"WHERE I DON'T HAVE TO EXPLAIN MYSELF": ETHNOCULTURAL CHURCH
COMMUNITIES AS A THIRD PLACE FOR IMMIGRANT EDUCATION AND
ACCULTURATION

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A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Education and Human Development

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Doctor of Philosophy

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by

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Abstract

This dissertation explores how Korean ethnic churches in the United States and the constellation of key social, cultural, and institutional contacts linked to them, which I refer to collectively as *church community networks* (CCNs)*, shape ways that Korean American and Korean immigrant parents understand and navigate the formal education of children and their families' experiences of life in the United States. This ethnographic case study of Korean American parents examines the significance of settings outside of the formal school environment, such as ethnocultural institutions and informal networks, for children's education and development, particularly as they relate to the acculturation of newcomer youth and families to receiving societies.

Data in this dissertation come from in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted with 17 participants from various generational immigrant backgrounds: first-generation parents who immigrated prior to 2000; first-generation parents of children enrolled in K-12 education who immigrated to the United States after 2000; and U.S.-born or U.S.-raised 1.5-to-second-generation parents with children in K-12 schools. Participants include four intergenerational dyads comprising first-generation immigrants who have lived and raised children in the United States since prior to 2000 and their 1.5-to-second-generation children who experienced at least part of their K-12 education in U.S. schools and are now raising young children in K-12 schools.

My analysis suggests that Korean American and Korean immigrant parents' ideas about education and its aims are socially, culturally, and historically situated relative to

the migration journey in ways that shape how they develop and implement strategies for children's learning and development. The Korean ethnic CCN is a significant context where church members situate efforts to seek and obtain support, knowledge, and resources relevant to how they approach children's education, and its structure is designed to facilitate pathways by which knowledge and resources are exchanged. Moreover, by providing access to practical and material support; exposing parents to ideas about children's education and learning that influence parenting practices; and facilitating social, cultural, linguistic, and religious connections that help mitigate negative experiences associated with experiences of immigration, Korean ethnic CCNs contribute to formation of a sense of belonging and facilitate acculturation processes.

My study extends the literature on the education and acculturation of newcomer children and families and on the significance of non-school settings for children's education and development by bringing together the following threads of inquiry: the significance of educational and other experiences across the immigration trajectory, the role of parental involvement in the education of immigrant children, and the influence of ethnocultural institutions in facilitating the acculturation of immigrants. This dissertation provides insight into why and how particular types of non-school settings provide crucial support for newcomer parents, by showing how an ethnic religious community network offers key forms of pragmatic, psychosocial, cultural, and spiritual support for newly arrived families. Lastly, it provides guidance for ways that ethnocultural and other institutions may be more intentional and systematic in their approach to connecting families with resources, facilitating useful connection among parents, and creating shared social spaces for community-building and belonging.

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List of Acronyms and Terminology

AGC: Abundant Grace Church

ALFC: Agape Love Fellowship Church

CCN: Church Community Network

Early Wave: Early Wave Parents (first-generation participants who immigrated by 2000)

EC: English Congregation

EM: English Ministry

FCIC: Faith Community International Church

K-12: Kindergarten through 12th Grade

KASA: Korean American Student Association

KC: Korean Congregation

KM: Korean Ministry

KSA: Korean Student Association

ND: Non-Denominational

PCA: Presbyterian Church in America

Recent Wave: Recent Wave Parents (first-generation participants who immigrated after 2000)

SBC: Southern Baptist Convention

Second Gen: Second Gen Parents (1.5-to-second generation Korean American participants)

VBS: Vacation Bible School

Chapter 1: Introduction

Prologue

I was born in Seoul, Korea and immigrated with my parents and younger sister to

the United States shortly after my fourth birthday and my sister's *baek-il* (백일)[1], a

traditional milestone for Koreans that is celebrated 100 days after a baby is born. We

spent a few weeks with relatives in Washington, D.C. as my family began acclimating to

the United States, then continued onward to Raleigh, North Carolina, where my dad –

Appa (아빠) – would pursue a Ph.D. in mechanical engineering at N.C. State University

(NCSU). As is the case for many immigrant families, lack of an established social

network, language limitations, and cultural unfamiliarity were significant features of my

family's early experience as newcomers. Although several extended family members had

previously settled in the United States, we did not have any relatives or other social

contacts in Raleigh initially. Moreover, my parents had limited proficiency in spoken

English, since in Korea at the time, students were primarily taught to read and write the

English language, rather than to speak it. My father struggled to earn recognition for his

intellectual and academic capabilities, and students enrolled in his undergraduate calculus

class sometimes mocked his English. Meanwhile, my mom – *Umma* (엄마) – spent most

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[1] Throughout the dissertation, I provide parenthetical words in Korean *Hangeul* (한글) and subsequently
use a Romanized transliteration. There are standard rules governing the Romanization of the Korean
language (see, for instance, https://www.korean.go.kr/front_eng/roman/roman_01.do); I have loosely
followed guidelines shared in the Korean language guide by Kansas University
(https://guides.lib.ku.edu/c.php?g=953495&p=6879848), with the assistance of Romanization and
translation tools (e.g., https://www.ushuaia.pl/transliterate/?In=en, Papago, Google Translate).

of her time in our apartment with just my sister Laeun and me for company. My parents must have felt isolated, *Umma* especially so, and venturing out of the home to buy groceries, do laundry in the communal laundry room, or bring me to and from preschool must have been an intimidating prospect. Even so, when my father's graduate stipend proved insufficient to fully support our family, my mother sought and took a job as a waitress in a local restaurant, where she had to speak English regularly.

As we settled into life in the United States, my family's social connections initially developed through exposure to two distinct and at times overlapping ethnocultural networks: the NCSU Korean Student Association (KSA), comprised primarily of Korean international students, and Raleigh Korean Presbyterian Church (RKPC), at that time the larger of two Korean churches in the greater Raleigh area (M. J. Sung, personal communication, December 28, 2024). In the immediate term, contacts in these organizations provided access to practical resources and knowledge that eased our transition from Korea to the United States, including how to secure an apartment, purchase a car, address the logistical aspects of matriculating at NCSU as an international student, and enroll a child in a preschool. In the longer term, these networks served as a crucial nexus that gave my family access to social relationships, linguistic and cultural familiarity and comfort, and messages about American norms, practices, and expectations.

Many evenings, *Appa*'s grad student friends in the KSA came over with their wives and children, and everyone crowded into our small apartment, where the men (*ahjussi*, 아저씨) played cards and told jokes, their wives chatted with one another while preparing and serving an endless series of snacks, and the children ran between the two

tiny bedrooms and jumped on the beds. Sometimes, I fell asleep with my head nestled on my *Appa*'s knee, lulled by the sound of the *ahjussis'* conversation and laughter. On Sundays, my family drove in our used, American-made car (which lacked air conditioning and had vinyl seats that were burning-hot and stuck to our legs during the summer) to church, where I earned "Jesus tokens" by memorizing and reciting Bible verses, my parents sang in the church choir, and the entire congregation ate a communal lunch prepared by the ladies, or *ajummas* (아줌마), of the church after Sunday school and worship service had ended. On Sunday morning, we saw at church many of the KSA friends who had left our house just hours before, late on Saturday night. Each Saturday morning, I begrudgingly attended Korean language classes, *Hangeul hakgyo* (한글 학교), and every summer, my sister and I participated in Vacation Bible School (VBS), a sort of religious summer camp where I enjoyed the singing and crafts sessions more than the religious instruction. During a church Christmas celebration one year, *Appa* put on a Santa costume and handed out gifts to the children.

