “to learn English,” and they sooner or later meet the goal. As the young migrants get used to their new lives in the U.S., they learn English, go school, participate extracurricular activities, and make “foreigner” friends. There comes a time when they become less obsessive about having “American” friends and speaking fluent English. When they feel content with what they have gained, they do not anxiously or proactively put extra efforts to gain more of them or to better acculturate to the U.S. local society. Before reaching that point, the young migrants often have guilty feeling when they see not practicing English as much as they should.

Baikman is one of many CYA members who passed the stage of “nothing in Korean.” When he stepped into his new American school in eighth grade, he deliberately chose to cut off everything related to Korean/Korea. He did not hang out with any Koreans in his school, did not watch Korean TV or movie, did not listen

to Korean music, or even did not talk with his friends in Korea. To learn English fast was the reason. Three years later when he felt confident about his English and established good relationships with non-Korean friends, one Korean student (out of many) caught his eyes for the first time. When I asked Baikman if he did not know him before, he said “I did, but I did not really pay attention to him.” One day, he *decided* to talk to him. I asked him why he chose him out of many Koreans. He answered “because I knew he was like me.”

He was different from other Koreans in school who always grouped themselves together and spoke only Korean, which I did not like. He never sat with other Koreans and neither did I. We ran into each other in school frequently in the gym. When I played basketball with my friends [non-Korean], I saw him playing basketball with his friends [non-Koreans]. But he never said hi to me. I did not either.

Baikman said there was also a common type of Korean who was avoiding talking to or getting involved with other Koreans. They did so because of the same reason he had (i.e., to learn English faster). Baikman “sensed” the student was like himself.

When Baikmin was ready to resume his Korean mode and approached him, Seonghyun, he would not back off from Baikmin. Seonghyun did not avoid Baikmin at that time because “the timing was right,” Baikman said, because he was also passing the phase of “no-Korean but English-only.” Seonghyun felt something missing from his life once he had achieved what he aimed. When Baikman reached out to him because of the same reason, he took Baikman’s inviting gesture. Since then, they became best friends. They spent time together doing many things that they had put aside; watching Korean TV shows, making Korean food, or reading Korean comic books. I asked him what language they spoke each other. He laughed:

“Of course, Korean! We had finished learning English. I know I know. There is no end in learning English.” As Baikman noted, mastering English does not have an end point. Yet, he felt “enough” because at least he no longer had difficulties in studying in class, socializing with non-Korean friends, and living everyday life in the U.S. The transition from “non-Korean” to “everything Korean” phase resembles a discipline with which many Korean children grew up: Do your homework before going out and playing with friends. To master English was like their homework to finish before having relaxing and fun time. If they work harder, they could finish their homework quicker so they could play sooner.

Conclusion

Many researchers have interpreted educational migration as strategic and calculative actions of Korean parents who wish for their children to lead “better” lives in the “bigger” world. The calculations reflect Korean parents’ anxiety of securing their middle class positions, their desires for their children to get ahead in competition structure, and their all-encompassing devotion for their children’s futures. They hope English fluency as a means of materializing the goals, expecting it will get converted to economic, social, and cultural capital in global market (Park and Lo 2012).

The way the CYA members understood their migration motivation, purposes, and goals is precisely through such instrumentality of English that was often transmitted from their parents or Korean society. Such a calculation is however

undeniably faulty in many aspects. As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, the young migrants did not get a chance to make a sense of their migration in their own terms. After migration, they grew older with future projections which were scaffolded in the idea of the well connected link of English fluency, experiencing “bigger” worlds, and “better” futures. It is surprising that whereas the significance of English fluency and its measures are well developed, the rest of the components such as “more opportunities,” “broader perspectives,” “bigger worlds,” and “better” life largely remained unarticulated. At best, “better” or “more” opportunities in the “bigger” world are indexed as being able to communicate with people in the world linguistically and culturally so they can work in transnational or multinational corporations.

Even if each concept is well defined, problems are still unsolved. Most evidently, those components for making better futures do not get magically connected all together. It requires work. Fluency in English and Korean language can only have value as linguistic capital when it gets converted to economic, social, and cultural capital. The young migrants must know first how to do it. Unfortunately, however, this obviously critical issue is surprisingly missing in everyday scenes of the young migrants both before and after migration. Arguably, the issue is also missing in well-intended plans or hope of their parents’. The presumed correlation between English competency, more life opportunities, becoming global, and better life works as a formula without much explanation about processual details. It mirrors the prevailing desire (or illusion) for the “bigger

world” both on a national and individual level in Korea which is transformed to the “English fever” (Park, J. 2009).

The relationship between the CYA members and English and Korean language competency illuminates the intricacies of how globalization and migration redefine peoples’ ideas of language and language use. It also shows how such language ideologies and practices shapes contours of migrants’ lived experiences. Language competency as commodity and capital decouples language and ethno/national identity bound to nation-state. At the same time, however, the notion of language as an ethno/national identity marker does not vanish. The two contradictory forms of language ideologies coexist and require migrants to play along in multiple markets and contexts. This chapter most importantly, shows how easily the young migrants can flounder in the web of such complexities and contradictions.

The subsequent chapters focus on challenging experiences of the young migrants in the midst of ambiguity and contradictions rife in their migratory lives. Studies that interpret educational migration as a highly calculative and strategic action, after all, take the parents as the primary actors. This results in glossing over the children who were thrown on the blue print of the “better” futures drawn by their parents and they try to figure their way out. Even if the parents effectively transmitted their ideas, strategies or calculation to their young children, these young migrants are not robots following their parents.

On the bright side, the obscure and ambivalent nature of the CYA members’ migration can be translated into possibilities and explorations in young adulthood.

On the other hand, it can worsen uncertainties and insecurities about undetermined futures which is already prevalent in young adulthood. In neither of the scenarios does acting strategic or calculative seem relevant. The stories of the young migrants who live in ambiguity and contradictions remain unheard to parents, researchers, and society of the sending and receiving countries. In the following chapters, I share the young migrants' stories of how they project their futures (chapter 4), begin crafting the imagery as goals and plans (chapter 5), learn how to materialize their futures (chapter 6), and in the meantime, how they are becoming an adult apart from their parents and family.

Chapter 4

Age-Peer Socialization of Young Adults:
Learning How to Build Futures

As usual on a Friday evening, about thirty members gathered for dinner at the church before the service began. They were sitting around dining tables and talking in small groups. “What’s your plan for this summer?” Julie (“living”) asked Jinsung (“living”) sitting next to her. “I am thinking to apply for an internship in Seoul,” Jinsung shared his plan, “Jaehoon *hyung*²⁷ said he can ask his father to put me in his company. Did you know his father is in a very high position in Samsung?” Julie asked Jinsung about the internship position. Scratching his head, Jinsung confided, “I don’t know. Actually, I don’t really care. I just think an internship experience in the big company in Korea would make my resume look good. You know, *in case* I look for a job *there*.”

Turning to a junior in 2009, Jinsung became to think about his future “more seriously.” For summer, he was planning to do an internship in Korea, which he had not visited since the last visit four years ago for his grandfathers’ funeral. Jinsung did not know details about the possible internship in the company. In fact, what

²⁷ *Hyung* is a word used by Korean males to address male older than them who they are close to. *Hyung* literally means “older brother” The equivalent word for female to address older male than them is *Oppa*. A word *noona* is for males to older female and a word *unnie* is for females for older female.

attracted him were not the actual tasks of the position which could give him opportunities to learn necessary skills and knowledge for his future real job. Instead, he was interested in getting his foot in the door for his possible futures in Korea. The conversation between Julie and Jinsung is a snap shot of the ways the CYA members talk about futures with their age peers. The CYA members project multiple futures in multiple places including Korea, the U.S. or other countries. Yet, their future projections are notably provisional as implied in Jinsung's remark above that, while being cautious about committing his future back to Korea, he emphasized the *possibility* of the idea.

Future elements are intrinsic parts of migration and migrants' lives. Decisions about migration are essentially driven by the value of the future that individuals hope to gain through locating their lives in a new country (De Jong and Fawcett 1981; Roberts 1995; Piore 1979). From the other direction, more recently, transnational migration scholars have highlighted how immigrants' envisioning of their futures in a home country shapes their present lives in the host country. In this respect, envisioned futures are not merely fictitious imagery. They have behavioral significance in the present in innovating and evaluating action (Emirbayer and Mische 1998, p. 984). In a temporal flow, actors "construct changing images of where they think they are going, where they want to go, and how they can get there from where they are at present. [...] they [such images] entail proposed interventions at diverse and intersecting levels of social life" (*ibid.*).

To the CYA members, future projection is an imaginative practice through which they engage in inventing new possibilities and venues of their transnational lives. And yet, their liminal positions give the CYA members' forward-looking distinct shapes and directions. By liminal positions, I mean the CYA members are no longer adolescents but not yet fully self-sufficient adults; they are unable to fully commit their futures to the U.S. or Korea. As young adults, their future projections take less concrete forms than those of older adult migrants who have more established social positions and roles in family, work, and/or communities. Older migrants (chronologically or developmentally in life course) have enduring commitment and responsibilities to fulfill, and clearer plans and goals to execute. To the contrary, the CYA members' present and future are largely undetermined and exploratory. As young adults, their roles and social positions are highly ambiguous and their futures less directed than those of individuals in other life stages. Their future projections are not developed as a plan yet, in that it lacks clear elaborations about desired states or specific strategies with which to achieve them. In turn, the CYA members' future projection is close to aspirations or imageries of "possibility," looming on the horizon in multiple directions.

Briefly mentioned above, future projection is at play when people make a decision to leave or return to their country of origin. This implies that projected futures are embedded in places (i.e., the *place* where they see their "better" *futures* to be). Largely undetermined and exploratory, the CYA members' futures are drawn in various configurations of time and places. Moreover, a variety of ways that the CYA members identifying themselves as certain types of migrants produce

envisioned futures in diverse spatial and temporal boundaries. For example, self-identified “studying” members tend to emphasize the temporariness of their lives in the U.S. regardless of the actual length of time they have lived in the U.S. While seeing their futures as ultimately in Korea, some talk about going back to Korea right after finishing college whereas others postpone it until getting some work experiences in the U.S. or other country. To the contrary, “living” members are more likely to stress the permanency of their lives in the U.S. One member even put it in “I am not going anywhere but will live in the U.S. forever.”

Such a connection between self-identified migration status and future projection in places often becomes a proxy for how the members set boundaries regarding their present lives in the U.S. and Korea. For instance, Hosoo (“studying”) kept emphasizing how English fluency was important to him precisely *because he was going back to Korea*. To him, speaking fluent English indexes linguistic and cultural capital that he expected to gain through migration so he could utilize it for better professional settlement in Korea in the future. He proactively put himself in “American” experiences in order to maximize his capital gains as much as possible, within the supposedly limited time in the U.S. In adapting to “American” life, on the other hand, Yoonjae (“living”) had a more laid-back attitude because as she said, there was “a plenty of time to work on that in the U.S.” Regardless of migration statuses, there are also many CYA members who are rather open to go “anywhere” for a better job or a more exciting life. All in all, some of the members were rather decisive about their futures in Korea, the U.S. or other places whereas others were

uncertain about where they would want to be in future. Yet, many of the CYA members change their minds as they grow older.

This chapter and the following two chapters tell stories that the CYA members envision, develop, and employ to actualize their futures, the process I named “future building.” Integral to the process is age-peer socialization. In the simplest definition, a peer group is an aggregation of individuals who share physical, cognitive, and socio-affective *similarities* (Brown 1990). As well documented, age-peer socialization is a crucial part of human development, in particular for young individuals. Through sharing “same” activities with peers (*ibid.*), young people develop social skills, prototypes for adult relationships, and strategies others use to cope with similar problems (Koo 2012). Many studies have examined age-peer socialization as critical for ethnic identity and adaptation to a host society among immigrant children or adolescents (McCarthy 1998; Rumbaut 1997; Fuligni 1997; Lee 1994). A noteworthy point is the significance of peer groups could outweigh that of family in the process of developing their schema as young immigrants grow older (Garcia-Coll and Magnuson 1997, p.126).

To the CYA members, several to thousands of miles away from family, age-peer groups are central to their social lives. Many of the CYA members stress friendships, predominantly those established through CYA, as *all* they have in their lives in the U.S. Whereas almost everyone holds the same goals of migration, “better education” and “better futures,” they have varied life boundaries which are differently defined by their subjective, legal, or social positions in migratory

contexts. The similarities and differences in projected futures are constantly and mundanely communicated in CYA. Everyday interactions are thus a key for them to build their futures. Yet, age-peer socialization among young adult migrants is a notably absent topic in immigration or transnational migration literature.

The chapters 4, 5 and 6 elaborate on how the CYA members rely on each other in the process of developing their adaptive “toolkit” (Swidler 1986) to build their futures. I show this through three distinct but interrelated phases that I dub as “poking,” “modeling” and “consulting.” At first, the following sections of this chapter focus on the phase of “poking.”

“Poking”: Expanding Life Boundaries

Poke [pohk] verb (used with object).

1. *To prod or push, especially with something narrow or pointed, as a finger, elbow, stick, etc.*
2. *To make (a hole, one’s way, etc.) by or as by prodding or pushing.*
3. *To thrust or push: she poked her head out of the window.*

Source: Merriam-Webster Dictionary

I use the concept “poking” to portray an exploratory phase of the CYA members’ future building. Following the dictionary definitions, it denotes the CYA members’ practice of pushing their head out of their own life boundaries and becoming more interested in the lives of others. It also describes the way the CYA members prod their friends to the direction to which they are heading. While doing so, the CYA members expand boundaries of their world in cultural, spatial, and temporal dimensions.

“When I first came here [New Jersey], I was so surprised because there were SO many Koreans!” Minjoo, a college freshman, recollected her first impression on her new neighborhood and school. Until she moved to New Jersey for college, she lived in West Virginia since her first arrival there at age nine as a *jogi yuhaksaeng* (i.e., early study abroad student). In comparison to New Jersey, there were not many Koreans in her school or neighborhood in West Virginia. Even in her Korean church there, people spoke English. Naturally, she also spoke English only except for when she talked to her parents in Korea on the phone. “Here, EVERYONE speaks Korean!” she added, “I speak Korean more than English now because I hang out with CYA people.” She described her transition as follows:

I always had American friends and a few Korean friends who spoke only English. But now, I have friends who speak English, Korean and both. My CYA friends, especially those FOBs, share a lot of cool stuff. We always talk about Korean TV shows, music, celebrities, or fashion. I missed that stuff for a long time since I have not been Korea for a long time.

The transition from West Virginia to New Jersey brought many changes to her everyday life. Back in West Virginia, she was rarely exposed to Korean culture, people, and language. In West Virginia, she lived with her white American homestay families; she had “American food” every day, spoke only English, and watched American TV shows. She had visited Korea only a couple of times in nine years. Instead, her family (usually her mother) visited her almost every year. After joining CYA, her life became “more diverse,” according to Minjoo. Such changes were often represented as which languages she used in daily activities. She was making a

transition from the “English only” to the “Korean *and* English” world. Inseparably, this took her to the world where “American” and “Korean” ways of living coexisted.

When she met “SO many Koreans” in her college and neighborhood who spoke Korean, English, and shifted fluidity between the two, it was like a “new world” to her. At CYA she made many friends and learned they were living in two worlds simultaneously. Minjoo got together with her CYA friends and went out to eat “Korean” food one day, “American” food another day, and time to time, other locally available “international” dishes. She observed her friends getting on Korean websites for “fun stuff” such as TV shows, movies, music, or daily news, whereas looking up “American” websites for school related work. Minjoo’s friends also quickly included her in their social circles across multiple cities of the U.S., Korea, Canada, Philippines, China, etc. When meeting and/or talking with their friends on Facebook, Kakao Talk, SnapChat, or Instagramm they also invited Minjoo and they all become “friends.” While hanging out with them, Minjoo quickly and unconsciously picked up their way of living in the two worlds.

As many studies have examined, the home country has been always a part of immigrants’ lives in a host country. So has ethnic culture consumption among immigrants (Park 2004). What is different (if not new) in the way Korea / Korean culture involves the CYA members’ lives are the instant impacts that shape their daily lives with great intensity and extensity. For example, Phillip, born and raised in Hawaii, also had some familiarity with Korean culture before moving to New Jersey and joining CYA. He heard about Korea through his mother who immigrated with

her family in her early teenage years. Phillip used to eat out at local Korean restaurants following his mother who from time to time missed her home country. Yet, the “Korea” he began experiencing through his CYA friends differed from that of his immigrant mother with its nostalgic images of her homeland.

To the majority of the CYA members, Korea is one of many sites where their lives continue unfolding. Far from being a country in distant memories or longing, “Korea” mediated through those members is alive in everyday life and immediate interactions. This is particularly eye-opening to the members whose lives had been largely encapsulated within “American” ways of living like Minjoo and Phillip. Similar to Minjoo, Philip never saw that many Koreans in a close-up who newly arrived or spoke fluent Korean. He hung out with his friends listening to Korean music, talking about Korean TV shows, or eating Korean food together. Considering the relatively long immigration history of Phillip’s family, his friends were almost the sole channel through which he experienced contemporary versions of Korea and “Korean” ways of living in the U.S.

Imagining living in Korea

“Poking” works not only to diversify cultural experiences but also to extend boundaries with which the CYA members draw their futures. As usual on Friday evening at CYA, Philip’s *sarangbang* members gathered in a small conference room at the church after the service. A main topic of the chatter in the beginning was Phillip’s much improved fluency in Korean. “Do you guys notice that Philip’s Korean doesn’t have much English accent anymore?” Danbee (“Living”) said. When Philip

first joined CYA, the members jokingly copied his English accented Korean. While “hanging out” with his friends during weekdays and working as a part-time cashier at one big Korean grocery shop during weekends, not long after, his Korean remarkably improved. Other members nodded sympathetically. She continued, “You could even live in Korea since you speak Korean well like that.” Jiyeon (*jogi yuhaksaeng*) chimed in, “You can teach English in Korea. I teach English every summer although I am *only* a *yuhaksaeng*. Since you were born here, you would get paid much better than me.”

A few months after this sarangbang meeting, I had an interview with Philip. He confided, “When my friends said at first I could live in Korea, I did not take it seriously. It was just a compliment. When I keep hearing that, it kind of makes me think, maybe it would be fun to live there.” Phillip had never thought he could make a living by speaking English as a first language. Yet, his sarangbang friends taught him that could be an option for his futures. Moreover, they gave him proof that his Korean fluency could help him live in Korea without much difficulty. The CYA members’ comment on Phillip’s improved Korean began as just a simple compliment but further “poked” him to start imagining his future in Korea for the first time.

“Poking” begins as a joke or compliment like Phillip’s case. And yet, it sometimes develops more seriously. In the spring of 2012, Woojin (“living”) was saving money to visit Korea in the coming summer. “When I was younger,” Woojin said, “I thought I should live in the U.S. forever because my family immigrated here.”

As growing older, he began seeing his futures in a wider scope. “At first, it started as a joke,” he explained his experience of a turning point.

When summer gets closer, you know all those *yuhaksaengs* talk about their trip to Korea, when they are leaving and what they are gonna do there. When they came back they all talked about what they did. Every summer was like that. Three summers ago (2009), one of my friends randomly shouted out it would be fun if we all got together in Korea and hung out.

In the summer of 2010, Woojin and his friend actually made that joke turn for real and met up in Seoul. That was his first trip to Korea without his parents in tow, which made his experience a lot different. His past trips with his family were usually for visiting relatives. By the time he went around visiting all his maternal and paternal families, time in Korea usually had run out. For the first time, Woojin had “fun” in Korea without having to spend time visiting families. He hung out with his CYA friends in Seoul; went walking down streets packed with young people, looking for inexpensive but “cool” restaurants, going to watch baseball games, and singing and dancing in *noraebang*²⁸ to name a few. Since then, Woojin became more attentive to who around him was leaving for Korea or moving back and forth between the U.S., and Korea. He learned that some of his high school friends like himself, Korean immigrants, moved back to Korea (“temporarily”) and were working there. He gradually realized he did not have to put aside life opportunities in Korea just because he was a “permanent immigrant” in the US.

In the meantime, he “hit the moment.” In the spring of 2011, he turned twenty one. In that summer, he traveled to Korea again. Being officially an adult in

²⁸ Similar to a Karaoke but people have a private room.

both countries allowed him to have “a lot more fun” with fewer limitations for what to do and where to go.

Things are more exciting and entertaining there. I am more related to the way they [Koreans in Korea] play. American ways are boring. Simply, much more things are happening in Korea. Basically, every street is full of people. There are much more things that I could do in life not only for fun but also for living my life and making money.

A simple joke with his friends initiated his first trip to Korea. It was mainly for “having fun” in Korean ways which was more appealing to him. The two trips without his parents gave him wake-up calls to see his future as more open. The vibrant air and faster life pace in Korea were more attractive to him than his seemingly monotonous life in the U.S. In addition, he his friends moving back to Korea and doing business there. He began having a mentality that “they are doing it. Why not me?” And most of all, he met his girlfriend through his *yuhaksaeng* friend during his second trip and continued a long-distant relationship with her. As his relationship got serious, his thought of moving back to Korea became also more serious.²⁹

Imagining the U.S. life

“Poking” is also at play to expand life opportunities in an opposite direction. The fall of 2011 was Hanah’s first semester as a *yuhaksaeng* in college. She lived in a small rented room at a big town house owned by a Chinese Korean woman, nearby her small community college. As many *yuhaksaengs*, she did not have a car or family

²⁹ In the summer of 2014, Woonjin got married with his girlfriend and moved back to Korea.

members who could help her getting around. She felt lucky there was a bus route between her house and college so she did not have to completely rely on other people for a ride every day. The first few weeks were fine, she said. Hanah was busy adjusting to her new life: school, class schedule, new house, bus schedule, and so on. Yet, it did not take long for her to settle down. Especially, it was not her first time living abroad for school. She went to high school in the Philippines and came to the U.S. right after graduation. Through her previous experience, she was already pretty familiar with how to make herself comfortable in new environments. At this time, yet, she felt it more difficult mostly because of the “ridiculous bus system” in the town: the bus ran only every once per hour. Second of all, it was hard to believe the town /city was like the “countryside.” She expressed her frustration, “Nobody walks on the street. Actually, there is nothing to go by walking. How can this be a city?” All the cities where she had lived in Korea and the Philippines were busy all the time with crowds walking down streets, shopping at stores, running errands, etc. Most of all, she could not understand why there was no night life in her new town: “after seven in the evening, everything is closed and nobody is out. It is really strange.”

The “strange” scene soon became unbearable to her. She vented over her anguish: “I am going stir-crazy from getting stuck in my room and school.” Hanah was not used to the life “living like a squirrel in a cage.” She used to be free: walked to schools, went out with her friends, walked down streets and had fun. When she wanted to travel more widely in the town, she could easily take bus or taxi. In the U.S., supposedly giving her a “bigger world,” her life was confined within the boundary of the bus route between her house and school, and the church van route

picking up the CYA to the church. Her feelings of being confined worsened when she met her friends at CYA. With a deep sigh, Hanah said “I wish I had a part time job like Joohae or Jessica.” Joohae was also a *yuhaksaeng* but lived with her immigrant aunt’s family. Twice a week, she worked at her aunt’s nail shop to make her allowance and have “life experience.” At the Friday CYA meeting, Hanah’s *sarangbang* members talked about their week and shared concerns and news. Joohae often spoke about her tough time with difficult customers. Yet, she usually ended her complaints with a constructive conclusion: She would take the experience as learning moments about the real world and to become a better person. To Hanah, Joohae seemed to have a whole other world that she did not have. When Hanah openly shared her frustration about her “prison-like” life, her friends suggested she find a part-time job and get out of her “little cage.” She actually tried but faced a big wall. First of all, she would need a working permit to be able to legally work on or off campus. When she went to get a working permit, an officer told her to come back with a Social Security card. When she went to the Social Security office, they told her to come back with a working permit. Her attempt ended in vain. Soon, however, she learned not everyone worked with a working permit, green card, or any other official documents. Yet, she would need family members or close friends who could set her up for work as a tutor, cashier, or restaurant server in settings that did not require official documents for the job. Such informal network connections are, of course not always readily available to *yuhaksaengs* like Hanah.

Her ties were slowly but certainly built mostly through her CYA friendship. At that time, Phillip (“born”) worked at a big grocery store as a cashier. Whenever

Hanah a grocery shopping, Phillip introduced her to his colleagues and the staff there. After a semester looking at her friends enviously, she finally got a call from Phillip about a cashier job at the same store. Friday night on that week, I met her at CYA, right after coming back from work. I saw an odd mix of tiredness and yet vibrancy from her. She excitedly told me all the mistakes that she made at work and how stupid it was. A cheerful tone was still in her voice even several months later. She kept emphasizing how rewarding the job was for her: "I get very tired at the end of the day. But, I am happy. I get to meet new people coming from everywhere and made many friends working there too. After work, we go out for coffee or bowling. I feel bad for my friends because they have to give me a ride back to my house at late night. But, I always try to pay back to them like buying dinner or coffee. Oh, I've been to new restaurants several times by now." She walked to work every Friday and Saturday, about thirty minutes each way. But, the walk was enjoyable because, she said, it gave her a chance to get around her neighborhood and look around at how other people live "out there." Importantly, the walk was also contemplative for her to think about her past, family in Korea, her possible futures, and so on. In her own words, the work at the store gave her a "new world." Through the part-time work, her social circle got a little bit bigger. Some of the workers at the store went to the same school with her but they had never known each other before. Since starting her job, she met up with them at school for lunch or to study together at a library. Most of all, she felt a lot less alone and isolated in her newly starting life in the U.S. Hanah's part-time work was the only vehicle that took her out of her own "cage-like life."

The CYA members are relatively free from enduring commitments or responsibilities for families or work. It is certainly their privilege that they did not have to work to support themselves financially. Hanah and many other CYA members receive tuition and living cost from their parents. Yet, the unintended consequence of the privilege is to cut off many important opportunities to “experience a real world,” or “get a lesson to become a better person” as Joohae interpreted her part-time work. It was, for some, like losing an entire “world” according to Hanah’s expression. As many studies have documented, educational, occupational, and familial domains are of greatest significance to young individuals (Kalakoski and Nurmi 1998). Being apart from family, these young migrants’ life boundaries are already much smaller than non-migrant young adults. Not having to or unable to work as part-time thus literally means they live in the world which is as small as one third of those college students who have families around them and have part time jobs.

Hannah might have been fine with her small world since it is common or even normal among *yuhaksaengs* who have financial support from parents and are not allowed to work because of their international student status in the U.S. Yet, in comparison to Joohae who was also a *yuhaksaeng* like herself, Hannah found her supposedly normal life problematic. When she repeatedly heard Joohae describing her work in her aunt’s nail shop as life experience, it made her anxious, as if she were missing opportunities to learn such life experience, social skills, or to make friends outside of school. The mix of envious and anxious feeling was so strong that she looked out opportunities to get a part time job and eventually gained one. As

such, age peers are the most immediate references to which the CYA members gauge and develop outlooks on their own lives. Mundane chatters in daily interactions work to make each other curious about and envious of other people's lives. Through this "poking," the members seek opportunities to extend their life boundaries in their lives in the U.S.

Recently, Sihyun (*jogi yuhaksaeng*) became more open to the idea that her future could be in the U.S. Before college, she went to all "white" schools in which Koreans or Asians students were very rare. Without any other "choices," she got along with all non-Korean (i.e., white) friends. She described herself as fairly comfortable with being around "Americans." Yet, she said, "Somehow I always thought I would date only with Koreans." She reluctantly confided, "It's kinda scary to date with American. They seemed sexually aggressive. In my high school, American students made sexual jokes all the time, you know. Maybe, it is just me." I asked her to say more about "it is just me." "My roommate Mieun is dating an American. Mieun is also a *jogi yuhaksaeng*. A few of our friends come over to our room and we ask about her boyfriend. Sometimes she asks us for help when she has trouble with him. You know all those girls' stuff." Mieun showed Sihyun pictures of her boyfriend's family at the Thanksgiving dinner. When her boyfriend had family members visiting him, they always invited Sihyun along. "She also has a lot more Facebook friends than I do. I mean non-Korean friends," Sihyun registered her envious feelings by discussing Mieun's relationship with her boyfriend. As Hanah felt her world was much smaller in comparison to Joohae who had family and work

contacts, the two worlds Hannah did not have for herself, Sihyun saw Mieun living having “more life” and “diverse communities.”

Later in the interview, however, I learned it was neither the image of Americans being sexually more aggressive, which she got from her high school nor unfamiliarity with living with non-Korean people that made her reluctant to date with “Americans” or non-Koreans. Rather, it was her plan to return to Korea *right after* college.

Sihyun: It’s been almost three years that I have lived alone. My mom went back to Korea when I began college. I can live alone. I mean, living alone is not a big deal. But, I see my friends living here going back home during weekends. That makes me to want to live close to my family.

KYS: When did you start thinking you would return to Korea right after college?

Sihyun: Almost right after coming to college, I think.

KYS: Have you dated with anybody?

Sihyun: Not really.

Unlike other *yuhaksaengs* or former *jogi yuhaksaengs* who migrated alone from the start off, Sihyun used to live with her mother until high school. She found it unbearable to live alone. Counting down days to return to Korea to reunite to her family was thus her way of dealing with her loneliness. In her firm mind heading toward Korea, she said, “having relationships which would eventually end without enduring results seemed pointless.” Following her explanation, it is clear that whether it was “American” or Korean did not really matter if the relationship took

place in any other place but Korea. Yet, her limited time in the U.S. in mind was indexed through her indifference, perhaps intended, toward dating with “American.”

For Sihyun, it was the dormitory room chatter with Mieun and their mutual friends about Mieun’s relationship with her “American” boyfriend that gradually changed Sihyun’s attitude. “I know it sounds silly but I began thinking those people are just like us, just human beings but [who] have different ways of living.” I asked her if she would consider dating with non-Korean: “I’m not sure but I think I should not limit myself...maybe.” Sihyun continued, “Mieun recently spoke talking about getting engaged with her boyfriend. If she gets married, that will be her family, right?” Living with or close to family was what Sihyun wanted so badly that made her desire to return to Korea immediately after graduation. Gradually, she began seeing other ways of living close to family without having to moving back to Korea.

Similar to Sihyun, Jaewoong had always projected his near future to be unfolding in Korea. At age twenty four, he came to the U.S. in 2010 as an ESL student. Discontented with his college having little market competitiveness in Korea, his migration was specifically designed for his future plan in Korea. To compensate for his older age to begin a *yuhaksaeng* life, he came with fairly clear future plans: complete ESL courses in one year, finish community college in two years and transfer to university in Korea. He expected that English fluency and the U.S. college credential would enable him to have “upgraded futures” in Korea by landing him one of Korean universities with a higher reputation. Two years later, however, he became unsure about the plan.

My friends going college in Korea, they don't have life. They take classes, constantly take TOEIC tests to get higher scores.³⁰ In addition, doing internships, getting other job related certificates and licenses. It's crazy, so competitive. But my friends here... they go to classes and do activities. Also, other *hyungs* working here [in the U.S.], they finish work at five. There seems more life here, much less competitive.

In the past two years, Jaewoong made comparisons about life in the U.S. and Korea. Regarding life in the U.S., interestingly, Jaewoong found what Woojin considered dull and boring as, in comparison, appealing to him as a relaxing life. He saw his future live in a picture: leaving work at five and coming back home, spending time with family or on his own interests. As rightly put in Jaewong's words "it is impossible" to live such life in Korea where "nobody leaves work at five except for government agency workers." Jaewoong described what Woojin particularly liked about vibrant life in Korea as "crazily" competitive and there is no room for living life. What both Jaewoon and Woojin did not realize was the fact that they were standing on one point that gave only partial pictures of the reality of Korea and the U.S. The contrasting interpretations about the same aspects of living life in Korea and the U.S. are likely the result of their reversed positionalities; Woojin as a "visitor" in Korea and a "permanent" resident in the U.S. whereas Jaewoonn as a "visitor" in the U.S. and a "permanent" resident in Korea. Jaewoon and Woojin only saw the overblown images of the most appealing part of lives in the countries in their stand point.

³⁰ Test Of English for International Communication. TOEIC scores are almost mandatory for college graduate level jobs in Korea

Nonetheless, once having discovered more “life” happening in Korea, it would not be ideal for Woojin to limit his life only within the U.S. Like Woojin, Jaewoong was also having a hard time to make a decision once he found his future in the U.S. would be more enjoyable. To stick to the original plan was not as easy as Jaewoong had anticipated. Getting to the point when he began debating whether to follow his initial plan or not, more questions arose. If he stayed longer than had expected, until when he should prolong his stay in the U.S.? The solution he found was to extend his future options in both countries. He decided to apply for university transfer both in Korea and the U.S. Transfer admission from a college either in Korea or the U.S. would mean a difficult decision for him. I asked him what if he got admissions from colleges in both countries: “That would be too good to believe. Well, I’ve got time to think until it actually happens.”

Living Anywhere?

The CYA members to a various degree expressed their future as open in places. “I will stay *wherever* I can find a job,” Chanhoo (“living”) said when I asked his plan after graduation. I asked him if he would consider even Korea for his first job, he answered that could be “one possibility.” Chanhoo was not the only members giving the response. Admittedly, it was hard to tell whether their answers were serious or not. Even when they were serious, the future they were drawing widely open to “anywhere” sometimes seemed unrealistic or ill-informed. Jaewoong was planning to apply for college transfer both in the U.S. and Korea. Later, however, I learned he was not well informed about the college transfer processes. In Korea,

college transfer requires special exams which are specifically tailored for individual schools. Korean students usually act on the process early by making a wish list of schools in advance so they can prepare for exams. It can easily take years from making a school list to actually gaining transfer admission. When we talked about his plan, it was one year before his graduation. Considering the preparation process, his scenario of continuing university study right after graduation at his current community college seemed less than feasible. What was more, he was not informed about such processes at all.

However, to gauge how realistic or feasible the “open” futures is not always the primary concern of the young migrants in this exploratory phase. As the CYA members put, they were experiencing an “eye-opening moment,” a “turning point,” or “wake-up calls” that compelled them to think about their migratory lives on their own terms for the first time. Accordingly, my focus of this chapter is also on the implications of the very act of projecting open futures in extending temporal and spatial horizons of these young migrants’ lives in the present moment. Zimbardo and Boyd (2008) rightly addressed this process, arguing that “Beliefs and expectations of the future in part determine what happens in the present by contributing to how people think, feel, and behave” (Mische2009: 699: Zimbardo and Boyd 2008:137). “Poking” works through various forms like jokes, compliments, complaints, chatter, showing off, envious feelings, or simple observations. Such mundane interactions among the young migrants are their primary source with which to craft the “beliefs and expectations of the future.”