These interactions contributed to formation of an intricate web of social relationships, which in turn offered practical support, useful information, and opportunities to enact Korean traditional practices like cultural collectivism through communal meals. Through these experiences, my family also received implicit messages about U.S. social and cultural life and practices common in the American landscape, such as going to summer camp or celebrating Christmas with decorated trees and a red-and-white-clad Santa. Of course, my family participated in settings other than Korean ethnic enclaves. For instance, as a competitive swimmer (one of few non-White members of the swim team), I traveled with my family to meets all over North Carolina and its

neighboring states. During team bonding meals in chain restaurants like IHOP and Bennigan's, we learned about quintessential American menu items like baked potato skins and milkshakes and discovered that Americans often split the dinner bill, rather than politely "fighting" with one another to pick up the whole check. We came to understand that parents were expected to volunteer in support of their children – by serving as a timer or stroke-and-turn judge, staffing the concessions booth, or handing out heat sheets (a program of swimming events and participating swimmers) at swim meets, and by taking part in fundraising drives or attending parent-teacher association meetings at school. These interactions in non-Korean contexts provided valuable insight into what life in the United States would entail. However, the KSA and RKPC were the social settings in which my parents were most active, and therefore they were the most influential in shaping how my parents navigated the education and overall development of my sister and me, and how my family adjusted to our life as Koreans living in America. Indeed, when my family moved away from Raleigh after *Appa* had finished his Ph.D., finding the right Korean church for our family was second only to securing a place to live.

As a doctoral student studying education and immigrant experiences of adaptation and integration, I became curious about questions that underpin my dissertation: How do immigrants experience and make sense of formal schooling? How are these experiences and understandings shaped by migration trajectories and by interactions outside of formal school contexts? Where do immigrant newcomers seek, access, and make use of information, support, and resources that help them navigate education and life in their new community? How do immigrants learn to live in new social and cultural

environments, with what kind of assistance? What are the implications for their experiences of education and their negotiation of identity, belonging, and adaptation? In this dissertation, I explore the interrelationships between experiences of transnational migration, processes of immigrant acculturation, negotiations of sociocultural identity and belonging, and participation in significant cultural and ethnic institutions. In particular, I examine how Korean American and Korean immigrant parents understand and act in relation to the formal education and development of children and how significant contacts and institutions such as Korean ethnic church community networks shape the ways they navigate formal education in the United States, and with what implications for overall experiences of adjustment, acculturation, and belonging in the American context.

Research Questions

In this dissertation, I address the following empirical research questions:

- How do Korean American and Korean immigrant parents understand and navigate formal schooling in the United States?
- How do religious organizations such as Korean ethnic churches and other key non-school settings – such as a church community network – shape families' understanding and navigation of formal education:
  - Through provision of resources, such as information, material support, and networks?
  - Through communication of cultural messages about norms, ideas, practices, and values?

- How do these processes relate to overall experiences of acculturation and adjustment to life in the United States?

By understand, I mean (1) how parents make sense of their children's education, and (2) whether and to what extent parents talk to their children and others to gain this understanding. By navigate, I mean (1) whether and how parents seek or obtain relevant information from their networks and communities regarding attention, resources, and services for their children, and (2) what parents do with such information. I use the term *church community network* (CCN) to collectively refer to the church and the constellation of significant social, cultural, and institutional contacts that are linked to the church itself.

The KSA and Korean church were influential ethnocultural communities that shaped my family's life in the United States. In this study, I focus on the Korean ethnic church as the primary institution of interest for the following reasons. Firstly, although there are numerous factors that may contribute to a decision to migrate, pursuit of a postsecondary education (i.e., college/university or graduate school) drives the immigration experience of only a subset of individuals. Secondly, a broad cross-section of Korean immigrant and Korean American members comprises the congregation of a Korean ethnic church, whereas as organizations based at an institution of higher education, Korean Student Associations (KSAs)[2] draw their membership more narrowly from Korean American students and immigrant and international students from Korea who are enrolled at that institution. That is, by virtue of its positioning in the broader

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[2] Some colleges and universities may have both a Korean Student Association and a Korean American Student Association, the former encompassing Korean international and more recent-generation immigrant students, and the latter, later-generation Korean American students. Each type of organization is intended to best serve the unique needs of their respective constituencies. For the sake of clarity and convenience, I refer in this dissertation to campus-based Korean cultural organizations broadly and collectively as KSAs.

community and congregation members' regular and frequent participation, a Korean

ethnic church touches the lives of Koreans in greater numbers and from more diverse

backgrounds and experiences than does a KSA (e.g., Min, 1992; Shin, 2000). In addition,

there can be considerable overlap between participants in KSAs and Korean churches,

such that KSA members may form a subset of the congregation of a Korean church. As a

result, a KSA may be connected to one or more Korean churches in a geographic region

as part of a broader CCN. In Chapter 2, I provide a more detailed discussion of the

functions and roles of Korean ethnic churches.

Organization of the Dissertation

The dissertation is divided into seven chapters. Chapter 1 briefly establishes the

historical context for Korean diaspora in the United States, introduces the role of Korean

ethnic churches in shaping the lives of Korean immigrant and Korean American families,

provides the theoretical framework which has informed this project, and discusses the

theoretical and practical significance of this research. In Chapter 2, I situate my research

alongside the prior work of other scholars, including scholarship on the significance of

ethnocultural institutions in immigrant life; parental roles in relation to children's

education and development; and processes of immigrant acculturation. In this chapter, I

also define key terms and background for scholarship examining the experiences of Asian

American and Korean Americans. In Chapter 3, I provide a detailed discussion of the

study's design, methodological orientation, and methods, including my positionality in

relation to the research and introduction to the participants and context in which I

conducted this project. In Chapter 4, I home in on Korean American parents'

understanding of their children's education; the experiences, dispositions, and influences

that shape their orientation to children's development; and the significance of migration trajectories, material conditions, and social, cultural, and historical contexts. In Chapter 5, I examine ways in which Korean American parents access, interpret, and make use of key social and cultural networks to navigate their children's education, with a particular focus on the role of the Korean ethnic church in shaping Korean American and Korean immigrant life. Chapter 6 examines the implications of such processes of learning, information-seeking, and network formation for the overall acculturation and adjustment of Korean immigrant families and Korean American children and youth to life in the United States. In Chapter 7, I conclude the dissertation by elaborating on empirical, theoretical, and practical implications of this study, discussing limitations of this research, and suggesting directions for future research.

Korean Diaspora in the United States

Scholars such as the sociologist and scholar of ethnic identity, Korean American life, and the religious practices of immigrants, Pyong Gap Min (e.g., Min, 2006a), and the Korean sociologist In-Jin Yoon (2012) situate modern emigration from Korea to destinations such as China, Russia, Australia, and most relevant to this dissertation, the United States, into distinct periods starting circa 1860s. I draw on this work to provide a broad overview of three key waves of immigration to and settlement in the United States by ethnic Koreans: an early period of immigration from 1903 to 1945; an intermediate period from 1946 to 1964; and contemporary immigration from the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 to the present (Boston University School of Theology, n.d.; Houchins & Houchins, 1974; Min, 2006b, 2006a; Wong et al., 2011;

Yoon, 2012). Korean Americans and Korean immigrants who are in the United States as part of the third and most recent wave are the focus of this study.