Before joining CYA, many of these young migrants had lived in rather exclusively “American,” “Korean immigrant,” or “FOB” lives. Their envisioned futures also used to be directed in a single direction along the continuum of their past and present lives. Being apart from families, these young migrants attend college and join CYA where all these different kinds of Korean migrants mingle together. Everyday interactions with friends who had varied migration statuses and trajectories made the CYA members’ lives not only more “diverse” in present but also multiplies their ideas of possible destinations in the future. If Minjoo had continued living in the West Virginia “white” town, she would not have projected her life outside of living in “American” ways. Sihyun decisively anticipated a return to Korea after college. This in turn resulted in backing her off from engaging relationships or activities which would require her long-term commitment. Yet, her friend Mieun “poked” Sihyun in a way to think about her future in the U.S. through the idea that she *could* establish her own family in the U.S. Here, it is less relevant to predict Minjoo would continue “Korean” ways of living over the long term, or that Sihyun would actually start dating in the U.S. Sihyun might not date with anybody and simply return to Korea as she had planned. Yet, I suspect she would not give up opportunities to meet someone only because she “was to return to Korea *anyway*” as she had thought before - once having experienced thoughts in perspectives in a new way. And, such changes in perspectives on the futures matter in leading life in the present.

Far from being well-planned out or informed, the open futures linger every time and every place in CYA in the name of “possibilities.” The young migrants

constantly talk about their present life in relation to their future, which may or may not be possible for the, given resources, contingencies and constraints. Meanwhile, the way the members see their lives continues to change over time. My observation speaks to the point that the “contingency of future projection” changes over time from fixed to flexible or the other way around (Mische 2009). Accordingly, their present practices also change from time to time. In doing so, they gradually accumulate a stock of knowledge with which they calibrate their projections and become more “realistic.” This is the topic that I am heading to in the next chapters.

CHAPTER 5

Future Building I: Modeling For the Roads That Are Not Yet Traveled

Jaewoong's decision to apply for college transfers both in Korea and the U.S. is closer to an idea rather than a plan, as yet. Lacking elaborate articulations or clarity with which the desired state is imagined, the CYA members' "plans," "goals," or "possibilities" take a form of what Mische (2009) conceptualizes as "a multipronged future" which is vague and impressionistic (p.700). Soon or later, however, there comes a moment that the CYA members begin to attach details to the images of their futures. They become more interested in knowing what their projected futures require from them. They become more evaluative about their present selves in relation to their future selves (e.g., their ability, motivations, resources, or constraints). Meanwhile, "breadth" of their "open" future becomes more narrowed down into specifics (*ibid.*).

"Models" for Self-assessment

One Friday night in the early fall of 2011, the CYA worship band was to begin their first song without Julie, the main singer. Yumin standing next to me whispered Julie just moved to the City in summer for graduate school. Yumin continued, "I am so in envy of her. It's really cool that she lives and studies in the City. I wish I could

be like Julie *unnie*³¹." While Julie's "cool" life caught Yumin's attention at first, it also showed her a glimpse of the process of how Julie had moved forward with her life; college graduation, moving to New York, attending a graduate school, and being "cool." After the service, "Also," she went on, "Jisoo *unnie* is going to graduate school but in Korea." By ardently filling me in about the recently graduated CYA members, she registered her anxious feelings about being a junior in college without having "dreams." Although she was always like that, according to her, the worries were growing stronger as she felt pressure to "figure out" her life more seriously. Two CYA members caught Yumin's attention wandering around in search for "dreams." In Yumin's wishful thinking, Julie and Jisoo as new graduate students appeared as her "possible future selves" (Markus and Nurius 1986), the ideal selves that she also wanted to become in her own future. Although the self-concept seems a personalized or individualized cognitive manifestation, Markus and Nurius (*ibid.*) stress the construction of possible futures selves is an eminently social process.

Many of these possible selves are the direct result of previous social comparisons in which the individual's own thoughts, feelings, characteristics, and behaviors have been contrasted to those of salient others (p.954).

"Salient others" can be the models, images, and symbols available through various media outlets or individual's immediate social experience (*ibid.*, p.954). To the young Korean migrants in my study, CYA is an important "pool" from which they draw their "salient others." While socializing daily in CYA, the younger members

³¹ *Unnie* is a word used by Korean females to address female older than them who they are close to. It literally means "older sister."

develop their future possible selves, as these are projected onto the older members' current states. I dub this developmental process as "modeling" for the CYA members' future building. This "modeling" process further enables the members to pull down to the ground their open futures which otherwise seem to be drifting in thin air. They become more precisely aware of their present state in relation to their envisioned futures.

I met Minchan ("living") in 2009, his sophomore. He led the worship band for the entire period of my fieldwork in CYA. He was one of a few members who had a clear "dream," which was to become a professional musician. Three years later in his senior year, however, he began second thoughts about his life-long dream. He was not very interested in his business major, which had happened to be assigned by the school because his SAT score was high. Instead, he devoted himself to developing his musical talents such as vocal training every morning, practicing guitar every evening, composing songs, recording his music at home, and sharing them with his friends. The CYA worship band was, thus, a stage for his musical performance and experiments besides religious practices. As he developed his talents, more frequently he got to the wall of "reality." He confided, "As I practice harder, I realize I would be never able to reach the bar for my music quality that I set for myself." One day, he confessed he might "wrap up" his dream.

I am not a genius like John Mayer. Unless being a genius like John Mayer, it is almost impossible to make a living by doing music. Of course I knew it before, but now I accept it for myself. That does not mean I quit music. You know Youngbin *hyung*, playing a guitar in the adult church band. It might not be so bad to live like Youngbin *hyung*.

He has a real job for weekdays and plays a guitar on weekends as a side job, hobby, or whatever.

Minchan's story shows his two possible future selves. The first one is "John Mayer." Minchan's admiration for his music talent represented Minchan's goals and aspirations for his music career in futures, and thus strongly motivated him to develop his music talents for many years. As Minchan grew older, his John Mayer future-self served as a reference to which he calibrated the chance to become like him on the basis of his own music talents. It further had him reconsider his dream and "get real." Facing the gap between his future and present selves, Minchan found "living like Youngbin *hyung*" more realistic. Youngbin was a research professor at a university nearby the church. Besides his real job, he was also a member of the CYA worship band and played a guitar for all services on Sunday. While spending much time with Youngbin for weekly band practices, Minchan appreciated his performance as a "professional level." In fact, Youngbin time to time worked for a music recording company. He could manage to keep his passion for music while his "real" job enabled him to have a financially secure life. Doing the "reality check," Minchan gradually replaced his "John Mayer" future self to "Youngbin *hyung*" future self.

In contrast to Minchan, Yumin said she had never had dreams. Yet, my notes over a three-year-long fieldwork period portrayed her as having more than one dream. The fact is that she changed her dreams many times. The first one in my field notes was to work at a non-governmental organization (i.e., NGO) for children in

Africa. Later, her dream moved onto being an international lawyer, a news reporter, and finally a Ph.D. in communication. The reason why Yumin put aside her first dream was similar to that of Minchan: it seemed “too idealistic” or admittedly “too difficult” to make a living by working for African children in need. Yumin also began reassessing her future selves through the lives of those CYA members who devoted themselves to missionary work in African countries. She was well aware that their income consisted almost exclusively of missions offering from the church. “It is not that I did not know about such difficulties before,” she admitted, “but that became a relevant issue to me as I am thinking of myself working in similar conditions. Also, it will be very difficult to live like that especially because I am a woman. It is almost impossible for women to take their husband and children for their work at such a remote, underdeveloped country.” She drew a parallel between her future self to work for an NGO and missionary work with which she was familiar through a second experience at church. Her self-assessment reached a conclusion that she was “not a self-less person like those missionaries who sacrificed their entire lives to look after other people.” Instead of turning her future to the entirely different direction, she found the middle way. Growing up in a Christian family, she knew many people at her churches who took a short-trip to countries like the Dominican Republic in summer for voluntary work. Yet, it came to her attention only after she began seeing this, with new eyes, as an alternative to committing her entire life to missionary work. In that timing, Julie’s example was a big influence. Julie went to missionary trips to Dominican Republic in the summer of 2011 right before starting her graduate study, in anticipation that this would be her last chance in the near

future. To Yumin, Julie's path to a graduate school in New York City was not only "cool" but also ideal in that it showed her she would be able to keep her passion to helping people in need without having to give up future aspirations in her life.

As such, of many different ways of leading life, "models" reflect assorted future states that the members perceive as the most self-relevant. The selected "models" from the older members help the younger ones in a few steps behind visualize with better details their envisioned futures. Yet, "models" differ from a "role model," which often suggests to follow behaviors or practices of a certain social role and offers inspirations to "become like" *the person(s)* (Markus and Nurius 1989). Instead, the "case" of certain persons is constitutive of "models" rather than properties of the selected individuals. Yumin's wishful thinking to "become like Jisoo" was actually directed to the idea of becoming a graduate student and living in a cool place like New York City. While "models" are a source for inspirations, they are also a medium for the members to redefine their wanted future state. The stories of Minchan and Yumin show that in this "modeling" process multiple future possible selves work simultaneously as a solid reference, to which Minchan and Yumin evaluated their envisioned futures as suitable (or not) for them. Such "reality check" serves its constructive purpose when there are alternative "models" to meet the balance between their ideal dreams and realistic lives like the cases of Minchan and Yumin.

"Models" for Multiple Scenarios of Possible Futures

Another important function of “models” in the CYA members’ future building futures is they present multiple possible scenarios of future states. In this respect, “models” work just like architecture models which visualize a designed building in physicality. Having models, people can get a tangible sense of how a projected building looks like when it gets materialized. Architect models, furthermore, enables people to better communicate about the building design with other people before it actually gets built. As such, the CYA members become “models” for each other to visualize the roads that they have not yet traveled by themselves.

When I first met Heejoo in 2011, she recently moved to the area for her first job. Her migration trajectory shows a typical case that a supposedly short-term temporary “visiting” spell gets prolonged over time and, accordingly, the young individuals’ identification as migrants get adjusted formally and informally. Her life in the U.S. was supposed to be over shortly after a ten-month-long ESL program in 2008. She had originally planned to resume her junior year in college in Korea. The life of a small town dweller in Long Island was relaxing as opposed to the life in Korea, the latter, full of people, buildings, apartments, roads, and cars. The faster life pace and competitive environment often made Heejoo “feel choked.” In the new neighborhood surrounded by many trees and parks, she had “a space to breathe.” It was admittedly hard to get used to life in a slow pace at first (“so slow that she could go crazy”). As time went by, she made herself comfortable with the slow life pace, and did not want to go back to the “battlefield” of her life in Korea. She found a way to prolong her stay by transferring to the college with which her ESL program was affiliated. Her decision was firm enough to persuade her parents to allow her to stay

only until college graduation. At the end of her senior year, however, she was “not ready to leave the county *yet*,” and so applied for jobs all across the U.S. without telling her parents. Since she studied in a U.S. college, it made more sense to her to use her education and have work experience in the U.S. Like many other *yuhaksaengs*, she made a bet to herself: if she got a job, she would stay. If not, she would return as planned. When she actually got a job offer in a Japanese owned international telecommunication company in New Jersey, her parents also agreed with her “to seize as many as opportunities possible while staying in the U.S.”

Her transition from school to work was marked with a change in her visa status; from a F1 student visa to an OPT³² and then to a H1-B working visa. While she was on her OPT, a H1-B visa application was the foremost important issue at her hand. Yet, that was all she knew about the big transition from school to the “real world.” After joining CYA following her colleague at work, she quickly but unknowingly entered the new phase. She said, “I learn so many things from the members that I have not thought about before. I thought getting a job would be all I had to do after graduation.” As a college student, graduation and getting a job were the future that she could envision in the longest reach and the most real sense. Relocating herself to a new town following her job thus meant her to have gotten to

³² Optional Practical Training: one of two specific types of employment authorization which enable F-1 students to hold employment for a limited time (12 months) after graduation for the purpose of gaining experience or additional knowledge in their fields of study (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, Retrieved March 12, 2015. <http://www.uscis.gov/eir/visa-guide/f-1-opt-optional-practical-training/f-1-optional-practical-training-opt>) .

the near end of her mental map of the envisioned future. She would need to reset her compass and adjust her future horizon but she was not prepared for that yet.

Being new to the town, CYA was an important place to her to develop friendships. In particular, the *sarangbang* gathering was most helpful for her to settle down. When her *sarangbang* members intimately shared their concerns and hopes, she felt herself a part of the community. Not long after her first day at CYA, she found what she was getting from her *sarangbang* members was not only friendship but also technical knowledge that could be also useful for her. One Friday night after the CYA official gathering, Heejoo returned to the church van to get a ride back home. In a tone full of surprises, she poured out what she learned at her *sarangbang*.

Minha *oppa*³³ said he was worried about his H1b visa renewal application. Oh my god, I didn't know a working visa should be renewed. I thought once I get one, then that is all. He seemed quite nervous about the process. He said he really needs his visa renewed because of something for a green card application. He explained in detail but I didn't quite understand what he meant.

Although Heejoo was about to initiate her own H1-B visa application in several months, it was not yet “real” to her how critical it was to secure resident status not only for her job but also for many other purposes while staying in the U.S. Through

³³ *Oppa* is a word used by Korean females to address male older than them who they are close to. It literally means “older brother.”

Minha's present state, Heejoo got a glimpse of the life path that is normative to migrants in a H1-B visa category including herself.

About two months later, she became much more knowledgeable about the "visa stuff." "Oh, now I know why Minha *oppa* said he would really need his H1-B visa to be renewed," she shared with me what she had learned. H1-B visa grants migrants' "temporary" stay for up to six years. After that, it could be extended either in increments of one or three years depending on an individual case. When Heejoo met Minha first at her *sarangbang*, his first six years were running out. He was uncertain if his "case" would be assessed as the increments of one or three years. Because his green card application process would also depend on the H-1B visa conditions, he was anxious about his H1-B visa renewal application. At the end, Joohee added, "I am surprised by myself to be interested in this kind of stuff, I mean 'grown up things'." I asked her if she saw her future in the Minha's case. Rather reluctantly, she said, "I don't know yet." As a novice entering adulthood, looking ahead in six years was perhaps too distant to think about. Yet, she knew what she would face in coming six years as she learned Minha's case was one typical way to secure resident status as H-1B workers. While she still kept her future "open," her future possibilities were more directed and informed with details in comparison to the undefined and exploratory futures in the "poking" stage.

As Heejoo was settling down to her new life, Suyoung, was preparing to depart for Korea. At the end of one Friday night service, the minister asked Suyoung to give her farewell words. She had waited for several months for her H1-B visa

application to be approved. Other members assumed she was planning to stay at least for a couple of years. Thus, the announcement that she would leave in two weeks was quite unexpected to many of the members who knew her visa had just gotten approved. At that night after the service, several members got together at a coffee shop with Suyoung. Until that moment, Heejoo did not know what she would hear from Suyoung. "As many of you know, it was my first job," Suyoung was getting off her thoughts from her chest. It seemed that Suyoung had already got herself sorted and set her mind at peace.

She recollected the moment she got the job offer from her company about one year ago. Although "it was a good company and people were nice there," she confessed that the job however never satisfied her particularly because she "had aimed high." She continued, "I could have gotten a similar offer in Korea even if I had not come all the way from Korea and studied in the U.S." Against her high aim for a first job, her time given for OPT was almost running out without solid progress in employment. There were two options; either taking the job she did not like or turning down the job and continuing the job search for the remaining time. The latter one was riskier because she might end up getting a "better" job but in the worst case she would have nothing in her hand and have to leave the U.S. by the OPT end date. "Of course," she recalled the nerve-breaking moments, "there was no job in Korea waiting for me." If returning to Korea, she would face a jobless reality. At that time, it was an unthinkable future for her - especially having spent "far more money to get a college degree" than had her friends in Korea. She had to make a major life decision. Given the physical time constraints and psychological pressure,

she made a compromise between her ideal and reality. This was how she ended up taking the job in anticipation of moving to a better job in three or four years. Once she began her work, she put forth her best effort. The first couple of months were exciting as was getting to know her work, colleagues, and the company. For the first time she had her paycheck deposited to her bank account every month. She began making a long-term investment in her life in the U.S., purchased a car, opened a savings account, and planned for a trip to Cancun. When she got used to her work, however, things were getting dull.

Everyone at work looks at a clock for the time to go home. Nobody seems to want to work harder and better. The tasks for my job are really mechanical and routinized. There is no stimulation for self-development for me. Everyone just comes, does what they are told to do, and leaves.

I told her it is perhaps the nature of an office job just like that: monotonous. Suyoung expressed that many people around her said the same thing. She knew things would be still the same even if she moved to another company here or in Korea.

“Nonetheless,” she spoke in a decisive voice, “to return to Korea is my decision.”

Ironically, her decision was precisely *because* of the conclusion that things might be the same anywhere. If an office job would be all the same in the U.S. and Korea, what is the point of living in the U.S.? What would be a better way of living a more satisfying life? She had reached her own conclusions. Other people could be tolerant about a routinized and monotonous job because they have life outside of work with families or well-established communities. She had not established strong communities in the U.S. or in New Jersey, given her three years of short migration

history as a *yuhaksaeng* and her transition from Michigan to New Jersey for a job. She found her life in the U.S. would never be rewarding unless there were something to compensate for her monotonous life at work. Therefore, going back to Korea where she had her own communities and people was, on balance, a better choice.

For a few hours, Heejoo was quietly listening to other members. I tried to read what was going on her mind but it was rather unclear. On the way back home in my car, she kept quiet. I asked her what she was thinking. Instead of answering, she asked a question, “*Could it happen to me too?*” After a short pause, she continued, “I mean, I am happy with my work so far, but I *could* get disappointed like Suyoung *unnie?*” She was thinking out loud. Then, she returned to silence again. Suyoung’s story was rather hard for Heejoo to take as her mind was still filled with excitement about her new life. Her question, however, evidenced she was taking it as at least partially relevant to her own future. She was trying making sense of Suyoung’s story. And clearly, she reflected her future state onto what Suyoung had been through until making the final decision. Suyoung’s self-confession revealed another side of *yuhaksaeng*/H1-B working visa holders’ trajectories which Heejoo was just entering. That the excitement *might* not last long was a first realization to Heejoo. At the “worst” case, her job *could* also disappoint her *like* Suyoung’s. Heejoo had as yet thought of neither of the two possibilities. Also, nobody showed her the “dark” side of the life path of *yuhaksaengs*/H1-B visa holders. That negative but certainly possible future came into Heejoo’s vision for the first time through Suyoung’s earnest voice. I speculate Heejoo’s mind was busy and blank simultaneously perhaps because of a surprise or a fear, or a mix of many unexpected

feelings. Sitting quietly for a while, she broke her silence, “At least, now I know what *could happen to me.*”

After that night, Heejoo continued actively participating in CYA for another year. One day, she brought me news that Jongha got accepted into a graduate school. Jongha was her closest friend from her old *sarangbang*. Heejoo was very happy for her to achieve what she had wanted for a long time. Jongha was working at a doctor’s office as a nursing assistant. Not long after beginning her first job in 2010, she learned there would be much better work opportunities if she had a master’s degree in nursing. While managing busy work schedules, she had prepared for a graduate school application. Her first attempt in 2011 was not successful. She tried one more time in 2012 and finally got admitted. Although Heejoo and Jongha were the same age, Jongha started her first job one year earlier than Heejoo. Thus, Jongha was a few steps “ahead” in life stage. During their *sarangbang* gathering, they shared their difficulties, goals, and dreams, and they prayed for each other. Heejoo naturally learned about Jongha’s vision for better future and hard work to realize her dreams. Heejoo often mentioned how inspiring Jongha was. Heejoo’s admiration for Jongha often alluded to her wishful thinking for her own futures: “Actually, I also always wanted to go graduate school and become a CPA.”

Ongoing chatters circulate among the members about their possible future selves: what they would like to become, could become, and are afraid of becoming (Markus and Nurius 1986, p.954). Markus and Nurius (*ibid.*) emphasize that “possible future selves are not *any* set of imagined roles or states of being. Instead,

they represent specific individually significant hopes, fears, and fantasies.” Of many CYA members, Heejoo found her futures selves from the cases of Minha, Suyoung, and Jongha. “Minha’s case” modeled one possible path that Joohee would continue working for her job for a fairly long time and pursue more secure resident status in the U.S. “Suyoung’s case” took her to the opposite direction of the “Minha’s case” which was to return home in Korea after a tryout of working and living in the U.S. Although the latter was rather unexpected one but the most “helpful” one in that “it was good to know at least” about the possible ‘worst’ case” so she could get herself prepared when/if it actually comes to her. In the middle was “Jongha’s model.” It was the most desirable and appealing one particularly because it gave her aspirations and motivations for self-development. At the same time, it gave her a psychological buffer in between the two rather extreme paths of either staying or leaving. It eased off her fear of “what if” she wanted to stay longer but her H1-B visa was not proved at first place or not renewed later, or “what if” her job did not satisfy her living in the U.S. Without forcing her to commit her future to the U.S. or Korea, taking the Jongha’s path seemed to give her time until she becomes more certain about what she wants for her life.

The CYA members’ stories give evidence that the “modeling” practices provide guidance for action, change, and development (*ibid.* p.960). As shown so far, “models” present possible challenges associated with each of the multiple future scenarios as well as aspirations and motivations. During this phase of future building, the CYA members pre-experience multiple possible futures and have opportunities to modify and refine the desired state of their future selves. Whether

these “models” are actually emulated in the CYA members’ real lives, this process is critical for the young adults’ development as they try to figure out their lives; still, there was little guidance or practical support available from school or family members living so far away.

CHAPTER 6

Future Building II:
“Consulting”- learning technology to build future

When the future imageries of the CYA members took more elaborative and directed shapes, technical aspects of actualizing the futures became their primary concern. Yumin’s wishful thinking of “I wish I could be like Julie *unnie*” moved forward to a next step asking “*How* can I become like her?” The question often was clarified and answered by knowing “*How* did *she* get there?” If Yumin’s wish was serious, she would open up all her channels to get any relevant information. She could reach out to people who might know the Julie’s case personally or a more general process of graduate school application. If possible, she could even ask Julie directly. More indirectly, bits and pieces of information from other people’s experiences and reflections would be also useful.

Through learning from each other, the CYA members collected “tools” (Swidler 1986) to build their future with as they had projected. I dub this practice as “consulting” among age peers. The technical and practical functions of age peer socialization were particularly important because the young adult migrants had significantly limited parental/inter-generational guidance. Many of the CYA members migrated – permanently or temporarily- with their parents and/or siblings. As new migrants themselves, their parents were also dealing with an

overwhelming life transitions. Most readily vivid examples include refreshing or newly learning English, getting a job, starting up new businesses, acquiring new social skills, just to name a few. It is not difficult to appreciate that newly migrated parents possess far less stock of knowledge necessary for migratory life than those who have longer migration history. While their past knowledge and experience carried from Korea do not have the same applicability in their new lives the U.S., they have not gained comparable knowledge and experience yet. This predicament revealingly speaks of the parents' limited ability to give practical advice or guidance to their children. In fact, many studies have highlighted reversed roles between parents and children in new immigrant families. More adaptable to new life environments, children of immigrants often become a primary leader of their family from early age. Instead of their parents who lack English communication proficiency or social skills, they take care of "adult" matters from renting a house for family to talking to police about accidents that their parents get involved (Buriel et al. 1998). Many of the "living" CYA members went through a similar experience at a young age when their family tried to settle down. Growing older, they were frequently placed in a situation where they had to come up with solutions by themselves rather than relying on their parents for advice.

The *yuhaksaeng* members also experienced insufficient parental guides most apparently because they migrated alone. Most of their parents did not have a migration experience themselves. They might have a sense that studying and living abroad alone is challenging. Yet, their understanding based on an indirect experience might not be sufficient to share with their children difficulties in reality

that they faced on daily basis such as having to rely on other people all the time for a ride, dealing with unfamiliar administrative work at school or government office, not arguing back to unfair treatments because of language barriers, having little confidence in public speaking as an ethnic/racial minority, and the list goes on. There were some members whose parents had migration experience. It was often because they studied at graduate school abroad or worked at an overseas office of their company. The parents, therefore, experienced migration in a more mature life stage with well-defined goals, established social positions, and financial resources. This often made the parents' migration experiences not readily applicable to their children in young adulthood who were striving to figure out their lives.

“Think Wisely and Make a Good Decision”

In the summer of 2012 Onyu got a second academic dismissal from school. When I asked him if he had talked with his parents about the situation, he said, “The same thing all the time. ‘Think wisely and make a smart decision.’ They know nothing anyway.” There was no way to know how thoroughly he explained to his parents about the situation. Also, he did not get into details about the advice his parents might have offered to him. Yet, his surprisingly disengaged tone as if he was talking about someone else's problem implied that neither him nor his parents was knowledgeable that an academic dismissal could bring potentially detrimental consequences on Onyu's resident status in the U.S. His family immigrated when he was twelve. A few years later, his parents applied for a green card but approval had

been delayed for years. Meanwhile, he continued being on non-immigrant status with an F-1 student visa. Losing a valid student status thus means losing a valid resident status at the same time. Becoming “illegal” in such a young age was not what their parents had hoped for when they moved to the U.S. to give their son better future. As a permanent immigrant (“living”), returning to Korea would not be an option for Onyu or his entire family in case he lost a legal status in the U.S. The academic dismissal, therefore, would be significantly threatening not only for Onyu’s academic development, his future but also for his family’s life.

Despite his parents’ wish, Onyu was not really thinking wisely or making any decisions at all. I asked him what he had done since getting the letter from school.

Onyu: I typed in Google, “I got an academic dismissal. What should I do?”

KYS: What did you get?

Onyu: They said to go to a community college for a couple of semesters and get good grades. That could boost up my GPA so I could return to my original school.

KYS: Is that what you will do?

Onyu: I think so.

KYS: Does the solution work for all cases?

Onyu: I guess so.

KYS: What else have you done other than that?

Onyu: Nothing. I really don’t know what else I can do. Maybe, I’ll just quit school.

He bluntly spitted out “I’ll just quit school.” He continued in an indifferent manner, “I will leave school because the school said so.” He was accepting the school’s decision before making any attempts to resolve the situation. Besides, he was managing the situation by justifying the consequences: “I am not interested in school anyway.”

When I learned of his problem, I could not stay behind and watch him doing nothing or making “unwise” or ill-informed decisions. I looked up the academic

policy of his school and offered some guidance. He did his best not only to follow my advice. When we learned the submission due for an appeal for reinstatement was already passed, he put extra efforts to find people in his department who could pity on him and help him out. Fortunately, his appeal was accepted and he got a final chance to prove his academic standing. The problem was settled.

It was only then when he confided how scared he was at that time. He told me “I thought a game was over.” In front to an “official” letter from authority notifying an academic dismissal, it was unthinkable idea for him that something could be done to make difference. Onyu really needed his parents’ help with finding solutions together. Unfortunately, his parents’ hope for him to “think wisely” was not very useful and he was going through that scary and helpless moment alone. Nonetheless, he never blamed for his parents precisely because he knew it was not their parents were unwilling to help him out but they were simply unable to do so. He said, “Talking about every single detail about a situation like that would only make them worried more because they kind of know what I am talking about but they actually don’t. And there are nothing they can do. Then, what’s the point of talking to them. I don’t want them to worry about me.” That was why he only nodded his head when his parents asked him “think wisely and made a good decision.” After that, he turned on his computer and asked google for advice. What other people poured out on google pages might not be applicable for his case or the best thing to do for his future. Yet, that was the only source on which he was relying in resolving the situation. A long conversation with him reminded me of him a few

months ago. He repeated himself on and on that he might as well quit school, he was hiding a feeling of helpless and hopeless behind his indifferent and blunt manner.

Onyu is just one of many CYA members who have a difficulty in making important decisions without sufficient guidance from their parents or older adults. In the summer of 2012, Boyoung and her father were discussing to which school she should transfer after finishing community college. There was a big difference in the advice that she needed and her father actually offered. Boyoung was getting into a frequent argument with her father at the end of a phone line in Korea. She got frustrated because her father insisted that she should transfer to a college nearby where her grandmother's sister lived in California. When I asked her about what she did not like about his father's suggestion, she said "He doesn't really know the stuff I have to deal with here." Boyoung had informed herself of the transfer policy of the school that her father was suggesting. Her state at the current school did not neatly match to the eligibility. First of all, the school required TOEFL³⁴ score which she did not have. She said it would be not impossible to get a score. "But," she explained, "my class schedule for the next semester is full with required courses for my major. I think studying hard and getting a high GPA are more worth spending my time and money than doing TOEFL test preparation." There were other issues such as a gap between her GPA and a required one by the school, classes she had taken and the school asked for pre-requite for an application, etc. Given the present gap, she knew there would be few chance to get transfer admission from the school.

³⁴ Test of English as Foreign Language.

In addition, one of her biggest concerns was she would have to live with her grandmother's sister. She knew her friends had conflicts with their relatives with whom they were living. In fact, many of the CYA members live with their relatives. Their parents tend to believe it is safer than living alone or with roommates. Having their children under "adult" supervision of family members put their mind at ease. Moreover, relatives often do not charge full rent or living costs. Instead, the parents could send "some" money to express their gratitude for them. This took off a big financial burden from their shoulders. For the CYA members' point of view, however, living with relatives is not always safer or cheaper. Most of all, they rarely knew their relatives until starting living with them. The "supervision" under the relatives who they barely know often brought more stress than peace especially when they constantly have to deal with conflicts caused even by a very small difference in lifestyle. They usually cannot say anything to them because they are older family members like their parents. Because they are the one who entered the new family, it should be them who have to follow their rules. These CYA members usually do not share such difficulties with their parents in Korea either. Talking about their difficulties would make their parents worried, and possibly could cause conflicts between their parents and the relatives. The CYA members usually kept things themselves and vent it over to their friends. All these issues are a part of what Boyoung believed her father had no idea about. To Boyoung, her father's suggestion without understanding her reality seemed "something that did not make sense at all."

Later, I learned from Boyoung that without telling her father she had made a decision a long time ago to transfer to a university nearby her current community college. In the past semesters, she checked on the transfer policy of the school and made her academic state eligible for their criteria. Thus, her application was to be done seamlessly without having to do extra work like taking an English test, more courses, etc. She gave me an explanation for her decision, “that is a good school. It might not be as good as the one my father suggests. Many of my friends go that school. I have heard many good things about the school, especially about the major that I want to study.” Besides practical issues such as transfer policy and moving in with distant relatives, the CYA community was holding a strong place in that decision deep. She went through a lonely time when she first arrived by herself in 2010. It took her more than a year to see her community gradually developing. As a sense of belonging to her communities was growing, she winced at the idea of being “dropped off at a new place *again*” where there was no one she knew. When she confessed herself to her father, she felt him treating her as a young girl who was unable to make wise decisions. Boyoung’s father had a good reason for insisting his suggestion: “Although you think people around you now are important, people come and go. Your education will stay with you for life.” In looking far ahead in the future, he was offering legitimate advice. His far-sighted advice, however, was now drawn on intimate knowledge about the U.S. academic policy or day-to-day challenges with which Boyoung had to live daily. From her father’s point of view, Boyoung’s decision was naïve. Yet, from Boyoung’s perspective, his un-experienced (un-lived) advice was not very convincing.

Whenever I heard the CYA members sharing their concerns and worries, I usually asked them what their parents had told them. Their answers were starkly similar to what Onyu and Boyoung said about their parents: “I trust you will think wisely and make a smart decision” or “Do your best.” Treating their children as an adult, the parents’ “trust” could show a respect for the decision their children make and emotionally support them. However, that also could add more pressure to their children as they want to meet their parents’ expectation for them to make a “wise” decision as an adult. When they actually made a “wise decision” from their perspectives, it could be not wise enough for their parents because they were still young. In such contradictions, the CYA members feel lost without practical guidance and tips they needed to make a “wise decision.”

“Consulting”: What should I do?

To compensate for the gap in advice between what they need and receive from their parents, relationships with other older adults are integral to the CYA members’ development. This is particularly true when they begin interested in practicality for achieving their desired future states. For those who are in this phase, the CYA community turns as a place for consultation. At dinner tables, hallways, or *sarangbang* gatherings, they learn concerns, problems and plans of their friends. When two or more members get together and talk, thus, consultation knowingly and unknowingly begins.

At a dinner table, Sunghwan, Saehoon, and Jaeyoung were sitting together before the Friday service.

Sunghwan: I am so worried...what if I cannot find a job until I graduate?

Saehoon: I found there are tons of jobs out there unless you are so picky about them.

Sunghwan: I wish I could get a job like Jaeyoung *hyung's*. Do all kinds of jobs in his field always pay well?

Saehoon: I guess so.

Jaeyoung: It depends but entry salary is usually high in my field.

Sunghwan: Then, should I change my major?

Saehoon: If you are serious about that, you may as well hurry.

Sunghwan: What do you mean?

Saehoon: You might have to take many required classes if you change your major. I couldn't change my major because it was already too late for me to take all the required classes.

Sunghwan: Really? I will check that out when I go home today.

The conversation between three members exemplifies how mundane activities like having dinner together become a time for life-coaching; getting a decent job after college graduation was a subject in this particular case. Sunghwan ("living") shared his worries about getting a job. As finishing up a junior year, his anxiety seemed strong but nonetheless vague. It contained only a feeling about a jobless and thus undesirable future state rather than substantive difficulties in career preparation or job search that he was actually facing at that moment. Saehoon ("studying"), a recent college graduate, discounted Sunghwan's anxiety of "cannot find a job" by making a point that it would be nearly impossible to find no job. Through his recent experience as a job candidate, he made such a claim that there were "tons of jobs out there." Brushing aside Sunghwan's rather premature worries, Saehoon in a way was putting his mind at ease.

On the other hand, Jaeyong in the conversation represents a desirable case out of those “tons of jobs out there.” Sunghwan had a good reason to worry about getting a job as he recently learned more about career limitations in his academic major in Electrical Engineering. In that moment, Jaeyoung caught Sunghwan’s attention and prodded him to consider changing his major to the one Jaeyoung studied (Bioengineering). However, not only would it be a big decision, he would have to decide fast. Changing a major would mean taking many more classes to complete graduation qualification and thus an inevitable delay to graduation. This was precisely the dilemma that made Saehoon call off from the decision in the past year. Sitting between the two, Sunghwan learned through Jaeyoung’s case about a more ideal job field and through Saehoon about what he would have to do to achieve it. Perhaps, Sunghwan expressed his worries without seriously meaning it. Yet, it set up a place for a consultation and Sunghwan unexpectedly got suggestive “solutions” from it; not to be picky about job or to change his major to more marketable one.

Besides the Friday meeting at the church, consultation takes place in various venues such as a casual gathering for a meal or coffee, talking on the phone, or “meeting” on mobile. A usual conversation topic is their common interests or experience such as choosing classes for getting good grades, studying efficiently for certain exams, taking particular courses at right timing, keeping graduation requirements most updated, etc. The members who recently made a transition from school to job often coach the younger members about college major for getting a decent job, know-how for a job interview, citizenship requirement for job application eligibility, benefits and salaries of certain job areas, and many more

topics. More indirectly, the younger members also learn when older members talk about their challenging experience at work such as stress, emotional crisis, interpersonal relationships with colleagues, or physical exhaustion.

The shared information and insights by the older members often differs in nature from what the young members get from their parents, family members, or friends who do not have migration experience at all or who have experience but in a more mature and developed life stage. The older members' guidance is insightful and yet practical as it is relevant to the younger ones' futures not so distant from where they are now. Moreover, it was drawn from the older members' stock of knowledge that they have accumulated through their own experience in making a transition to adulthood. Thus, such intimate and lived knowledge is often the most useful when they maneuver through the transition from adolescent to adulthood, from school to a first job.

“Consulting”: Who should I Talk to?