Early Korean Immigration to the United States, 1903-1945

While a small number of political refugees and students entered the United States in the late 19th century, a larger group of ethnic Koreans began arriving in 1903, primarily to work on Hawaii's sugar plantations. By 1905, when the Japanese government restricted the entry of Koreans to protect its own laborers in Hawaii, over 7,000 Korean immigrants had arrived, the vast majority of them men (Houchins & Houchins, 1974; Min, 2006b; Yoon, 2012). These early Korean immigrants were motivated by poor economic conditions in Korea to find greater stability abroad, and a large proportion settled in Hawaii and the United States mainland, with only about 1,000 returning to Korea (Houchins & Houchins, 1974). Before passage of the U.S. Immigration Act of 1924, approximately 2,000 more Koreans entered Hawaii and California, including more than 1,000 so-called "picture brides" intending to marry and form families with prospective husbands already settled in the United States (Houchins & Houchins, 1974; Hurh, 1998; Min, 2006a, 2006b; Yoon, 2012).

The Immigration Act of 1924 set quotas for the number of European immigrants and barred the entry of Asian immigrants, but an exception allowed Asian students to enroll in U.S. educational institutions (Houchins & Houchins, 1974; Min, 2006b). During Japanese colonial rule (1910-1945), Korean nationalists, political refugees, and political activists made their way to the United States as students, including such prominent political leaders as Syngman Rhee (이승만), who was elected the first president of South Korea in 1948 (Min, 2006b). The majority of this group returned to Korea after it

achieved independence from Japanese colonial rule in 1945 rather than settling permanently in the United States (Min, 2006b; Yoon, 2012).

Intermediate Wave of Korean Immigration, 1946-1964

Global U.S. military, economic, and political involvement since World War II has shaped both Korea-U.S. relations and Korean immigration to the United States, due to the strategic geopolitical position of the Korean peninsula, particularly after partition into the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) and the Republic of Korea (South Korea). The Korean War (1950-53) was an early proxy conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union, and South Korea was crucial to the U.S. policy of containment to prevent the spread of communism during the Cold War. Concerned with establishing a democracy in South Korea as a buffer state, the United States established a military presence which continues today, as well as provided economic and material assistance since the conflict (Min, 2006b; Yoon, 2012). For instance, between 1952 and 1963, approximately $100 million of U.S. aid went to education development alone, as the United States, viewing education as "a major vehicle for the democratization of society" (McGinn et al., 1980, p. 86), invested in efforts to make schooling available to all, develop a democracy-based curriculum, and build an educational infrastructure and system of administration.

U.S.-Korea relations and the two countries' respective migration policies facilitated the international migration of Koreans to the United States after World War II and the Korean War. During this period, Koreans entering the United States primarily comprised students matriculating at American colleges and universities, spouses of U.S. military personnel who had served in Korea as well as their children, and Korean

orphans[3] adopted by American parents (Min, 2006b; Yoon, 2012; Yu, 1983; Yuh, 2002). In the period from 1950 to 1964, approximately 15,000 Koreans entered the United States, including approximately 6,000 students who enrolled in U.S. higher educational institutions between 1945 and 1965 (Hurh, 1998; Min, 2006b; Yoon, 2012).

Contemporary Korean Presence in the United States, Post-1965

Korean immigration to the United States increased significantly after the passage of the 1965 Amendment to the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, which removed restrictions on immigration by individuals from particular ethnic backgrounds and national origins, including from Asian countries, and emphasized occupational preference and family reunification policies (C. Kim & Kim, 1977). Domestic factors also encouraged emigration from Korea, including social, economic, and political conditions due to policies of rapid industrialization and a turn toward "guided capitalism" under the dictatorship of General Park Chung Hee (박정희), the president of South Korea from 1962-1979 (Deyo, 1987; Koo, 1987; Yoon, 2012). Between 1962 and 1976, Park's administration instituted a series of Five-Year Economic Development Plans that incorporated educational, manufacturing, and other economic components (Fredriksen, 2008). While Park's approach of "developmental authoritarianism" ultimately advanced the development of the economy, education system, and overall quality of life in Korea, the resultant instability, uncertainty, and lack of opportunity led many to leave, including to the United States, between the 1970s and 1980s (B. M. Chung, 2010; Fredriksen,

[3] Recent investigations by AP News, Frontline, and other news media have suggested that many South Korean adoptees may have been separated from their birth families and placed with international families in what has been described as "widespread adoption fraud". In March 2025, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, a South Korean government agency, concluded that Korean adoption agencies had undertaken fraudulent practices to facilitate international adoptions (e.g., Choe, 2023, 2025; Galofaro & Kim, 2024; T.-H. Kim & Galofaro, 2024a, 2024b; Moftah & Moftah, 2024).

2008; J. Lee, 2001; Selth, 1988). For instance, Park's authoritarian regime favored social and military elites, forcing lower and middle socioeconomic classes into more precarious economic and political conditions and creating poverty conditions in rural areas as the formerly agricultural economy was rapidly mobilized toward a more industrial economic base (K.-D. Kim, 1976). Those who chose to emigrate from Korea included college graduates who were unemployed or underemployed in the changing Korean economy; parents who sought more post-secondary educational opportunity than possible in Korean universities; and intellectuals and others fleeing the military dictatorship (Min, 2006b; Yoon, 2012). Meanwhile, American families continued to adopt Korean orphans at an annual rate of as many as 3,500 children during the 1970s and early 1980s (Min, 2006b).

The rate of overall Korean immigration to the United States increased to its peak in the mid-1980s, when more than 35,000 Korean immigrants entered each year, then steadily declined as economic conditions and political stability improved in Korea after the 1988 Olympic Games in Seoul and a peaceful transfer of power to a democratically elected government in 1993, such that by 1999, the number of Koreans arriving as immigrants had dropped to a mere 12,301 arrivals (Fredriksen, 2008; K. C. Kim & Kim, 2001; Office of Homeland Security Statistics (OHSS), n.d.; Yoon, 2012). The shift in immigration patterns has shaped the demographic distribution of Korean immigrants and Korean Americans living in the United States: the age and duration of residence in the United States of Korean immigrants have increased, as has the number of U.S.-born Korean American children (K. C. Kim & Kim, 2001). According to the most recent U.S. Census 2020 data compiled by the AAPI Data, a research organization housed at the Asian American Research Center at the University of California Berkeley, there are over

1.5 million Korean Americans in the United States; if the Korean Americans who identify with two or more races are included, then the total number increases to 1,989,519 (AAPI Data, 2024b, 2024a).

The participants in my study came to the United States during this third period of Korean immigration: the most recent arrival took place during the pandemic in 2021, and the earliest arrival occurred in 1973. (One participant's husband immigrated on his own even earlier, in 1967, returned to Korea to marry his wife, and returned to the United States with her in 1976.)

Theoretical Framework

I situate this research in the understanding that people's lives are comprised of relational processes embedded in complex social systems (Gergen, 2009). As such, my study is informed by theoretical and empirical work on ecological approaches that examine the multiple and varied contexts involved in shaping the development, well-being, and education of children and the childrearing practices of parents, and on social dimensions of learning which focus on the sharing of information, resources, and knowledge through social interaction.

Influential Settings for Youth and Family Development: Ecological Approaches

The importance of settings outside the home and the inter-relationships between different settings for children's well-being has been theorized by various scholars to consider the spheres of influence that comprise the overall environment in which children live, learn, and grow. For instance, Bronfenbrenner's (1994) influential ecological systems model situates a child's development within an ecological system comprised of nested contexts: the *microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem,* and *macrosystem*. In

Bronfenbrenner's model, these various contexts are sites of interaction that influence the child's development. The most proximal processes occupy the *microsystem,* comprised of settings in which the child interacts directly with others, such as the home, family, school, or peer groups. In the *mesosystem,* interactions occur not within a microsystem, but across microsystems, for instance communication between parents and teachers. The *exosystem* is an ecological setting in which a child does not actively participate, but that exerts influence on the contexts in which the child lives, for instance the neighborhood or parent's work environment. Finally, Bronfenbrenner describes the *macrosystem* as the outermost wing, which encompasses a given culture with its subculture, values, beliefs, and social conditions. The theorization within this model of interactions among the layers of ecological contexts informs the proposed study of how non-school settings may shape the ways in which families access, understand, and experience formal schooling.