As shown in conversation between Sunghwan, Saehoon, and Jaeyoung a “consultation” takes place unknowingly. Yet, it also happens through conscious efforts to seek for advice and guidance. In 2012, during her senior year in college, Yumin firmly decided to pursue graduate studies instead of looking for a job. She had contacted Jisoo in Korea and Julie in New York to know where to start. Although Yumin was open to either Korea or the U.S. for graduate school, Korea was more appealing to her. She identified herself to be able to “blend in Americans and

Koreans,” and equally enjoyed living in Korea and the U.S. Her migration trajectories- early childhood in the U.S., adolescence in Korea, college in the U.S.- shaped her identity culturally versatile. Yet, she was inclined to live close to her family in Korea. This was also why Jisoo, who completed all her education in the U.S. from elementary school to college, returned to Korea for graduate school in 2011. She knew Jisoo’s migration trajectory resembled her own, Yumin chose Jisoo for her primary consultant at first. She talked almost every day with Jisoo living across the country on *Kakao Talk*. The topic that Jisoo brought up first was a rather unexpected one for Yumin: how difficult it was to study in Korean language.

Yumin: Jisoo *unnie* said I would really have to get myself prepared for studying in Korean. Jisoo *unnie* said she anticipated it so she could prepare in advance while she was still in the US.

KYS: Did she tell you how she had prepared for it?

Yumin: Looked up information about what textbooks or other materials Korean graduate schools generally use for her major. Then, her sisters in Korea got those books and sent them to her. Jisoo *unnie* studied them by herself. She said it was really time consuming because there were many Korean words that she didn’t know exactly. She studied only in English up to that point. So she had to look up dictionaries all the time to make sure if she got those difficult words right.

KYS: What came across your mind when you heard that?

Yumin: It was *eye-opening* to me. *Who would think studying in Korean, which is my first language, can be more difficult than in English?*

Jisoo showed Yumin step-by-step how to prepare herself for the future in Korea, beginning with her challenging experience with studying in Korean, the never-ending routine of looking for word meanings in dictionaries. Initially, Yumin thought she “could do it like her.” Yumin went on, “but I gave in” after heard from Jisoo that it may be much more difficult for Yumin who wanted to study sociology or journalism. Whereas Jisoo’s major, biology, many graduate schools in Korea use

English textbooks in part of their curriculum, graduate studies in sociology or journalism would be much more dependent on Korean language texts. Furthermore, unlike biology, a more technical subject, Yumin's studies would have required much more cultural, social, and historical backgrounds of Korean society, and thus greater fluency in the Korean language. Yumin knew Jisoo was sharing rare knowledge that could be only gained through lived experiences, not everyone could give that sort of advice. Jisoo's advice was thus very convincing to Yumin.

At first, Yumin felt Jisoo's advice making her more confused. Soon, however, she learned that kind of confusion was a necessary step to make a major life decision more thoughtfully. If she had chosen the Jisoos's path, she would have to train herself in advance to communicate academically in the Korean language. In addition, she also would have to make a "returning plan" to Korea with a big list of "to dos" such as packing her belongings, terminating her apartment lease, selling her car, saying goodbye to her friends, etc. A series of conversations with Jisoo convinced Yumin that there would be no good reasons to cope with those anticipated difficulties of studying in Korea just because she wanted to live close to her family. As Yumin pointed out, she would never have been able to imagine the potential difficulties of studying in Korean if it had not been for Jisoo's advice. Yumin finally changed her mind to apply for graduate school in the U.S. and began contacting Julie in New York.

When Yumin first talked with Julie in February of 2012 about graduate school application in the U.S. the process seemed much more straightforward. Yet, she soon learned it would not be less difficult because her migration status on a

student visa would fetter Yumin's use of time in the U.S. She would have to act fast, given that she was already a senior. By the time when she made up her mind in March of 2012, it was rather clear that she would not be ready by application deadlines for the next academic year which vary by school but mostly begins around in late fall of the year. She would have to study for a GRE test, choose schools, write essays, get recommendation letters from her professors, etc. It would take at least several months only to make all application materials ready for submission. She had never thought of such processes in advance. While she newly learned about those details of a graduate application process, her graduation came just in two months. Since a student visa expires upon graduation, she would only have a sixty-day grace period for packing her belongings and leaving the country. In March, her timeline was tight. She should make a decision very soon for whether to return to Korea or apply for OPT to prolong her stay in the U.S.

One day in March I met Yumin. She made a decision to stay in the U.S. and prepare for a 2014 application. I asked if she had discussed with her parents.

My parents usually don't say anything about what I do other than 'it is up to you.' That is the way they raised me. When I was debating between Korea and the U.S., they said the same thing, 'Choose what you like.' I told them there was not enough time to prepare for a 2013 application. They said 'it is okay. Just come back and prepare in Korea.' But, I don't want to. I am a grown up adult and want to be responsible for my life. I will figure things out by myself. No, I don't want to return without accomplishing anything yet.

Her parents thought a graduate degree in a U.S. college would be more advantageous for her future but, they did not put pressure on her. Yet, she balked at their suggestion to come back home. Returning to her parents' wings was not

acceptable for her as a “grown up,” as she claimed and the parents respected her decision. While her parents were there for Yumin to support their daughter by all means, they had little guidance to offer regarding how to actualize her decision. Alternately, Yumin turned to Julie. However, she learned Julie could not offer good guidance either because her different migration status as a permanent resident in the U.S. Her non-resident migration status imposed regulations on her which not only limited her time to stay in the U.S. but also specified how to use her time. Of course, all these regulations are processed through administrative agencies which also operate with a specific time schedule. Thus, everything needs to be aligned well in advance so she would be able to complete paperwork on time.

Yumin sorted through other references in her mind and Jinhee suddenly came up to her mind. Jinhee used be in the same *sarangbang* with Yumin about one year ago. She got a job in the fall of 2011 at a New York branch of a big Korean bank. Jinhee was also a *yuhaksaeng* and did not have a job when she graduated college in May of 2011. Jinhee had to go through a whole process of extending her stay in the U.S. in order to earn time until she could get a job and secure a new resident status through her employment (i.e., an H1-B working visa). The process began with filing an OPT application. Yumin said, “I did not even know such a thing [OPT] exists. The only thing I remembered was Jinhee did not have a job when she graduated like me, but she could still stay. I just called her and asked how she did it.” Jinhee told Yumin to go to the international student office at her school to file her OPT application. Yumin followed Jinhee’s advice. Once a filing process got started, she became frustrated because of the meticulous details that she needed to know to complete

her application but most of them were something hard to know for sure in advance: “it is so confusing to calculate the start and end date of OPT. how many days before or after graduation? How to define ‘officially started looking for a job or getting a job?’” Another unexpected hurdle about OPT was she actually had to find a job related to her academic major field in order to earn time to prepare for a graduate school application. Besides frustration, she was also nervous to fill in the forms because even a small mistake could ruin her chance to obtain time for executing her plans. Questions and confusions emerged time to time as she moved along with the process. Yumin could not always rely on Jinhee because she was usually at work when Yumin urgently needed her for help. In CYA, Yumin often expressed how anxious and frustrated she was because of the OPT filing processes in addition to a job search.

One Friday night meeting, the minister introduced a new member, Juhyuk, who recently moved to a nearby area following his first job. Juhyuk was assigned to Yumin’s *sarangbang*. As usual, the members took a turn and shared how their week was. When it got to Yumin’s turn, she vented her frustration, “Nobody exactly knows what to do and how to do the OPT stuff!” Juhyuk sympathetically chimed in he understood her because he also had been through the process. After the *sarangbang* gathering, Yumin initiated a conversation with Juhyuk in hallways. She learned his OPT period was ending soon and he was about to apply for an H1-B working visa. Since that night, Yumin actively reached out to Juhyuk for advice. She sat with him during dinner at the church. She gave him a ride home when the Friday meeting ended. Conversations at the church and the car were almost like “Q&A” sessions.

Juhyuk answered Yumin's questions and also shared his own experiences of an OPT period and a job search. Until Yumin's OPT application finally got approved, Juhyuk walked through the process with Yumin. He checked her application documents thoroughly beforehand and gave her tips on how to avoid troublesome situations, calculate dates and days for OPT forms, report changes of her status to the office properly to name a few.

Yumin's story also shows the CYA members rely on each other to develop a new "tool kit" (Swidler 1986). More importantly, yet, her story highlight they also learn from each other how and when to use it as becoming more aware of processual aspects of future building process. There were multiple points on the Yumin's path to graduate school in U.S. In order to reach her envisioned future, she needed to know how to move from one point to another. Passing each point required distinct knowledge and skills. Sorting out her contact list, Yumin arranged Jisoo, Julie, Jinhee and Juhyuk at each point of time to connect the points on her path.

Discussion

As shown so far, age peer socialization is an irreplaceable source for the CYA members to gain knowledge, information, skill, and second-hand experience necessary for engineering their future. Besides, the inter-personal relationships that they have established in the community become seeds for their social capital.

Evidently, the CYA members' navigating their futures is a cyclical process of "poking," "modeling," and "consulting." As they constantly tried to figure out where

their lives were heading, they also continue reshaping boundaries of their lives in Korea, the U.S. or other places. Some might continue expand their life boundaries, whereas others begin “settling down” to a more specifically defined ground. To know what made them to take divergent paths to the futures require a longitudinal study in an extensive time period than the time that spent conducting my fieldwork. This is a subject for my future study. I am planning to continue working with some of the CYA members who were my key informants for the current study.

CHAPTER 7

Gendered Futures of Migration: Mandatory Military Duty of Young Korean Males³⁵

The CYA members who migrated to the U.S. with the same motivation -life opportunities for “better” futures- initially saw their futures in similar ways. As they grew older, they eventually took divergent life paths. Planning futures and making a transition to adulthood, which are ostensibly individualized process, are in fact shaped by external forces such as economic, social, cultural, and institutional conditions. In this chapter, I take the lives of young Korean male migrants who were obliged to the Korean mandatory military duty as a case to show how future planning and life trajectories were affected by gender, migration status, and citizenship policies.

When I came to the US ten years ago, I had plans for my life. Now, I am 25. I've come this far all by myself. I planned to return to Korea for my military duty in two years. Wrap up everything and return now? Well, it is not easy. (Sangmin, age 25)

Sangmin arrived in the USA alone as a study abroad student when he was fourteen. Since then, he has been establishing a ‘successful’ life in the USA. He entered a university with a full scholarship and graduated summa cum laude. A letter of

³⁵ This chapter previously appeared as an article in *Global Networks: Journal of Transnational Affairs*. The original citation is as follows: Kirsten Younghee Song. 2015. “Between Global Dreams and National Duties: the Dilemma of Conscription Duty in the Transnational Lives of Young Korean Males.” *Global Networks* 15:60-77.

recommendation from the dean of the business school at his university landed him a job at a well-known US financial company. Two years later, in 2011, his company wanted to promote him to a senior position. At that point, however, the Korean embassy noted that, because of his unfulfilled military duty, he might not be entitled to renew his passport. If this were the case, he would have to return to Korea before his passport expired in three months. Otherwise, the Korean state would consider his overseas stay unauthorized. According to him, this was ‘not the right timing’ for his call to duty.

Transnational migration scholarship has highlighted the mobility and flexibility of individuals’ lives across countries (Basch et al. 1994; Fox 2005; Levitt 2001). Contemporary migrants seek life opportunities in countries other than their own in an attempt to enhance their livelihoods while maintaining their economic, social and emotional connections to their regions of origin (Faist 2000; Itzigsohn et al. 1999). Transnational migration does not necessarily free migrants from the institutional ties of a sending state. Instead, living in multiple states places migrants in complex institutional webs. Here, Sangmin’s migratory life in the USA collides with his citizen’s duty in Korea.

Since the territorial division between North Korea and South Korea in 1948, the South Korean state has maintained male-only compulsory conscription. Conscription in Korea differs from that of other countries in which all male citizens are subject to military service but yet in practice there is a lottery or some other selection mechanism to determine exactly who is drafted (CIA 2014). Unlike Turkey, for example, Korea does not permit alternative ways of fulfilling the obligation, such

as paying fees. Furthermore, the Korean state explicitly excludes migration or dual citizenship as possible reasons for avoiding conscription. The Korean Nationality Act stipulates that a male dual citizen ‘must choose one nationality by the end of March of the year he turns 18. If he fails to do so in time, he may choose his nationality *only after* he finishes his military service or after he is exempted from military service [by turning 39]’ (Article 12 and 15). Likewise, male citizens classified by the Korean state as ‘overseas resident/emigrant’ are (according to the Conscription Act, Chapter 9, Article 149) equally obliged to serve. In other words, the government insists that every able-bodied male citizen must personally engage in military service, which on average lasts 21 months. At the surface level, conscription imposes physical constraints on male migrants such as controlling their exit/return across borders and making them serve at a certain age, yet the duty affects the migratory lives of young Korean males more deeply in a temporal sense. Because the age of conscription overlaps with the peak periods for higher education, or early career development, young Korean males need to find a way of managing the time conflict between these major life events in their early young adulthood. When they consider migration, or actually embark on a transnational life, the conscription obligation follows them and contours the temporal trajectories of their migration. This appears evident in the way they perceive and structure their future time and, accordingly, organize their actions in the present (Mische 2009).

In this chapter, I focus on impacts of gender specific citizen’s duty and state policies on individuals’ lives and how they intervene in shaping understandings of the future among young Korean male migrants. Understanding the future has an

important behavioral impact on the present (Emirbayer and Mische 1998; Lambert 2006), such as selecting a destination, integrating into the host society, or maintaining ties with the home country. From a life course perspective, understanding the future is highly, though not exclusively, associated with anticipating events specific to a certain life stage, such as marriage or a first child in young adulthood. Thus, one's location along a life course provides a critical context for imagining futures and structuring time in advance. The significance of a future is particularly acute for individuals in early adulthood, which is when they are more concerned about possibilities, explorations, or instability than at any at any other stage of their lives (Arnett 2000; Gaudet 2007).

While the quest to become 'global' pulls young Koreans abroad, military service pushes young male citizens back into the country. These two external forces transect the migratory lives of my informants and determine how they imagine their future, plan their life and structure their present. Of course, neither conscription nor male emigration is a new social phenomenon. However, as young Koreans leave the country for educational purposes at an unprecedented rate and a large number of them are young males obliged to fulfill their military obligation, the extent to which conscription affects male citizens' lives and its social implications are greater than ever before. Yet, scholars have rarely examined the effect of conscription on Korean male migrants, or the effect of citizens' duty on transnational life more generally. In the rest of this article, I shall show how conscription affects the migratory experiences of young Korean males in three ways – it standardizes migratory trajectories; it makes young Korean males vulnerable to unexpected changes and

places them in precarious positions; and it creates a clash between the young Korean male's global dreams and national duties.

Structuring the 'normal' male life course

In discussions of power and the state, political theorists stress that time is an inherent aspect of a state's functioning. State power operates within temporal dimensions (Braun 2007; Casarino 2003; Gross 1985; Hutchings 2008) to perform a range of functions from producing knowledge on human life such as fertility, morbidity or mortality (Foucault 2003) to nation building based on shared temporality of the past or future (Anderson 1983; Massey 1995). Scholars adopting a life-course perspective have also highlighted that the state manages individual lives through institutionalizing time by determining qualifications for everything from marriage to driving, voting, working, or social services, to name just a few (Settersten and Mayer 1997).

Conscription gives the Korean state the power to control the bodies and structure the temporal frameworks of the life courses of its male citizens. Once conscription takes effect at the age of 16, a male Korean has to subject his life to the bureaucratic procedures associated with him carrying out his duty. As early as the age of 17, young males undergo a physical examination to assess their suitability for military service.³⁶ Then, on the basis of the results of the medical check-up,

³⁶ I derived the information on the conscription processes from 'A guideline for the military service', published by the South Korean Military Manpower Administration (at www.mma.go.kr/kor/s_navigation/index.html).

educational attainment and family background, *all* male citizens are classified into 'grades': those in grades 1–4 are deemed 'qualified' and those in grades 5–7 are 'disqualified'. The state sends a notice to those in grades 1–4 to report for service. If a male cannot or does not want to begin immediately after the notice, he must notify the state of his wish to postpone his service with 'convincing' reasons. Higher education has been one of the most common 'convincing' reasons for that purpose. The conscription law determines 'reasonable' time ranges for completing higher education and designates age limits for postponing the onset of military service.³⁷

Since the state controls a young male's body, 'conscription candidates' who are 23 and older must get 'overseas travel permits' from the state when they cross borders.³⁸ The application requires detailed information, including the purpose, destination and departure/arrival dates of travel, along with a permanent address, citizen registration number and family contact information. Finally, applicants must sign a pledge that states that 'I will surely return home from abroad within the travel authorization period.' If they cannot return by the date, they must notify the Korean embassy in the country in which they are staying and get an extension with 'good reasons'. Approval of overseas travel grants them a passport for a single exit and return, which is valid for one or two years.³⁹ In other words, for young male citizens, emigration is officially designated *temporary*, regardless of their actual intention.

³⁷ Conscription Act, Chapter 8, Article 124.

³⁸ Conscription Act, Chapter 9, Article 145–7.

³⁹ Passports are granted to females for much longer periods (for example, ten years) and do not limit the number of exits and returns.

The 'suggested timetable' for military service imposes a normative male life course on 'qualified' male citizens with a 'suggested' tempo, duration and sequence of life events. For instance, it 'suggests' that each male citizen has his body graded at the age of 17 and enters college at the age of 18. If he is on a four-year course, he should begin his service at the age of 22 at the latest, or 20 if he is on a two-year one. If the candidate has not started his military service by the requisite age, the state classifies him as a draft dodger and monitors him until either he does his duty or his obligation officially expires at the age of 39. The 'suggested timetable' works as a primary and often sole temporal reference with which young males structure their futures. Consequently, young males in their twenties follow set pathways with a linear structure of high school graduation, entering college, discontinuing college, undertaking military service, and then resuming college study. Although conscription in effect only starts at the age of 16, it shapes male perceptions of their time from a much younger age. Like many other informants, Joonbin (aged 20) said, 'as Korean men, we all know *from the moment of birth* that we have to serve the duty.' Another informant, Heejoon (aged 21), complemented Joonbin's comment by saying that 'it is not that we always think about it, but it is always here [tapping his head].' As they grow older, almost naturally, young males learn to organize their lives in accordance with the conscription timetable. Inevitably, therefore, the conscription timetable also shapes their migratory planning.

Migration plans A, B and C

Individuals reflexively engage in life planning and plot a course of action in the event of future uncertainty or risks (Giddens 1991). Managing the future is also a critical part of the life of any young male migrant attempting to minimize the disruptive effects of conscription on his education, career or migratory ambitions. These young men begin their migration with a clear timeframe, which takes into consideration their future military service. This results in highly standardized migratory trajectories for young Korean males, namely Plans A, B or C. For Plans A and B, the timing of the military service is the determinant for organizing their future lives, whereas Plan C involves a life path of avoiding the service altogether.

Sangmin (aged 25) recalled the days when he was planning his migration to the USA ten years earlier, 'I had to think about the right timing for doing my military service – after my freshman year, on graduation from college, or even after finishing graduate school? If I begin the service then, I would be too old. Am I allowed to postpone the service that long? It complicated everything.' Two life events clearly preoccupied the projected future of Sangmin's early twenties – his college education in the USA and his military service in Korea. Tangible temporal markers, such as 'after my freshman year', 'after graduation from college', and 'after finishing graduate school' show that 14-year-old Sangmin was already dealing with male social time. One can take his concern about being 'too old' to begin the service after graduate school as a demonstration of his attentiveness to the 'normal' timing for the service among Korean males. He was also aware of the institutional clock that controls time for postponing the service. The way in which Sangmin projected his

future when preparing for migration appeared remarkably similar across my informants.

Heejoon, a college freshman, answered a question about his future plans as follows:

I came with two plans. Plan A was always my priority, and Plan B was for backup. Complete my freshman year, return to Korea for the service. Then, come back to the US, finish college, and go to grad school. People around me, *my father, uncles and cousins*, said '*after* freshman year' would be the best timing. Because there are not many classes taken for my major during freshmen year, it wouldn't be very difficult to catch up with school work when I return to the US as a sophomore after serving the duty.

Heejoon also anticipated military service in his description of his future. He laid out Plan A in a sequence that consisted of entering college, finishing his freshman year, leaving for Korea to undertake his military service, and returning to the USA to resume his education. His Plan B differed only in the timing of returning to Korea for his military service 'after finishing college' but 'before beginning a first job'. The way Heejoon explained his reason for choosing Plan A over Plan B emphasized how Korean males plan their lives in a way that minimizes the disruptive effects of military service on their educational development or career trajectory. It also shows that the male clock ticks across generations from Heejoon's father and uncles to Heejoon and his older cousins. Furthermore, this Korean male clock extends across borders because his A and B plans seemed 'normal' models among my informants.

Plans A and B offer a return to Korea for military service, although timing varies; Plan C implies a future without returning to Korea, thus avoiding the obligation altogether. Since not serving military duty is highly stigmatized and often criminalized in Korean society, my informants did not openly discuss it. However, I

found that they implicitly and commonly considered Plan C. Minsoo's family left Korea 'permanently' when he was 12. A few days before leaving for the USA, his father told him that he 'might have difficulty coming back to Korea because of the military service'. I asked Minsoo if he had asked his father why. He said that 'everyone knows that everyone must serve the duty if they want to live in Korea. We were leaving for the US to live there. Thus, I knew I would not serve the duty and thus I could not come back to Korea.'

The Korean state can control the entry and exit of young male emigrants who have not completed their military service. The state can investigate 'suspicious' cases and even arrest male emigrants at an airport and force them to do their military service immediately. In fact, many lawyers advising Koreans in the USA recommend that 'just in case', young males should not to travel to Korea unless their status in the USA is very secure. Minsoo was unsure whether his parents still maintained the required paperwork that legally authorized him to 'delay' his service. Unless this paperwork was in impeccable order, the Korean authorities could list him as a draft dodger, which would make it very difficult, if not impossible, for him to visit Korea without taking the risk of not returning to the USA until completing his service. In fact, his concern was so great that Minsoo decided to stay behind when his parents and sister visited Korea several times without him.

Having a timeframe, or known future, enables individuals to plan, progress, or invest in themselves, so thus gives them some reassurance in the light of an uncertain future. In fact, a highly structured temporal framework for the future provides a firm grounding for a sense of control over time (Daly 2002) and

‘ontological security’ (Giddens 1991: 35–69). Yet, in the context of the conscription, my informants’ futures seem overly colonized. As the institutional timetable of conscription is hardly receptive to individual circumstances, young Korean male migrants have few options when it comes to choosing the timing, pacing, or sequence of their life events other than what is ‘suggested’ to them. This further limits their ability to respond to new opportunities emerging beyond their anticipated future projections. My informants described their primary goals for migration as having a better education, diverse life experiences and broader perspectives. Ironically, however, they would not actively seek opportunities for new experiences such as exchange study programs, internships, or travel outside New Jersey or the USA, apparently because such activities were not part of their Plans A or B. They would also be very reluctant to change majors or schools because it would then take them longer to finish their freshman or sophomore year. Sequentially, it would also delay their return to Korea for military service. Most males in Korea serve their duty in their first or second year of college. Thus, if my informants took longer to finish their first or second year in the USA, they would likely become subordinates of those who were younger than they were. They, like many other Korean males, saw that as an unpleasant prospect and one to avoid. Within the structured plan for the future, with its tight tempo and sequence of life events, the priority is, therefore, to ‘get things done *on time*’ so they could minimize potential life course collisions at sequential stages.

Researchers have both supported and contested the persistence of a standardized life cycle (Elchardus and Smits 2006; Neale and Flowerdew 2003).

Stressing the erosion of traditional norms in late modern society, theories of individualization have suggested that life trajectories become increasingly messy and non-linear. This in turn creates a possibility for more individual choice in dealing with increasing uncertainty (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995). However, the young Korean male migrants' experience highlights that social and institutional standards shaping individual life courses not only remain strong (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995; Lewis 2006; Webb and Daniluk 1999) but also extend beyond the state border and construct normative migratory trajectories for young male citizens.

Unexpected events and uncertain futures

Future planning may be unproblematic when life unfolds as anticipated, as in the cases of Heejoon and Yongho. Two months after his interview in 2011, Heejoon returned to Korea in accordance with his Plan A and mentioned how very 'lucky' he was that his plan had worked out well. Yongho (aged 24) was also 'lucky'. Soon after college graduation in 2011, he finally received US citizenship. At that time, he was looking for a job but had found his opportunities quite limited. Many jobs to which he wished to apply were restricted to US citizens only. In addition, because of his yet uncompleted military service, he could not apply for jobs in Korean companies based in the USA. His US citizenship, however, removed these restrictions. Because the Korean state revokes the Korean nationality of those who acquire foreign citizenship by naturalization, his military service as a Korean citizen no longer pertained (MMA 2009). As a US citizen, he could now apply for jobs in American and

Korean companies. Gaining US citizenship at that moment was his 'life saver' – 'perfect timing'!

By contrast, unexpected events or 'fateful moments' (Giddens 1991: 243) can always intervene to disrupt a young Korean man's life course (Charmaz 1997). The disruptive impact of such an occurrence is greater when futures are planned according to specific time horizons and unexpected events are not envisioned (Zinn 2004). Unanticipated changes are catastrophic or threatening to the man's biographical certainty and sense of control over the timing of his future. I found my informants vulnerable to such experiences, particularly since their futures could abruptly diverge from their own plan depending on the state's decision about when or whether they needed to undertake their military service. Yet, they were little prepared for it.

While visiting Korea for his physical check-up in 2010, Chanhoo received a grade 6 (exemption) because of a newly developed kidney problem. Chanhoo had never imagined that this would happen to him and he found the results of his check-up 'shocking'. Not only did his 'grade 6' ranking 'disqualify' him from doing his military service but it also challenged his perception of himself as a healthy, athletic and therefore 'grade 1' male. The unexpected event forced him to revise not only his male identity but also his imagined future (Hubbard et al. 2010). He confided that he was happy at first because he would not have to leave his girlfriend in the USA, but that happiness did not last long because of the *reality* that he soon began to face. 'Everything changed', he said:

There are so many things to think about all of a sudden. I will be graduating in two years. I anticipated it to be in five years. Two years versus five years, that is a big difference. Men tend to think we should take advantage of having downtime before serving the hard military duty. We would have to start life over after the duty anyway. While serving the duty, it is time when men begin thinking about life seriously. That is why my GPA is not so good. I did not really care. Now, I do not have *that* time. I have to move fast.

Chanho saw his future in terms of a life pattern for *males* rather than as his own individual choice. The above excerpt from his interview shows how young Korean males negotiate the meaning of their military service, which they often regard as a 'sacrifice' or 'waste' of time in their youth: they phase their male life course into periods before, during and after the service and assign meanings to each. They view the period before their service as 'downtime' in which to prepare for the coming 'hard' time in it. They also explicitly define it as temporary because they believe that they will 'start life again after it is over'. They clearly interpret the time of their military service as a generative period in which to plan for 'real' life. Chanho, like many other males, had been preparing for his life in anticipation of *serving* the duty. The exemption, therefore, abruptly disrupted his long-held temporal schema, which brought him further anxiety (Marris 1974; Salecl 2004) and made him feel that time was running out. He would have to begin looking for a job soon and would have to decide whether he wanted to return to Korea. The important life decisions that he had put on hold for the period of his military service 'suddenly came so close' to him and he was 'not ready' for that. He said that his poor GPA and virtually empty curriculum vitae had put him in a 'panic.'

Sangmin also experienced the loss of certainty about his future, but for a different reason, namely an unexpectedly early call-up. After finishing college, he

began his first job at a well-known financial company in Manhattan while supporting his little brother who was living with him. In the summer of 2011, the Korean embassy told him that the authorities might not renew his passport because he was 'way beyond the common age of starting military service'. He received that 'unexpected' warning only three months before his passport was due to expire. One month later, however, the embassy 'unexpectedly' granted him a *final* one-year renewal of his passport. Initially, he had planned to return to Korea for military service when his brother finished college. According to his plan, that would have happened in 2013. 'By then', he said, 'I would have gained fairly good work experience in my field. Thus, after completing military service, I would not have to start from zero again.' He strategically planned his timing to minimize the potential disruption to his career because of his military service. The unplanned early call-up, consequently, interfered with his anticipated progression towards his imagined future. When he initially heard that he had only three months left before returning to Korea, it was too sudden. Nonetheless, 'it was clear', he said, 'because it was not negotiable'. He started to get ready to return to Korea by packing up things, preparing a resignation letter and terminating his apartment lease. Therefore, when the embassy granted him another year in the USA, it was not only unexpected but also made him more 'uncertain' about his future. It was sometimes clear to him that he 'might as well finish packing and return now' since he was going to do the military service anyway. At other times, he felt 'not yet ready to leave behind' all he had accomplished in the USA.

Minsoo, on the other hand, had his Plan C unexpectedly prolonged because of the delayed issue of a Green Card to his family. Minsoo's parents had applied for a Green Card in 2009 when he was 18. However, the process took longer than expected. In 2012, when he turned 21, his family had still not received its Green Card. He was unsure if his parents' application still pertained to him because he was no longer a dependent minor. With his future in the USA uncertain for a protracted period, he had kept himself there for the previous ten years. I asked him what would happen if he visited Korea and he replied that '*people* say the military police might be waiting for me at the airport.' Then, on asking if he thought that would be true in his case, he said 'I don't know for sure, but I wouldn't bother taking the risk. Even when my grandfather in Korea passed away three years ago, I could not attend his funeral. Well ... I am fine with it. I do not really miss anything in Korea anyway.' Here, Minsoo is acting on the opinions of other 'people' who do not necessarily know his precise circumstances. His case might be different from those of others and he might have been able to travel to Korea safely. However, he seemed to dismiss that possibility, yet without having any firm knowledge about his own circumstance.

My fieldwork data show Minsoo meeting his childhood friends in Korea online. He often talked about how much more fun and eventful his friends' lives in Korea seemed in comparison to his 'boring' life in the USA. He even asked himself what his life would have been like if he had not emigrated. When many of his friends travelled to Korea for the summer, I asked him if that made him wish to visit as well. His answer was always, 'not really'. I interpret this as implying mixed feelings about

his situation. There were times when he felt that his life could be better in Korea and wished to go back. However, as someone who regarded himself as a 'permanent' settler in the USA, there were few reasons to take a risk of not being able to return to the USA while visiting Korea. In this sense, he was 'fine' with his situation.

Minsoo's ambivalent feelings reflect his unclear positions in both the USA and Korea. In addition, this ambiguity could possibly last until his official release from military service by gaining US citizenship or turning 39. In either case, it would take many more years to resolve.

My informants' stories show temporal conflicts between individual expectations and bureaucratic procedures (Allen 2000; Allen 2005; Edensor 2006). The institutional nature of the constraints these young men face considerably restricts their ability to negotiate the parameters of the decision or its consequences on an individual level. The impact of a sudden and unanticipated interruption in a life plan, as in the context of conscription, can significantly disturb a person's progression along a life trajectory (Daniels and Weingarten 1983; Earle and Leatherby 2007), particularly because there are few alternatives when a deviation occurs in an initial plan. The unplanned events in my informants' life plans forced them to remap their futures, which not only differed from their ideal but also could be potentially detrimental to their later life stages. In the following section, I discuss this point in detail.

Dilemma between 'global' dreams and national duties

In their various experiences of military service in migratory life, all my informants faced an essentially similar dilemma, which reflects the pressure of becoming 'global' in contemporary Korean society. With Korea having integrated more closely into the global economy since the late 1990s, English proficiency has become indicative of intellectual competence and sociocultural capital (Song 2010). Depicted as 'English education fever' (Chung 2008), Korean families spend about \$15 billion a year on extracurricular English lessons through cram schools, private tutoring, English camps, or overseas ESL (English as a Second Language) programmes (Chun and Choi 2006). Such a large investment in English education, however, has never yet satisfied Korean parents and their children in its cost-benefit efficiency (Park 2009). Many middle-class families strategically choose temporary or permanent migration to English-speaking countries for their children's education.⁴⁰ Under such societal circumstances, 'study abroad' is not necessarily a luxury enjoyed by a few elite families. Rather, it is a popularized commodity – or necessity – for many families who want their children to secure at least a middle-class position (An 2011). Those of my informants who came to the USA alone often described their migration as an 'investment' in their future, despite the huge financial and psychological costs it imposed on their families. Similarly, those who migrated with their families understood that their parents had sacrificed stable middle-class lives in Korea for their education and better prospects for the future. Unsurprisingly, therefore, they often see English fluency – to the level of a

⁴⁰ Relevant news articles for examples are available at Asia Financial News (5 April 2012, www.asiae.co.kr/news/view.htm?idxno=2012040511225399827).

‘native English speaker’ (Park 2009) – and/or entering prestigious universities or professions⁴¹ as measures of a satisfactory return on their ‘investment’ or ‘sacrifice’. This social context of educational migration draws attention to the significance of how conscription interrupts educational or career development among young Korean male migrants. Irrespective of whether or not their lives had unfolded as expected, there seemed little difference between my informants in that they were all facing a similar hurdle on the track to a ‘successful’ migration.

The day before Heejoon left for Korea to carry out his Plan A, he said it was so strange to see his empty dormitory room:

I have lived here for long, but I feel like [there is] nothing left here. I will come back for sure, but, I am a bit scared of ... what if I forget English, lose all [my] friends? ... I came here for my dreams. Now ... I feel as if my past four years were just a dream.

Heejoon had overcome many difficulties while living alone in the USA since the age of 14. He had finally become confident in speaking English and felt comfortable being around people other than Koreans. ‘English’ and ‘friends’ were thus signs of big achievements to have arisen from the sacrifices that he and his parents had made. He feared losing his accomplishments during his return to Korea and consequently rendering all the ‘investments’ in his education in the USA useless. Heejoon repeatedly said he would return to the USA immediately after military service. Yet, that assurance seemed to imply his emotional efforts to diminish his mixed feelings about his uncertain future.

⁴¹ ‘Evaluations for success among the early study abroad 1st wave’ (Chosun Ilbo, 23 June 2009).

On the other hand, Chanho would not have to worry about losing his English or his friends in the USA. Instead, his dilemma was that his English fluency and US college degree might become worthless.

I am not sure whether the exemption saves my time or not. I came to the US because I wanted to attend college and get some work experience here so I could get a better job in Korea. I Googled to know what happens to the 'exempted' males: everyone says no company would hire males like me. It sucks. I spent so much money for education in the US. It could be worthless because I am exempted from the duty. It is not my fault. I always wanted to serve the duty. Now what should I do?

Chanho chose migration as a means to obtain a better position in Korean society through cultural and educational capital acquired in the USA. The unexpected exemption, however, threatened him, indicating that the future he had always imagined might not be achievable. His concerns reflect the multi-faceted meanings of conscription in Korean society. Since the ceasefire between North and South Korea, national defence has been a top priority on the agenda of the South Korean state. Given this political context, military service is a 'sacred' obligation of citizens; therefore, the completion of the duty glorifies a male citizen's 'sacrifice' to protect his country (Kwon 2005).