Bronfenbrenner's model has been critiqued however in relation to minoritized populations. For instance, the integrative model developed by the developmental psychologist Cynthia García Coll and colleagues (1996) foregrounds social constructs that are particularly salient to the unique developmental processes experienced by minoritized children, such as experiences concerning social position, racism, discrimination, and segregation, and takes into account variation in the adaptive strategies of different ethnic or racial groups based on their migration experiences, patterns of acculturation, or cultural beliefs and traditions. The cultural microsystem model proposed by developmental psychologist Nicole Vélez-Agosto and colleagues (2017) reconceptualizes Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model by bringing culture – conceptualized as social communities' daily practices and their interpretations of those

practices – to the core as a process with the capacity to directly influence and organize microsystems, rather than placing it at the periphery, where it exerts only indirect influence as part of the macrosystem. That is, culture operates within varied proximal and peripheral settings, which are regarded as "cultural practices (cultural pathways) that relate to the individual in mutually defining processes, emphasizing the transactional nature of human development" (Vélez-Agosto et al., 2017, p. 907).

Expanding upon the study of children's development by Bronfenbrenner and others, scholars have turned their attention to the contexts that comprise the ecologies of parents to understand how the social and environmental aspects of parental life spheres might relate to their decisions, practices, and involvement concerning childrearing and children's education. An influential framework developed by the sociologist Joyce L. Epstein and her colleagues (2009) identifies six key forms of parental involvement in children's education:

1. Parenting: Cultivating home environments conducive to children's education and development.

2. Communicating: Participating in communications between the school and home.

3. Volunteering: Engaging in school- and classroom-related activities.

4. Learning at home: Supporting students' learning activities, planning, and goal-setting.

5. Decision making: Being involved in school-based decision-making.

6. Collaborating with community: Participating in partnerships with community-based educational resources, programs, and services.

While this framework provides a useful typology to define and gauge parental involvement with children's education, it has been critiqued due to its potential limitations in addressing the diverse needs, capacities, and challenges of parents from various backgrounds and experiences, such as parents in high-poverty situations and those with experiences of migration. Other frameworks like the ecologies of parental engagement (EPE) model developed by Barton and her colleagues (2004) conceptualize parental roles vis-à-vis children's educational experiences to reflect a more complex and active relationship between families and schools. The EPE framework suggests a shift from parental involvement to a notion of parental engagement, a more "dynamic, interactive process in which parents draw on multiple experiences and resources to define their interactions with schools and among school actors" which emphasizes the agency of parents (Barton et al., 2004, p. 3). Moreover, this framework emphasizes the significance of both capital and space – that is, the material resources parents possess and the contexts in which they access, leverage, and deploy this capital – and by doing so, considers the importance of multiple life spheres that shape parents' navigation of their children's education and development (Barton et al., 2004).

Ecological theories have also influenced scholarship examining the psychological development, stress, behavioral practices, family relationships, and well-being of immigrants (Chu & Thelamour, 2021; Jensen, 2007; Kang & Lazarevic, 2013; Parke & Buriel, 2006). For instance, studies that specifically focus on Korean immigrant life have suggested that exposure to experiences, conflicts, and interactions in multiple ecological spheres may have significant social, relational, and psychological impacts (Hong &

Hong, 1996; Hurh & Kim, 1990a; E. Kim & Wolpin, 2008; H.-Y. Kwon et al., 2001; O. Kwon, 2003).

This study draws on theoretical and empirical work on ecological dimensions of children's learning and development, parental practices related to education and childrearing, and the lives and experiences of immigrant families. That is, the theoretical framework of the study recognizes the salience of minoritized children's and parents' social positioning, interactions, and experiences, and foregrounds cultural processes as significant across all levels of interaction taking place in multiple social spheres. These bodies of research inform this study's concern with exploring ways that Korean American and Korean immigrant families navigate the education and development of children and acclimate to life in the United States with the influence and assistance of contacts in significant social and cultural spheres.

Interaction Matters: Social Networks, Situated Learning, Communities of Practice, and Third Places

While ecological theories tend to center an individual orientation to learning, other theoretical perspectives emphasize social dimensions of learning. Broadly, the study of social relations facilitates efforts to examine relationships between sets of individuals or groups, with the understanding that an individual's actions and experiences of life are situated in broader webs of social connections (Burt, 1982). Social networks have been conceptualized in various theoretical strands as providing social support or group cohesion, enabling exchange of material goods, knowledge, or skills, influencing people's dispositions or behaviors through exerting social influence, or supporting the development and circulation of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu & Passeron,

1977; Coleman, 1990; Heaney & Israel, 2008; Podolny & Baron, 1997; Portes, 1998; Putnam, 2000; Schafft & Brown, 2003; M. Taylor, 2000). For instance, the sociologist Ray Oldenburg (1999) highlights third places – that is, spaces outside of the first place (informal settings like the home) and second place (formal settings organized around a concrete purpose or mission, like the workplace or schools) – as significant contexts for the development of social interaction, civic engagement, and community life. Other scholarship focuses on social interactions between actors rather than the social settings in which these interactions take place, such as the sociologist Mark Granovetter's influential study of how men in the United States had attained their jobs, which suggested the importance of more distant social connections, or weak ties, for helping to secure new opportunities or information than closer relationships with family or friends, i.e., strong ties, due to the access they provide to more diverse social networks (Granovetter, 1973).

Participation in a social environment conveys not only access to the exchange of knowledge and resources, but also opportunities to become part of a community through a process of social interaction and learning. The situated learning perspective developed by anthropologist and social learning theorists Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger theorizes learning as embedded within a particular activity, culture, or context, and therefore as having a social, rather than an individual, orientation (Lave, 2019; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Learning is further understood as part of process of becoming a member of a community of practice, a group of people who share a common concern or interest and who come together to learn through regular, sustained interaction (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). For instance, the *ama,* or shellfish divers, of Shima gradually become members of their community of practice as their fishing skills develop (J. F. Hill

& Plath, 1998), and students participating in Japanese extracurricular school clubs called *bukatsudō* advance through the hierarchy of these communities of practice as they absorb the values, behaviors, and norms of the clubs themselves, and of the Japanese society more broadly (Cave, 2004). While other theories of learning equate learning with formal educative processes, the situated learning perspective decouples learning and teaching, such that the newcomer or novice, rather than the master or expert, organizes and structures their search for knowledge and learning, and by doing so, becomes more fully a part of the community of practice (J. F. Hill & Plath, 1998; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998).

Research on the experiences of immigrants and other minoritized populations sheds light on ways that extended social networks, relationships, and communities of practice, including ethnocultural institutions like CCNs, facilitate connections to economic and employment opportunities, important information and resources, and trusted individuals, businesses, and other contacts; provide crucial social and emotional support; and offer opportunities for full participation and core membership through sustained interaction and learning (Arnau et al., 2023; Garcia, 2005; Hagan, 1998; Hurh & Kim, 1990a; Iskander et al., 2013; V. H. Kwon et al., 1997; Lim & Putnam, 2010; Min, 1992; Tsang, 2015). Churches are ostensibly and primarily religious institutions where members receive spiritual support and instruction. However, this study builds on the understanding that as a place where people gather, churches are also social settings where members seek, receive, and cultivate support and knowledge to meet their social, emotional, and material needs. Ethnocultural religious institutions and the broader social networks they are connected to, such as the Korean CCNs that are the focus of this study,

are particularly significant for the access they provide to material support to members with backgrounds and experiences of immigration.