Furthermore, Koreans often regard those who 'qualify' for conscription as competent human capital possessing 'normal' personhood. This consequently means that the society formally and informally marginalizes males who fail to complete their service, regardless of their intentions. Chanho began to recognize the complex meanings of the conscription and the stigma attached to an exemption as his problem. As he explained, it was not his fault or decision, yet the consequences could be severe enough to deprive him of the expected returns from his investment

in learning English and having a college education in the USA. Chanhoo had always envisaged that his future would be in Korea. However, he became reluctant to return to Korea because his future as a 'grade 6' male would be very different from the one he had always imagined for himself as a 'grade 1' male.

Similarly, the unexpected early call-up disoriented Sangmin's once firmly assured future projection. For the first time, he began 'thinking' about the military service rather than accepting it as a given. He mapped out possible scenarios for what to do in the one additional year given in the USA. 'I have two options', he said:

If I go to graduate school while keeping my job, I could stay here until I get a master's degree. When I am done, I would return to serve the duty in 2013 as I initially planned. Another option is to wait until I am promoted to a manager position at my company. That would grant me a Green Card without difficulty.

Sangmin could have used the final year given to get ready to return to Korea. Instead, he considered the time as a chance to prolong his stay in the USA. The first 'option' was to postpone his service until he could choose the right timing by himself. On the other hand, the second 'option' was to make his stay in the USA 'permanent' by obtaining a Green Card. This ultimately implies that he would not renew his Korean passport. That would consequently make his stay in the USA unauthorized by the Korean state. The second 'option' is similar to that of Minsoo's Plan C in a longer term, thus not return to Korea until obtaining US citizenship, renounce Korean citizenship and officially be released from military service. In the meantime, his travel to Korea would become significantly limited if not impossible. As Sangmin admitted, however, keeping himself in the USA until then seemed as difficult as giving up his prospective career for military service. Like Chanhoo,

Sangmin had always intended to spend his later life in Korea, but the second 'option' would make that future nearly unachievable. Plan C, not returning to Korea, used to be unthinkable for him until not long ago, but it appeared as an 'option'. Taking the second 'option', however, could be risky because getting a Green Card or US citizenship could be timely, as in Yongho's case, or unexpectedly long and unpromising, like Minsoo's.

A young Korean male's dilemma in trying to reconcile his quest for global subjectivity with his obligation to defend his country is the product of the modern state, which is fragmented into multiple components, each pursuing its own interests (Haney 1996; Kim-Puri 2005). The Korean state structurally and/or discursively promotes migration among young Koreans as a desirable means of raising the competitiveness of individual citizens and the country as a whole in the global economy. Other parts of the state, however, manage national interests through keeping young male citizens in its territory to defend it. In transnational migration studies, relationships between states and migrants are largely bifurcated. A large number of studies focus on the receiving state and its immigrant regulations whereas others focus on the sending state and its support for emigrants to maintain ties with it (Margheritis 2007; Østergaard-Nielsen 2003; Patton 1995). Yet, my informants' cases confirm that the state works both as a facilitator and as a regulator simultaneously in relation to emigrant populations. Furthermore, the state's contradictory positions work simultaneously and create difficult problems in individuals' lives. The state is of course not the sole constraint in individuals' lives. Nonetheless, the extent to which it can intervene clearly exceeds that of many other

sources of constraint. The decisions it makes about a young Korean man's status with respect to military service, migration, and/or citizenship can place the latter in a precarious position. The Korean state can marginalize those it 'disqualifies' from military service, criminalize those it deems to be military dodgers, or turn its back on those whom the US state shuns as 'illegal' immigrants. In any of these cases, there is a risk that the prospective futures that young Korean males had hoped to achieve through educational migration may end up with them being relegated to exile.

Conclusion

Shown throughout the chapters, the everyday lives of the CYA members exemplify how young adult migrants strive to maneuver through their migratory lives while making transition to adulthood. Their ambiguous and undefined social positions make the "future" an eminently salient component of their present lives. The CYA members' daily activities constantly engage in forward looking practices such as making major life decisions such as academic majors, career choices, dating and marriage partners, and whether they seek permanent immigration/U.S. citizenship or wish to return to Korea.

Surrounding these ostensibly individual decisions are yet external forces such as neo-liberal global economic shifts, local education system reforms, and state migration/citizenship state policies. Besides, age, gender, and class also play in sculpting these young migrants' understandings of time and future which further build foundations for their life trajectories. The formative impact of the mandatory

military duty of Korean rationale males is the one exemplary case. Conscription law structures young male lives by imposing specific procedures to undergo within certain timeframes. Consequently, military service fundamentally dominates the temporal schema of young Korean males, which works not only in the Korean state but also outside it, in imagining futures, making life plans and responding to internal and external life conditions. Moreover, citizenship policies in the U.S. and Korea, which presumably work independently from one another, simultaneously figure in young male migrants' lives and create gender, class, nationality, and age-specific predicaments.

Migration complicates individuals' lives by simultaneously embedding them in multiple places. This chapter highlights migratory lives are also situated in multiple temporal zones. Temporal rules impose the 'right' timing, tempo or sequence on people's life events. Examples of the social clock are everywhere in routines from bank closing times to timing the transition to parenthood. Evidently, the way social time operates varies from society to society. Migration, therefore, requires individuals to adjust their existing temporal schema to that of a new place. Time conflicts are almost unavoidable consequences of a transnational life lived by multiple social clocks. In this sense, young Korean males already face a high probability of having their life plans disrupted when they leave Korea, where the social clock is set to allow them to complete their military service. Time conflicts in transnational life may or may not be easily reconcilable. Then, how migrants manage to resolve the conflicts can be indicative of how resources and constraints

flow both in spatial and temporal directions and how such flows shape their transnational practices over their life course.

Another point that I want to highlight is the need to reconsider the concept of de-standardization of life courses in late modern society (Beck 2000; Giddens 1991; Heinz 2001). Lives of the CYA male members embody the power of institutions to standardize the life courses of individuals, particularly their temporal dimensions, remains strong. Moreover, the effects extend beyond state borders. Consequently, deviations from a 'normal' life course can marginalize individuals not only within state borders but also outside them. The projection of Korean male migration in terms of Plans A, B and C is the product of a bureaucratic schedule that shapes migratory trajectories in starkly similar forms from the outset. When unexpected changes occur, young Korean male migrants manage them by remapping their futures. Yet, some choices, such as resorting to Plan C, are highly risky in that they can result in young Korean males becoming illegal before 'securing' resident rights in the USA. This potentially places them in a precarious position trapped between two states, which leads to my third point. Transnational migration scholars have focused on individual rights to transnational mobility but have underplayed their obligations to the sending state. Migration does not free individuals from the institutional ties of the sending state, although it may eventually. Instead, because they embed their lives in the institutions of more than one state, migration places individuals in complex institutional webs. The agency of individuals to negotiate their interactions with state institutions is considerably limited when there is a high level of state authority. Young Korean male migrants had few alternatives available

to them other than to comply with the state's decision or face criminalization. More attention is certainly necessary for future studies to investigate how individual rights and citizens' duties co-constitute migrants' transnational lives.

The last insight this chapter provides is more comprehensive approach is necessary to understand the complex ways in which migration produce marginalization in relation to gender, class, and institution. While much research has focused on the marginalization of women migrants, this chapter challenges the predominant research tendencies. The fear and uncertainty about their futures haunting young Korean male migrants show male-specific physical and temporal constraints born out of state policy. This reminds me of a female informant, Sujin. When finishing college in 2011, she wrapped up her 12-year-long life in the USA and returned to Korea for graduate school. Her biggest reason for returning was that she was tired of living alone abroad. My male informant, Joonsu, insisted that Sujin could not have made that decision so easily if she had been a male. His comments concisely summarize male-specific difficulties in migratory life, which people rarely discuss as problems because they take them for granted. In the context of Korean migration, young women migrants have more flexibility than males to respond to emerging opportunities and challenges, which is a crucial advantage in a highly unpredictable migratory life. A future study on shifting gender dynamics might well show that young Korean women migrants have more control than males do over their education, career and partner choices.

CONCLUSION

Becoming an Adult in a “Bigger” World: Future-building in Progress

Living “Here” and “There” Simultaneously

I have documented transnational lives of Korean educational migrants and their transition to adulthood. In 2011, I began this project with a focus on these young individuals’ everyday cultural practices, future-planning, and identities that traversed national borders. As many other scholars have argued, globalization has enabled young Koreans in this project to be embedded in multiple sites and enjoy living “here” and “there” simultaneously.

The Korean migrants in this project show their transnational engagements are largely driven by exploratory and personal developmental purposes. The biggest aspiration of the young adult Koreans was to fashion a well-rounded global subjectivity. Consumption across borders – formal U.S. schooling, ESL programs, “American” cultural experiences, and cultural/material commodities imported from Korea – was the primary medium through which they actualized their aspirations. Everyday interaction with age peers who had varied migration statuses and histories worked to multiply reference points for being “cool,” “well-rounded,” and “global” Korean. In a form of sharing “know-how,” socialization further functioned as a primary source for them to develop their “toolkits” for navigating their lives unfolding in migratory contexts and in

a transitioning stage to adulthood. And notably, these young Koreans projected futures which were often not locally bounded either to the U.S. or Korea, but which floated in a transnational space and in the global market. These young Korean migrants' transnational engagement challenges the conventional way of thinking about citizen/non-citizen, permanent immigrant/temporary migrant, a decision for stay in a host country or to return to a home country, ethnic /national identity, and many more issues related to migrant and migration. This project thus contributes to broad sociological debates on migrants' integration to a host country, citizenship, and identity in the rise of increasingly fluid and negotiated transnational lives.

Lives of the CYA Members: Present Continuous

In the summer of 2012, I completed my data analysis and finished writing most of analytical chapters. As this project was ending, many of my key informants, especially those who had participated from the very beginning, were also getting closer to their college graduation. I began seeing them face newly emerging challenges. Their migration goals set in a loose term like self-development or "better" life opportunities once indexed openness for exploration, flexibility, and possibility through which they expectedly would further nurture their futures and cultivate life goals. Unfortunately, however, I saw the CYA members stumbling along a fine line between exploration/possibility and undirected/unrealistic, and many of them were left unprepared for life after college. While I have portrayed the CYA members as active leaders of their own lives and indeed they were, I also want to address the other side of these young migrants' lives before concluding. The ambiguity and contradiction which

originally characterized these young individuals' migration made their transition to adulthood particularly challenging.

Stuck in the “Big World”

In retrospect, the CYA members' migration was mainly initiated by their parents. Before arriving in the U.S. as young children, they never had a chance to think about what to expect from migration on their own terms. Instead, their parents set goals for them to learn English, receive “better” education, and experience a bigger world. Once their English reached a comfortable level even for college, they expected them to come up with further goals. In college, however, many of them remained uncertain about how they could make use of what they had gained through their U.S. education. Admittedly, the CYA members were not unique in this regard. Regardless of citizenship/immigration status, young individuals in post-industrial society often face this sort of uncertainty about value and utility of college education for their futures. More individuals now spend time in higher education and professional training before they step into the “real world” and land to their first job, which often marks a beginning of adulthood. Consequently, the transition to adulthood takes longer than ever before and even makes the transition ambiguous. The CYA members are a part of this large universe of young individuals in the name of education and/or professional development live for protracted periods without being anchored to traditional meanings of adulthood.

Yet, their position as international migrants adds another layer to the challenging experience in making the transition to adulthood. These young migrants,

who once dreamt about becoming a well-rounded person and being able to work globally, often met their college graduation without sufficient preparation for life after college. Some “chose” to return to Korea in the expectation that their U.S. college degree and English fluency would have them land on a decent job in Korea— just like their parents had expected when they were sending them to the U.S. Soon, however, they were likely to experience the reality in Korea unfavorable to them. The first wave of *jogi yuhaksaeng*⁴² is now returning back to Korea after college graduation. In the recent past, many consulting companies have reported that job applicants or newly hired employees who have a U.S. college degree do not necessarily perform better.⁴³ While their qualification does not excel, they lack social skills and networks which could only be gained through life experiences living in Korea.

Other CYA members were more realistic in that they were aware of the reality: in Korea there were so many young people just like them; their resumes are not necessarily better than others’. Thus, many of them “chose” not to return to Korea as long as they could maintain their legal resident status. Unfortunately, however, the U.S. job market is not all that favorable to them either. They had a hard time finding a full time job, not to mention a good job which would satisfy their own expectation and their parents’ hopes. Thus, when a company offered a job with a salary just enough for them to pay their rent and a basic living cost, they settled. They made this compromise because full time employment is the only way to have their stay in the U.S. extended

⁴² Those who went study abroad at their teen/preteen age.

⁴³ Hankook Daily, “Big Companies, Unfavorable to Applicants Studied Abroad,” 02/06/2014. Available at <http://www.hankookilbo.com/v/ff4bf47f3db04e7390806026b8f171e2>.

after college graduation (i.e., OPT).⁴⁴ While having their stay extended, they tried to get a working visa (see Chapter 6). Or, some of them were joking about or seriously considering getting married with someone with a green card or U.S. citizenship. Male members threw out their idea of joining the U.S. military for securing their U.S. residency. Yet, one year given for OPT went by quickly and many of their alternatives/ideas were not easily realized in that short period of time. When they were not able to find an alternative way to have their U.S. residency extended, they had no choice but to return to Korea with knowing the expectedly harsh reality back there. At an extreme case, some of them “chose” to remain in the U.S. and became “illegal.” This is the very paradox of the CYA members’ migration that had them “stuck” in the U.S. or left them nowhere: Their parents sent them to avoid the brutally competitive environment in Korea and hoped a U.S. college degree would help them get ahead in the global market. Because of that, they did not have a chance to develop the skills necessary to survive in Korean society. Unexpectedly, this made them less favorable job candidates.

Living Small in the “Big World”

As we have seen, the CYA community and CYA-based friendships were at the center of my informants’ lives. Once they began attending the CYA Friday meeting regularly, they often became loyal to their community. That was not necessarily because they were all very religious Christian or because they were always content with things happening in CYA. There were constantly voices among the members

⁴⁴ This work authorization by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services is given to international college students, up to a total 12 months (i.g., Optional Practical Training, OPT). Within this OPT period, a “trainee” must find an employer who can sponsor him/her for a working visa and have a visa application processed. If not, the “trainee” must leave the country when the OPT period ends.

questioning the pastors' leadership. The members were divided into small groups because of conflicts among them. There were always some members who rarely attended Friday worship but came for dinner and stayed for social gatherings after a worship. Many of the CYA members struggled from time constraints while juggling with schoolwork, church voluntary work, a part time job, and internship / full time job applications all together. Nonetheless, they religiously participated in the community life; rarely missed the official Friday meeting including a worship or formal and informal social events.

Those who were unchangingly active in the community life were often self-defined *yuhaksaengs*. Being apart from family in Korea, they were most likely alone in the U.S. If they had any family members or relatives in the U.S., they usually lived far away in other states. Youngjoo was one of these *yuhaksaeng* members who regarded CYA "[her] entire world." Wonjae, who was also a *yuhaksaeng* but had an older brother who graduated an U.S. college in other state, expressed his sympathy on other CYA members:

They hang out with each other. I mean, *only* with each other. It is a shame. Their parents sent them here to experience a bigger world but they get stuck in a small world here. I don't blame them though. It's not like Korea. There is no place we can go besides school and church and nothing we can do for life experience. If we don't have a car, we get stuck. Especially, if you don't have family here, it is hard to get out of school and do something for experience. It is hard to meet new people [non-Korean]. And you know, we [Korean students] are not very active in college activities either like clubs or volunteer group stuff. If you don't go out of your zone, you get behind. It's is unfortunate.

Admittedly, while focusing on the centrality of the CYA community, I was oblivious about how little space their school took up in these young individuals' everyday lives.

Most of them had never committed to any clubs, groups, or organizations on campus. Many of them never participated in any occasional events on campus such as film watch, workshops, career fairs, or lecture series. Attending classes seemed to be the only activity in which they were involved in college. Wonjae's case was rare among the CYA member. He actively utilized resources available through their academic major department or school more generally. Wonjae was lucky in his own words because his older brother guided him about how to get through college years and get himself prepared for his futures. CYA was also important to Wonjae but it was only a part of his social circle. In addition to CYA, he participated in a couple of clubs belonging to his college major department (a Business major). He learned from his brother that social skills to be able to work with people with diverse backgrounds would be critical for his future in a business world. Through club activities, Wonjae was training himself for such social skills and further made efforts to build networks for his career.

I was struck by such a contrast between well-guided members like Wonjae and other CYA members. It became clear that these young migrants need better guidance and mentorship to be prepared for their career and life after college. As shown, the CYA community did have such functions. The CYA members learned from each other about how to draw their life boundaries transnationally, how to deal with school related work, immigration visa related processes, and many more. Yet, their age peer socialization was far from sufficient or efficient. The small age gap between the members made their advice and mentorship exchanged among them were practical and had an immediate use. Yet, they were inevitably short-sighted because they all shared a similar life boundary which was largely confined within their school and CYA

community. Even those who graduated college and got a full time job were still not very far ahead from others and not very capable of offering the younger members with practical but yet long-sighted advice and mentorship. Clearly, to expect the CYA community to serve a guidance role for its members was not appropriate in that by nature CYA is a religious group and the members' relationships is friendship.

Roles of Universities: What Should be Done?

As I learned more about how disconnected these young individuals from their school, I could not help but think about what should be done. Then, it became clear that it should be college and university in which these young individuals nurture their dreams and goals and prepare themselves for stepping into the "real world." A college education is what these young individuals came for all the way from Korea in the first place. These young individuals and their parents expected that a U.S. college education would give them diverse cultural and social experience and "better" life opportunities. This was why they paid about 30,000 dollars of tuition per semester. Surprisingly, however, most of the CYA members did not know who their academic advisor was. If they knew, they never met their advisor. If they met them, they found they had to share one academic advisor with hundreds of other students and left the meeting with their advisor feeling little connected or cared. Many CYA members had difficulties with writing assignments but yet almost everyone never used writing centers at their school. There were a few CYA members who had received a help from their school writing center but they never went back after their first visit because tutors explained only basic grammar rules that they already knew and it made them feeling "stupid."

The number of international students in the U.S. has been constantly growing. In recent years, U.S. universities put a lot of emphasis on their value of diversities and internationalization of college and curriculum. To appeal to prospective students, they often deploy images of being a “diverse” school. Yet, what they show is often how many international students they draw from all over the world. In contrast to their active use of the number of international student enrollment in their school to promote their market value in tertiary education business (in fact international students are a great revenue source), they make little investment in developing programs or services to better serve their international students. University administrators, faculties, and staff are often not knowledgeable about challenges that their international students have to deal with every day. Teachers and staff members often have difficulties in working with international students due to their lack of English fluency or reluctance to participate in class or school related activities. On a surface level, university program brochures or internet home-page, international students are welcomed but in reality, they often become burdensome.

I do not intend to discount all the efforts that university administrators, faculties, and staff make to better serve their students. Yet, I want it to be clear that more should be done and in a better way.

What do they need?

When (or if) university administrators, faculties, and staff wish to know about their international students, their focus is often on them being “foreigners” in the U.S. Colleges and universities often assume that their international students would

experience cultural differences in the U.S. Most school programs designed for their international students (if there are any) educate them about “American” culture or to help them with their English (e.g. writing programs or pairing them with English speaking students as an “English conversation partner”). Most of the CYA members had experiences with programs such as an international student orientation in their first year in college; or had a “conversation partner” assigned by an international student office. Yet, a “once in a life time” type of the orientation was not very helpful in that it was for international students from all different countries and thus covered too broad topics that seemed little relevant to them. Having a conversation partner became almost burdensome to them when they did not speak English well enough to have a meaningful conversation with their partner but still had to meet the meeting schedule and bear the “awkward” silence during the conversation. After the international student orientation before the first day of school, the CYA members never heard about any programs to help them get through college years. Likewise, they stopped meeting their conversation partner after a few meetings.

What I learned during my fieldwork is the Korean international/immigrant students do not ask their school to teach them how to adapt to “American” culture. They were born in the late 1980s and the early 1990s and westernization/Americanization was already a part of their everyday lives even before coming to the U.S. They had learned about “American culture” from their English teachers at a kindergarten. What universities do not seem to see is their international students are also college students just like any other American/domestic students. Besides their distinct needs as international/immigrant students, they also needed what other college students would

need: they want to figure out how to develop their talents and skills, set up career/life goals, find opportunities to get a decent job after college, and be better prepared for their futures. And they need help for that. These concerns were little related to their being “international” students or having different cultural/ethnic backgrounds.

Unlike American/domestic students they had fewer opportunities to expose themselves to life outside of school (or even smaller community life CYA) so they could feel what is going on the “real” world that they would eventually have to step into as a fully grown adult. Colleges and universities offer many, albeit not sufficient, programs and services for their students. Yet, many Korean international/immigrant students (not only the CYA members), or international students more generally, tend to underutilize school resources available to them. Then, a possible solution is to think about how to better reach out international students. A first step is, of course, to examine to what extent international students are aware of or participate in school services, programs, and activities and what factors hinder them to get exposed to or participate in them. This could give us ideas of how to reach out to international students so they better utilize university resources. In this way, colleges and universities could provide a more meaningful venue for their students to get ready to be able to live in the “big world” they wished for before getting on a plane to the U.S.

Appendices

Appendix A

Survey

I conducted questionnaire surveys from January 2011 to September 2012 in order to obtain more comprehensive and overall understandings about the CYA members including their demographic characteristics, migration trajectories, daily activities, and interpersonal relationships among the members within and outside of the CYA community. The individual questions were designed based on my observation during the fieldwork. For example, it became clear that questions about family backgrounds and migration histories should be an essential part of a survey questionnaire. I frequently encountered that many of the members had experiences of living in other U.S. states or countries before they came to New Jersey. Individual members' migration histories were often at play when they got accustomed to their present lives and made plans for their futures. In many (but not all) cases, the members' previous migration experiences were related to their family backgrounds (e.g., their parents' professions such as diplomats, university faculty or business, or educations for MA or PhD) or their own schooling experiences (early study abroad, or short term language program). These previous experiences of living abroad were in many cases indicative of socio-economic status of the individual members' family. Moreover, I learned through my fieldwork that there were particularly sensitive issues such as military service, legal migration status, family background, or religiosity and these issues would be better answered through self-implemented survey than interviews in person.

Survey design and implementation

I designed survey questionnaire with an online-survey program (Survey Monkey). In January, 2011, I made multiple announcements about survey participation at the CYA Friday meeting and sent a survey link to the members individually through Facebook messages. After January, I sent the survey link to newly joined members throughout the survey conducting period. I began analyzing the collected survey data in October, 2012.

Survey Questionnaire

CYA SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE



This research is confidential. Confidential means that the research records will include some information about you, such as your name, age, school, gender, or migration experiences. I will keep this information confidential by limiting individual's access to the research data and keeping it in a secure location.

Name:	Date:	Questionnaire #
-------	-------	-----------------

I. Demographic Questions

- | | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|-------|
| 1. Date of Birth? | MM/DD/Year: | |
| 2. Gender | Male / Female | |
| 3. Where were you born? | Country: | City: |
| 4. Are you a college student? | Yes / No | |
| ➤ If yes, | School: | |
| | Year: | |
| | Major: | |
| ➤ If no, | 1) Graduation | |
| | a) Year | |
| | b) School | |
| | c) Major | |
| | 2) Current occupation: | |
| 5. What is your status of residence in the U.S.? | 1) U.S. citizen | |
| | 2) Permanent residence (Green Card) | |
| | 3) Student visa (F-1/J-1) | |
| | 4) Working visa (H-1) | |
| | 5) Traveler/visitor | |
| | 6) Other | |
| | 7) Do not want to talk about it | |
| 5. Family Relationship (Circle all applied) | 1) Mother/ Father | |
| | 2) Brother (Y/O)/ Sister (Y/O) | |
| | 3) Grandmother/ Grandfather | |
| | 4) Others (specify: |) |

6. What is your parents' occupation? Father: Mother:
7. What is your parents' highest degree of education? Father: High School Mother: High School
 University University
 MA/MBA MA/MBA
 Ph.D Ph.D
8. What is your family monthly income? 1) 2000000-3000000 won
 2) 3000000-4000000 won
 3) 4000000-5000000 won
 4) 5000000-10000000 won
 5) Above 10000000 won
 6) Do not want to talk about it.

II. Religion

14. Do you identify yourself as a Christian? Yes / No
15. Are you from a Christian family? Yes / No
16. Since when you are a Christian? Age: Year
17. Do you attend the Sunday church service? 1) Almost Always
 2) 2-3 times a month
 3) One a month
 4) Less than one a month
 5) Never
18. If you do not attend or sometimes skip the Sunday service, what are the reasons?
19. Do you think you are a religious Christian? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
 Little Moderate Very
20. If you think you are not very religious, why do you think so?
21. Since when you are a member of 찬양교회 Year/month:
 청년부?
22. What/who brought you to 찬양교회 청년부?

		NA
	Email	Everyday More than three times a week Once a week Several times in a month Rarely NA
Siblings	Telephone	Everyday More than three times a week Once a week Several times in a month Rarely NA
	Text Messages	Everyday More than three times a week Once a week Several times in a month Rarely NA
	Chatting/Web-cam chatting	Everyday More than three times a week Once a week Several times in a month Rarely NA
	Facebook/Cyword	Everyday More than three times a week Once a week Several times in a month Rarely NA

	Email	Everyday More than three times a week Once a week Several times in a month Rarely NA
Friends	Telephone	Everyday More than three times a week Once a week Several times in a month Rarely NA
	Text Messages	Everyday More than three times a week Once a week Several times in a month Rarely NA
	Chatting/Web-cam chatting	Everyday More than three times a week Once a week Several times in a month Rarely NA
	Facebook/Cyword	Everyday More than three times a week Once a week Several times in a month Rarely NA
	Email	Everyday More than three times a week Once a week Several times in a month Rarely NA
Others (Specify:)	Telephone	Everyday More than three times a week

	Once a week Several times in a month Rarely NA
Text Messages	Everyday More than three times a week Once a week Several times in a month Rarely NA
Chatting/Web-cam chatting	Everyday More than three times a week Once a week Several times in a month Rarely NA
Facebook/Cyword	Everyday More than three times a week Once a week Several times in a month Rarely NA
Email	Everyday More than three times a week Once a week Several times in a month Rarely NA

2. Social Networks in the U.S.

1) Among your friends (“친구” or “아는 애들”), what proportion of them is **Korean**?

a) How did you become to know them?

b) How often do you hang out with them in person?

c) How often do you talk with them (phone, texts, facebook, email, chatting...)

2) Among Koreans your friends (“친구” or “아는 애들”), what proportion of them is CYA (찬양교회 청년부) members?

a) How often do you hang out with them in person?

b) How often do you talk with them (phone, texts, facebook, email, chatting...)?

3) Among your friends (“친구” or “아는 애들”), what proportion of them is **non-Korean**?

a) How did you become to know them?

b) How often do you hang out with them in person?

c) How often do you talk with them (phone, texts, facebook, email, chatting...)

3. Your daily activities on on-line.

1) Think about your daily activities on online, what web-sites do you access in daily basis?
(Please name at least five web-sites)

2) When you need information for your school work or work, what online-websites do you access to? (Please name at least three web-sites)

3) When you need something fun (e.g., fashion, music, tv-shows, movies, entertainments, gossips, and etc.), what online-websites do you access to?

4) Where do you find daily news?

4. Have you visited Korea since you came to the U.S.? Yes / No

If yes, how often do you visit Korea?

- a) Every vacation
 - b) Once a year
 - c) Once in a while
- (Specify:)

What are the purposes for the visit(s)?
(circle all applied)

- a) Family visits
- b) Part-time job/ Internship
- c) Travel for pleasure (여행)

d) Other
(Specify:)

IV. Migration Trajectory

9. When was your **first time** to come to the U.S.?

Age (American):

Year:

10. Who did you come with?

1) Entire Family
(Specify:)

2) Sister/ Brother

3) Relatives (Specify:)

4) Friends

5) Alone

11. What was the reason to come to the U.S.?

1) Immigration

2) Father's occupation

3) Mother's occupation

4) Father's education

5) Mother's education

6) Sibling's education

7) My education - a) Elementary school

b) High school

c) ESL

d) College

8) Travel

12. Where was the place that you arrived/live first?

State:

City

13. Migration trajectory since the first time arrival (within the states, and between countries)
- Describe the trajectory in time order (when, where, why, with whom, how long...)

V. Military Service (male respondents only)

What is your status of military service in South Korea?

Exempted

Status reason (U.S. citizenship)

Medical reason

Others

Plan to file exemption

Status reasons (U.S. citizenship)

Medical reasons

Others

Waiting for physical test (expected in)

Plan to serve (expected in)

Appendix B
The CYA Membership Composition based on the Survey Data

Descriptive Statistics of the CYA membership (N=118)

Gender					
Male					54
Female					64
Total					118
Birth Year					
1983					2
1986					8
1987					14
1988					8
1989					10
1990					8
1991					16
1992					14
1993					16
1994					18
1995					4
Total					118
Legal Migration Status					
Student Visa (F-1)					58
Green card					22
U.S. Citizenship					32
Don't want to answer					6
Total					118
Self-identified Migration Status					
Immigrants					
Permanent migration for the respondent's education					52
Permanent Migration for other reasons					10
Non-immigrants					
Temporary migration for study abroad					48
ESL or Short-term Internship					8
Total					118
Age at Migration					
	Temporary migration for study abroad	Permanent migration for the respondent's education	Permanent Migration for other reasons	ESL or Short-term Internship	Total

Born in the U.S.	-	-	4	-	4
7	-	-	2	-	2
8	-	4	2	-	6
9	-	4	-	-	4
10	6	4	-	-	10
11	-	6	-	-	6
12	2	2	-	-	4
13	4	6	-	-	10
14	4	6	-	-	10
15	-	8	2	-	10
16	4	2	-	-	6
17	4	6	-	-	10
18	18	4	-	-	22
19	4	-	-	4	8
20	-	-	-	2	2
21	-	-	-	-	
22	2	-	-	-	2
23+	-	-	-	2	2
Total	48	52	10	8	118

Religion

Born in Christian Family	60
First attended a church after migration	46
Attended a church from childhood in Korea	12
Total	118

Religiosity

Not Religious	16
A little	20
Moderately	42
Religious	18
Very Religious	22
Total	118

What purpose is important for you to participate in CYA?

Social purpose	44
Religious purpose	74
Social and Religious purposes are equally important	
Total	118

Appendix C

In-depth Interviews

In addition to ethnographic fieldwork, I conducted in-depth interviews with sixty members from September 2009 to September 2012.

General interviews

General interviews were in-depth interviews on thematic issues applicable to the CYA members in general. I first conducted in-depth Interviews with the existing members. When new members joined CYA, I asked them for interview participation. The issues for general interview include:

- Basic demographic questions
- Migration trajectories/experiences
- Rules and implication of distinction making in CYA
- Use of Technology in everyday lives
- Future plans
- Religion/ religiosity
- Sense of Belonging to CYA

Individual specific in-depth interviews

Based on the data of general in-depth interviews, I conducted follow-up interviews informally with all the interviewees throughout the fieldwork period. Thus, the follow-up interviews were more individual specific in that primary topics of the interviews were mostly about what happened or changed after the initial interview day of individual interviewees (e.g., transferring schools, changing college major, visiting Korea, having company internships, searching job, graduation, or moving to other states/countries.). In this interview, the primary focus was on the process of decision making and its impacts on subsequent decision making.

Interview guideline

Interview Guide-Individual Church Member



Introductory Remarks

Thank you for your participation in this interview. The purpose of this interview is to learn about your transnational migration experiences in the U.S. and South Korea. While we have this conversation, please feel free to use any Language (Korean and/or English) that you feel the most comfortable with. Before we start, do you have anything that you want to tell or ask?

I. Participant's Profile

- Can you introduce yourself to me? (Participant's profile)
 - Age
 - Were you born in the U.S.?
 - (If not) How old were you when you came to the U.S.?
 - Why did you come to the U.S.?
 - Who did you come to the U.S. with?
 - Who are you living with?
 - (If living alone or with friends) Who did you live with before you moved out?
 - Have you been to the other countries except for the U.S.?
 - How long have you been a member of this youth meeting/ the church?
 - What/who brought you to this youth meeting/ the church?

II. Socialization (General Social Life)

- Can you tell me about your social life?
 - School activities/memberships
 - Friends (pay attention to if they are ethnic specific or more general).
 - How do you spend your time with your friends?

III. Interaction with Other Koreans in Daily life

- Can you tell me about your relationships/social life with other Koreans?
 - Who are they (pay attention to their migration trajectory)?
 - Where did you meet them? Where do you meet other Koreans?
 - How do you spend your time with them?
 - Would you say that you have made a special effort to pursue friendships with Koreans? Why/not?
 - How do you communicate with other Koreans in the U.S. and/or South Korea?

IV. Cultural Consumption

- How familiar would you say you are with the latest South Korean popular culture?
- Is that important to you? Why/not?
- Can you tell me about how familiar you are with the latest South Korean popular culture (music, TV show, film, fashion, news, and etc.)?
 - How do you get the access to those issues (Internet, friends, family, and etc.)?
 - How often do you visit South Korea?
 - How about your friends and/or family?
- Can you tell me about how familiar you are with the latest U.S. popular culture (music, TV show, film, fashion, news, and etc.)?
 - How do you get the access to those issues (Internet, friends, family, and etc.)?

V. Distinction/Multiple Positionalities – Indetermined Identities (or Positions)

- There are different terms referring to Koreans abroad. For example, Korean-American, Korean Immigrant, Korean-Korean (*Yukaksaeng*), *Gyo-Po* (an embracing term of Korean-American and Korean immigrant in Korean language).
- Can you tell me your impression/thoughts on these words? What/who do you think these words refer to?
 - How are they different or not different?
 - Can you tell me how you can tell the differences?
 - Let's think about the church meeting members. Can you tell me who you think you can put in Korean-American, Korean immigrant, Korean-Korean, or *Gyo-Po*?
 - Can you tell me why?
- How about you? Where do you put yourself among them?
 - Can you tell me why?
 - Do you think others would agree with you or have the same impression about you?
- Do you think a person who you perceived as Korean-Korean or Korean immigrant can become Korean-American?
 - (If yes) Can you tell me how they can become it?
 - (If no) Can you tell me why not?

VI. Positions in Migration Experiences

- Let's think about days before you came to the U.S.
 - Did you think about if you wanted to come back to South Korea after spending a certain amount of time? Or, you wanted to settle down to the U.S.? Or, you left your future open?
 - Has your thought changed so far?
 - If so, how and why?
 - If not, how and why not?
- Let's talk about days awaiting you.

- Where do you see yourself in the near future (Pay attention where the interviewee draws lines in projecting their future (e.g., graduation, first job, marriage, family, and etc.)?)
- (If project in the U.S.) Can you tell me why you see yourself in the U.S. in the future?
- (if project in South Korea) Can you tell me why you see yourself in South Korea?
- (If leaves it open) Can you tell me why you are undecided about it?

VII. What does the church meeting mean to you?

- Why did you choose this particular church?
- Is it different from other churches in the area?
- How/not?
- Religion
- Socialization
 - Do you hang out with the church meeting members outside of the church?
 - If so, who are they? Why them? How do you spend time with them?
 - Do you see them and yourself different (or not different) outside of the church meeting?
 - If so, how and why?

VIII. What are the biggest issues that you are dealing with or struggling with lately?

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