Project Significance

This research contributes to scholarship on how parents navigate children's education and development, how non-school settings are influential for the formal educational experiences of children, and how key ethnocultural institutions may shape the educational and overall acculturative experiences of immigrant families. Research has demonstrated that parent involvement is a significant supportive factor in the educational experiences of children, for instance through enhancing academic performance, graduation rates, student motivation, and social well-being (Antony-Newman, 2019a; Epstein, 1995; Epstein et al., 2009; Gonzalez-DeHass et al., 2005; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Kantova, 2024; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005; Wilder, 2014). Other bodies of work examine potential factors that may limit parents' capacity to be involved in their children's schooling, particularly in minoritized and immigrant families, and highlight supportive factors and resources that can promote positive educational experiences (e.g., Gilbert et al., 2017; Hornby & Blackwell, 2018; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Patel et al., 2016; Turney & Kao, 2009).

This study can shed light on how parents with backgrounds of immigration conceive of and approach their children's education and development and how participation in ethnocultural communities might shape parenting decisions about children's formal schooling and overall development. Moreover, building on an intuitive understanding of the importance of religious and ethnocultural institutions as social settings and of how social capital, social networks, and situated learning are embedded

and developed in such settings, this study will provide insight into the educational functions of ethnocultural churches and into the mechanisms by which social ties are formed and communities of practice are cultivated in these contexts.

This dissertation's examination of Korean immigrant and Korean American life and culture as they are enacted and practiced in Korean CCNs and the implications of these practices for how Korean Americans experience, understand, and negotiate identity, relationships, and life in the United States will contribute to a broader, more general understanding of the relationships between ethnocultural institutions and the experiences of minoritized groups. Ethnocultural institutions may draw on the findings of this study to equip and support immigrant and minoritized parents in their efforts to raise and educate children, as well as support the education and holistic well-being of minoritized youth as they navigate the norms, expectations, and environments of heritage and dominant-society cultures. The findings of this research may also expand notions of what constitutes parental engagement vis-à-vis children's education, and by doing so, guide schools, education policymakers, and other stakeholders in their efforts to nurture robust, effective school-home-community partnerships.

Chapter 2: Background and Literature Review

In the previous chapter, I provided historical background for Korean immigration to the United States. In Chapter 3, I begin by contextualizing the construction of Asian American and Korean American as ethnocultural demographic categories and define how I use the concepts of immigrant generation and generational cohorts in this study. I then turn to an overview of relevant scholarship on meaningful dimensions of Korean immigrant and Korean American life in the United States. First, I discuss the significance of ethnocultural institutions such as ethnic religious organizations for immigrant groups and implications of involvement in such networks for immigrant adaptation and integration. I home in specifically on the social, cultural, religious, and relational roles and functions of Korean ethnic churches. Finally, I present and discuss relevant research on the educational experiences of immigrant families, parental involvement, and school achievement.

Background

Constructing "Asian American" and "Korean American"

The label "Asian American" and associated ethnic labels – like "Korean American" – emerged during the late 1960s as part of a broader political project to claim racialized group identities and form coalitions based on shared social and political interests (Espiritu, 1992; Kibria, 1999; Lowe, 1996; Wong et al., 2011). For instance, campus-based activists from various Asian backgrounds formed political alliances to protest the Vietnam War and mobilize in movements against racism: "There were so

many Asians out there in the political demonstrations but we had no effectiveness.

Everyone was lost in the larger rally. We figured that if we rallied behind our own

banner, behind an Asian American banner, we would have an effect on the larger public.

We could extend the influence beyond ourselves, to other Asian Americans" (Ichioka

interview, as cited in Espiritu, 1992, p. 34).

The broad racial group label of "Asian American" encompasses people from

diverse national origins, cultural backgrounds, and migration histories. Accordingly,

scholarship on Asian American experiences has tended to be particularistic, capturing the

wide ethnic, cultural, and linguistic variation across national-origin groups, such that

"[the] prevailing practice, in a sense, is to read the Asian American experience as a

compendium of individual, ethnic, national-origin experiences" (Wong et al., 2011, p.

37). This dissertation is consistent with this body of work, delving into the social,

cultural, linguistic, and historical patterns of Korean American experience.

While such research acknowledges the unique immigration trajectories, historical

and policy conditions, and social and economic positioning experienced by particular

groups within the broader Asian American community, there is also recognition that

certain factors and experiences may be shared across differences in national origins. For

instance, Asian Americans from different national backgrounds may claim an Asian

American identity formed through shared experiences and values, such as being "racially

labelled as Asian by the dominant society, of growing up in an Asian home, and of

adhering to the Asian values of an emphasis on family, education, hard work and respect

for elders" (Kibria, 1997, p. 523). In the process of recognizing commonalities

experienced by Asian American groups, scholars suggest, the Asian American label has

been depoliticized and deracialized (Kibria, 1999; J. Z. Park, 2008). It has instead become recoded as a signifier for a set of attributes like "hard working parents, a commitment to education, and a strict upbringing" (J. Z. Park, 2008, p. 553) or of cultural values, such as "collectivism, conformity to norms, emotional self-control, family recognition through achievement, filial piety and humility" (B. S. K. Kim et al., 2001, p. 345), that are assumed to be shared among Asian Americans across national-origin boundaries.

Korean Immigrants and Korean Americans

In academic scholarship, the terms Korean immigrant and Korean American have been operationalized to reflect such qualitative variables as place of birth, age of immigration to the United States, and length of residency in the United States. For instance, in their comparative study of the ethnic identities of Korean American adoptees, Korean Americans, and Korean international students, the psychologist Richard M. Lee and his colleagues (2010) combine U.S.-born Korean Americans and Korean immigrants who immigrated to the United States before the age of 12, citing prior research which suggests greater differences between immigrants who arrived prior to and after the early adolescent years (e.g., Takeuchi et al., 2007; Tsai et al., 2000). Other studies aggregate U.S.-born Korean Americans and non-U.S. born Korean immigrants who are U.S. residents in their analyses (e.g., Y. Kim & Grant, 1997).

In this dissertation, I use the term "Korean American" broadly to refer to ethnic Koreans who live or intend to live in the United States permanently, whether they were born in the United States or somewhere else, and who retain a fundamental connection with Korean culture and consider being Korean a significant aspect of their identities.

These individuals include so-called first-generation immigrants, as well as the population of individuals who are U.S.-born or U.S.-raised, that is, the 1.5-to-second generation Korean Americans. I use the term "Korean immigrant" to refer to ethnic Koreans who have migrated relatively more recently and who may or may not intend to live in the United States permanently; that is, they may intend to return or remain unsure about returning to Korea at some point. For the sake of simplicity, I may at times refer to the participants in this study collectively as Korean Americans, as individuals who either migrated to or were born in the United States and who currently live in this country. In addition, since emigration from North Korea is limited and indeed, uncommon, from this point onward, I refer in this dissertation to Korea to mean South Korea, and Koreans and Korean Americans to mean individuals whose most recent national origins are South Korea, unless otherwise specified.

Immigrant Generations and Generational Cohorts

Immigrant "generations" are often defined as part of distinct generational groups by place of birth, for instance first-generation meaning non-U.S.-born individuals who immigrated to the United States and second-generation encompassing the U.S.-born children of one or both immigrant parent(s). However, scholars such as the sociologist Rubén G. Rumbaut (2004) suggest that doing so may fail to account for factors and experiences such as age and life stage at time of migration, amount of time spent in the United States, and other sociocultural and developmental contexts. These groupings may therefore overlook "in betweeners," that is, those individuals in between the first and second generations, who were born outside of the United States, but who were raised and educated for a significant portion of their later childhood and adolescence in the United

States (Cheng, 2018). The precise age range that might constitute late childhood to adolescence varies across immigration literature, and may range from 11 to 16 years old (K. Park, 1999), or 6 to 15 years old (H. Lee, 2000), for instance. For this study, I use a somewhat generous age range of 9 to 17 years old to account for a significant length of time spent in U.S. schools and especially to respond to participants' self-identification as 1.5-generation Korean Americans in relation to their age at arrival.

In this dissertation, I organize my participants into three broad groupings which reflect the time period at which immigration took place, age and life stage at the time of migration, and educational and developmental experiences. Despite general agreement about the importance of intergenerational analysis in the study of immigration, there is not a consistent and widely accepted approach to delineating generations of immigrants. I borrow Rumbaut's (2004) conceptualization of "generational cohorts" to identify and categorize the participants in this study. The immigrant generational cohorts represented in the dissertation include:

- *Early Wave Parents (first-generation Korean Americans, pre-2000 arrival):* Participants who immigrated from Korea to the United States as adults over the age of 19 (in Korea, 19 is the legal age of adulthood). The interviewees in this study arrived between 1973 and 2000. One participant was unmarried and immigrated to the United States by herself; other participants were married and arrived with their spouses and/or children. Their children are now adults and may have children of their own.

- *Recent Wave Parents (first-generation Korean Americans and Korean immigrants, post-2000 arrival):* These participants also arrived as adults, and

immigrated after 2000 (between 2011 and 2021). All of the study's participants in this group immigrated with spouses and/or children, and came directly from Korea, except for one participant who arrived from Europe. Their children are young and participate in K-12 education.

- *Second Gen Parents (1.5-to-second generation Korean Americans):* This cohort comprises participants who were born in the United States as well as participants who immigrated with their families during late childhood through adolescence, between the ages of 9 and 17. They are now adults whose parents are part of the first group (first-generation Korean Americans, pre-2000 arrival). Participants in this group have children of their own who are in K-12 schools.

In addition, nine of the participants in this study form four family dyads comprised of Early Wave and Second Gen Parents, as I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 3. I now turn to a review of literature relevant to this study.

Ethnocultural Institutions and Immigrant Life

Immigration scholarship suggests that ethnocultural and immigrant organizations, networks, and communities are salient to the experiences of immigrants in contexts of settlement due to the access they can provide to resources that meet economic, social, cultural, spiritual, and practical needs. I begin with a broad discussion of the significance of ethnocultural institutions and associations and of the implications for acculturation of immigrant populations, then turn to the role specifically of religious institutions, and finally provide context for the religious participation in Koreans and the key roles of Korean ethnic churches in the United States.

Theoretical and Empirical Approaches to Immigrant Incorporation and

Acculturation

Multiple theories attempt to explain how immigrants settle into a host society. For instance, the "melting pot" approach encompasses the mechanisms by which a multicultural society becomes more homogeneous through a process of "melting together" into a shared culture, or conversely, by which a less diverse society becomes more heterogeneous through the addition of immigrant groups (Glazer & Moynihan, 1970; Gordon, 1964). Assimilation theories are concerned with whether, to what extent, and how cultural values and norms are taken up across immigrant and mainstream cultures. Classic assimilation theory suggests that immigrant newcomers eventually take on the sociocultural values and norms of the receiving society and become subsumed by the mainstream group, in "a process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons and groups and by sharing their experiences and history, are incorporated with them in a common cultural life" (Park & Burgess, 1921, p. 735, as cited in Martone et al., 2014, p. 302). This approach to immigrant incorporation predicts that the children of immigrants and each successive generation will achieve greater educational attainment and socioeconomic status and thus experience upward social mobility and adapt more fully to the mainstream society (W. L. Warner & Srole, 1945).

The sociologist Alejandro Portes and his colleagues (Portes et al., 2005; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Portes & Zhou, 1993) developed the segmented assimilation theory, which theorized that the second generation (children of first-generation immigrants) could experience one of three pathways: (1) upward assimilation through a process of

consonant acculturation as both generations become more American; (2) downward assimilation through dissonant acculturation as the two generations' linguistic and cultural experiences diverge; and (3) upward assimilation experienced simultaneously with biculturalism through selective acculturation, as both generations take on the mainstream society's values and norms while maintaining a connection to their heritage culture. Richard Alba and Victor Nee's (2003) new assimilation theory responds to critiques of classic assimilation theory as too Anglo-centric by envisioning processes of assimilation as being situated within more economically and racially differentiated contexts.

Acculturation has been thought of broadly as the cultural changes in one or both cultural groups that may take place through intercultural contact; an early formal definition suggested that acculturation encompasses "those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups" (Redfield et al., 1936, p. 149). The work on acculturation by the influential psychologist John W. Berry and his colleagues has conceptualized more complex adaptation strategies exercised at the psychological, or individual, level, as migrant newcomers negotiate heritage-cultural maintenance or rejection and mainstream-cultural adoption or rejection, as well as broader changes occurring at the cultural group level (e.g., Berry, 1992, 2005, 2017; Berry et al., 2006; Phinney et al., 2023). Additional scholarship suggests alternative frameworks for the cultural processes that take place through contact between the cultures of immigrant newcomers and of receiving societies, for instance

biculturalism, intercultural personhood, or cultural fusion theories (e.g., Croucher &

Kramer, 2017; Y. Y. Kim, 2001, 2008; Schwartz et al., 2017).

As these theoretical frameworks suggest, there is not a consensus on what

constitutes immigrant incorporation and acculturation. However, there is a general

recognition that immigrant incorporation involves the dual processes by which

immigrants become part of a society, both as immigrants adapt to their host society *and*

as the receiving society becomes accepting of newcomer groups (e.g., Berry, 2017;

International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2019; Koser, 2016). Additionally, these

theories tend to suggest that the process of immigrant acculturation requires time, may

take place over multiple generations, and involves education and other socializing

processes (Alba & Nee, 2003; Hirschman, 2004). In this dissertation, I draw on a broad

understanding of acculturation as encompassing strategies, processes, and experiences of

cultural maintenance, resistance, and hybridization that may occur through contact

between the cultures of an immigrant heritage group and the mainstream receiving

society.

It is perhaps unsurprising that there is not a consistent and accepted approach to

how these processes are conceptualized and applied across the body of research on

immigration. The acculturation processes that immigrant newcomers undergo are, after

all, complex and contingent, shaped by the myriad experiences and conditions associated

with unique migration trajectories. However, studies of how immigrants adjust to a new

national context, particularly in the social sciences, often turn to analysis of more

straightforward or narrowly defined outcome measures associated with socioeconomic

status and social or educational integration. For instance, studies might examine

immigrant employment rates, proficiency in the language of the mainstream group, relative educational attainment between immigrant and non-immigrant groups, or instances of marriage across ethnocultural or racial groups (e.g., Waters & Jiménez, 2005).

Such studies can provide valuable understanding of broad patterns of behavior, outcomes, and experiences, while obscuring the deep significance of social and cultural processes, backgrounds, and experiences in shaping the ways immigrant groups understand, respond, and act in relation to conditions in a new environment. My study adds to scholarship that is concerned with deeper examination of the particularities of phenomena experienced by immigrant groups, for instance, studies like medical researchers May Sudhinaraset and colleagues' (2023) qualitative study of immigrant mothers' experiences of maternity healthcare which identifies specific barriers that can impede access to medical care. As an ethnographic case study, my project particularly adds to research seeking to shed light on mechanisms by which specific significant ethnocultural contexts shape immigrant life in the United States.

Life in a New Society: Participation in Ethnocultural Settings

The processes and pathways by which immigrants access support can ease their settlement into life in a new society. For example, the sociologist Min Zhou's (1992) study of the ethnic institutions and contacts in New York City's Chinatown suggested that participation in the ethnic enclave mitigated the negative impacts of linguistic, educational, and knowledge gaps as well as provided access to extensive information networks, employment opportunities, and other practical resources. Moreover, informal community associations that connect immigrant newcomers to social ties beyond close

kin and friend networks can facilitate the formation of weak ties and broadening the reach of their information sources (e.g., Caidi et al., 2010; Granovetter, 1973; Sanders et al., 2002).

Conversely, some studies have suggested that participation in ethnocultural communities and organizations may detract from or complicate acculturation processes. For example, a high degree of "institutional completeness" (Breton, 1964) – that is, the degree to which many or all community needs can be met by institutions within an ethnic community – may slow an ethnic community's capacity to acculturate to the mainstream society or isolate it by impeding the formation of bridging social capital with contacts outside of the co-ethnic group (Breton, 1964; Woo et al., 2019).

As settings that can provide exposure to resources, information, and other support that are relevant to life in a receiving society, as well as psychological, social, and cultural support, ethnocultural institutions can be a significant part of everyday immigrant life. While the impact and influence of ethnocultural networks and institutions are complex in relation to the integration and adaptation experiences of immigrants, a large body of work examines the types of immigrant and ethnic organizations that immigrant newcomers turn to for support, and with what implications. The professor of community development Chi-Kan Richard Hung's (2007) examination of immigrant-run and immigrant-serving non-profit organizations in ten major U.S. metropolitan regions identifies four broad categories of immigrant non-profits: religious organizations, cultural organizations that advance efforts to maintain and raise awareness of group cultural identity, service organizations that connect immigrants to social services, and public interest organizations, such as professional, civic, and advocacy agencies. In what

follows, I focus on the first category, that is, religious organizations and their relationship to immigrant acculturation and incorporation.

Religious Institutions and Immigrant Life

People gravitate toward faith-based organizations for a variety of reasons, such as out of a yearning for social interaction, sense of belonging, and practical support, as well as for religious instruction and spiritual connection. As a setting that provides access to these resources, religious institutions may be especially significant for immigrants simultaneously experiencing separation from the people and environments they left behind and trying to adjust to everyday life in their new society. For instance, immigrants often turn to churches and other religious organizations for direct assistance with addressing urgent material needs, such as finding a job, a place to live, or a vehicle, enrolling children in schools, or connecting members to social services and other resources (Ebaugh & Chafetz, 2000; Guest, 2003; Min, 1992; R. S. Warner, 1998; R. S. Warner & Wittner, 2009). Religious organizations, such as synagogues and Catholic organizations, historically connected marginalized communities to essential social services and continue to do so: agencies like Catholic Charities and Lutheran Family Services provide assistance to aid the resettlement of refugees to the United States, for instance (e.g., Commonwealth Catholic Charities, 2025; Lutheran Family Services, 2025; Virginia Department of Social Services, 2025).

In addition to providing practical support, ethnic religious spaces may be attractive as settings in which spiritual faith and religious practices combine with shared social, cultural, and linguistic frames of reference to evoke a sense of familiarity and comfort for those who may be marginalized in mainstream society due to racial, ethnic,

and linguistic differences (Hirschman, 2004; Hurh & Kim, 1984; R. S. Warner, 1998; W. L. Warner & Srole, 1945). For instance, influential early scholarship of Judeo-Christian White immigrant groups suggested the significance of religion for the maintenance of ethnic and cultural continuity (Herberg, 1960; W. L. Warner & Srole, 1945).

Religious institutions may also meet psychological needs for social status and recognition, particularly for those who may have "experienced downward mobility as a consequence of immigration" due to barriers limiting the ability to directly transfer their professional or educational skills, experience, or credentials to the economy of the new society (K. C. Kim et al., 2001, p. 13). The strong lay leadership structure of Korean ethnic churches, for instance, provides opportunities for its members to hold positions that command respect and enhance social positioning, as I discuss in greater detail below (Hurh & Kim, 1990a; K. C. Kim et al., 2001; Min, 1992).

Although researchers have noted that religion is significant to processes of ethnic identification and belonging (e.g., Bankston & Zhou, 1995; Yang, 1999), less attention has been given to how ethnic religious institutions contribute – or conversely, undermine – broad attempts by immigrant newcomers to navigate life in their new community. For example, Portes and Rumbaut's (2001) work on segmented assimilation narrows their examination of contributing factors to the human capital possessed by parents, structure of the family, and conditions of immigrant incorporation. In other words, the role of religious participation is overlooked, despite ample research suggesting religious affiliation is, in fact, important for many immigrant groups.

Similarly, studies of Asian American educational achievement homes in on family-level factors like supportive parenting, parent-child relationship, and parental

expectations, school-level aspects like teaching quality and positive peer groups, and ethnic-community programs and partnerships (e.g., Chang & Shih, 2023). Research on the latter may consider programs that are directly educational, such as heritage language schools, testing prep, and other academic programs, including those that may be hosted by religious institutions (E. Kim, 2014; Paik et al., 2017). Although studies like these may be more narrowly concerned with direct academic outcomes of participation in educational programs, this dissertation contextualizes this work by considering more holistically the actions taken by Korean immigrant and Korean American parents on behalf of their children and families based on more multi-faceted support from religious institutions.

Religious Involvement of Koreans in America

A saying attributed to Korean immigrants captures the essence of Korean ethnic churches' importance in Korean immigrant life: "When two Japanese meet, they set up a business firm; when two Chinese meet, they open a Chinese restaurant; and when two Koreans meet, they establish a church" (Kim, 1983, as cited in Hurh & Kim, 1990, p. 20). In their edited volume on the sociology of Korean American religious communities, the sociologists Kwang Chung Kim, Ho-Youn Kwon, and R. Stephen Warner (2001) attribute the cross-cultural and international transfer of religion to two key avenues of movement: the movement of religious ideas via missionaries and the movement of people through migration, who bring along religious beliefs and practices (p. 4). Due to ways that religious ideas are taken up and practiced, and in this process, take on cultural dimensions, people who are not particularly religious in their originating society or whose migration choices are driven by secular motivations may find that religious

practices acquire deeper meaning in their destination country (Hurh & Kim, 1990a; Smith, 1978; R. S. Warner, 1993; Williams, 1988, 1996).

Indeed, the religious participation of Korean immigrants has continued and even strengthened as they established lives in the United States. Although fewer than one-quarter of Koreans living in Korea identify as either Protestant or Catholic Christians, well over half of Korean Americans identify as Christian. According to a 2022-2023 study conducted by the Pew Research Center (2023), 59% of Korean Americans in the United States identify as Christian, including 34% who identify as evangelical Protestant, 12% as non-evangelical Protestant, and 11% as Catholic, indicating significantly greater rates of Christian affiliation than their counterparts in South Korea. In the United States, there is a higher concentration of ethnic Koreans who are associated with Christianity than with Buddhism, even though these two main religious affiliations for Koreans in South Korea claim nearly equal shares of the population: 17% identify as Protestant, 16% as Buddhist, and another 6% as Catholic as of 2021 (Central Intelligence Agency, 2025).

While prior studies of Korean immigrant churches had been largely descriptive, three influential and complementary studies of Korean immigrant churches conducted in the 1990s by the sociologists Won Moo Hurh and Kwang Chun Kim (1990), Pyong Gap Min (1992), and Victoria Kwon, Helen Ebaugh, and Jacqueline Hagan (1997) together provide a general but more comprehensive portrait of Korean ethnic churches, their functions, and their members. Hurh and Kim's (1990) study focuses on participation patterns by Korean immigrant church members; Min's (1992) research examines the religious, social, and cultural functions of Korean ethnic churches; and Kwon and her colleagues (1997) home in on one particular feature of a Korean church, the cell group

ministry. I will turn to the research by Min (1992) and Kwon and her colleagues (1997) in subsequent sections to discuss the roles, functions, and features commonly found in Korean ethnic churches.

According to Hurh and Kim's (1990) analysis of qualitative interviews conducted in the Chicago area, historical and structural conditions may help account for Korean Americans' and Korean immigrants' high rate of participation in religion and specifically Christian churches. For example, the subset of Koreans immigrating to the United States in the post-1965 period was disproportionately drawn from the urban middle class, a segment of the population highly affiliated with Christian churches prior to migration: over half of Korean immigrants identified as Christian, versus approximately 20 percent of the general Korean population (Hurh & Kim, 1984, 1990a; Min, 1992). In addition, even those who had expressed no affinity with Christianity prior to migration joined Korean ethnic churches upon arrival in the United States, yielding high rates of church affiliation. Min (1992) notes that about 40 percent of immigrants attending U.S. Korean ethnic churches had not been Christians prior to departing from Korea; Hurh and Kim's (1984) study found that approximately 70 percent of Korean immigrants in the Los Angeles area were affiliated with Korean ethnic churches.

Korean Americans do not merely identify with Christian religious institutions at relatively high rates; studies have suggested that Korean Americans tend to display a significant degree of active involvement in church activities as well. According to the sociologists Kwang Chung Kim and Shin Kim (2001), survey data collected as part of the Racial Ethnic Presbyterian Panel Studies conducted by the Research Center of the Presbyterian Church (USA) indicate that 78 percent of Korean survey respondents

reported attending their church's Sunday worship service on a weekly basis, relative to the 34 percent of African American respondents, 49 percent of Hispanic respondents, and 28% of Caucasian respondents, and indeed, that two-thirds of the Korean participants (67%) believed church attendance to be essential aspect of their lives as Christians (p. 82). Korean American and Korean congregation members find various ways to be active in the church beyond regular attendance. I turn now to a discussion of the functions of the church as an institution, as well as roles that may be taken up by church members.

Roles and Functions of the Korean Ethnic Church

Min's (1992) analysis of typical structures of Korean ethnic churches in the United States identifies four broad social functions of Korean churches: (1) opportunities for social interaction; (2) ethnocultural maintenance and transmission; (3) connection to social services and practical resources for the broader Korean immigrant community; and (4) access to enhanced social positioning.

Fellowship and Korean Ethnic Churches. Of the four categories, Min (1992) suggests the church's ability to meet the need for social connection, often referred to as "fellowship," to be the most crucial and important function for the Korean immigrant community. Although a significant number of Korean immigrants (about 25 percent) may be affiliated with other organizations or community associations with co-ethnics, Min notes that "nonreligious ethnic organizations are less effective than ethnic churches for helping to maintain social interactions and friendship networks with fellow Koreans because they do not have frequent meetings" (p. 1381). That is, the high rate of weekly church attendance by Korean members facilitates the sort of regular and frequent social interactions that are conducive to the formation of social networks and friendships.

Furthermore, churches formally and explicitly create opportunities for social engagement, such as a post-worship service "fellowship hour" and communal observance of traditional Korean celebrations, holidays, and other social gatherings. Social relationships formed within the church structure were significant aspects of members' overall social networks, often carrying over into non-church contexts: 45 percent of Korean immigrants in Chicago with close Korean friends in the area had met in their church (Hurh & Kim, 1987, as cited in Min, 1992, p. 1382).

Cultural Dimensions of Korean Ethnic Churches. Contemporary multigenerational Korean ethnic churches often function as "bilingual yet monoethnic congregations" (H. A. Kim, 2021). As such, they may hold bilingual worship services, offer simultaneous translation, or be divided into separate ministries or congregations corresponding to the primary language used in each, under the broad umbrella of the overall church entity, with varying degrees of shared and collective resources, infrastructure, programming, and activities (e.g., Min & Kim, 2001).[4]

Still, Korean is the official, primary language used to conduct worship services and other church activities in Korean immigrant churches, particularly those directed toward the adult members of the congregation, while worship service and programs for children and youth members may be offered in both Korean and English. In addition to youth-oriented religious programs, Korean ethnic churches often host Korean language classes (*Hangeul hakgyo*) for children, which may incorporate additional cultural or traditional activities and content, such as lessons on Korean history, traditional etiquette,

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[4] These separate sub entities may be referred to as *"congregations"* or "ministries," i.e., Korean Congregation (KC) and English Congregation (EC), or Korean Ministry (KM) and English Ministry (EM). Both approaches are used by churches represented in this study.

games, and art forms (Min, 1992; Pak, 2003; E. Park, 2018a; S. M. Park & Sarkar, 2007).

These types of linguistic and cultural instruction help socialize the younger generation to

Korean norms, expectations, and behaviors, as do church-based religious holidays and

Korean celebrations, which offer opportunities both to enact and reproduce Korean

culture.

Scholars have also noted that religious messages are often intertwined with

cultural or even political messages. Early Korean churches established in Hawaii and

California during the first period of mass Korean immigration served as sites to engage in

political activity, and not just religious observation, for Korean immigrants exercising

political resistance to Japan's colonial control over Korea (S. Chung, 2024; Houchins &

Houchins, 1974; Lyu, 1977; Min, 2006b). In contemporary Korean ethnic churches,

pastors might instead "pray for the democratization of South Korea, the unification of the

two Koreas, the elimination of corruption on the part of government officials, a quick

recovery from flood damages in a certain area of Korea, and so forth" (Min, 1992, p.

1384). In other words, the religious and cultural – and sometimes the political – are

inextricably connected in Korean ethnic church contexts.

Access to Practical Support and Services. Ethnic churches are significant

settings where people may seek and access social and practical services directly, as well

as through less formal channels for sharing information. Direct educational instruction

and enrichment programs commonly include Bible study classes, Korean language

school, and summer activities for children, as well as one-off informational seminars and

other educational programs such as lectures about college admission processes and other

aspects of children's learning and development (Choi, 2003; Min, 1992).

Korean ethnic churches, particularly larger congregations and those with larger operating budgets, also may create a slate of programs to meet the religious, social, and care needs of older members of the congregation as well as for elderly members of the broader Korean immigrant community (Choi, 2003; Y. Kim, 2013). Access to the religious community and social support found in church settings can support the overall adjustment and well-being of older members of a congregation (Cnaan et al., 2005). For instance, Kim's (2013) qualitative study of senior citizens participating in a church-based "senior school" found that attending senior school social and enrichment activities enhanced participants' psychological well-being through opportunities to socialize, take part in enrichment and educational opportunities, and participate in service activities to support their community.

Less formal support is provided on an ad hoc basis by pastoral staff and lay church leaders. For instance, congregation members can access information and advice about securing jobs, obtaining housing, accessing medical care, and navigating children's education, as well as receive help with processes that require English proficiency, such as filling out forms (Choi, 2003; V. H. Kwon et al., 1997; Min, 1992). Due to cultural ideas about mental health concerns, Korean ethnic churches are also particularly well-positioned to provide counseling and other support for psychological and emotional well-being (B.-L. C. Kim & Ryu, 2005). All of these resources provide crucial support to not only facilitate the initial settlement process, but also the ongoing, longer-term project of acculturating to life in the United States.

Social Positioning via Church Lay Leadership Structure. Many of the Korean immigrants to the United States in the post-1965 era who originated in the professional,

highly educated middle class in Korea experienced downward socioeconomic mobility due to language barriers or difficulty directly translating educational credentials or professional experience to the American employment context (Hurh & Kim, 1984; I. Kim, 1981; Min, 1992; Yu, 1983). While success in entrepreneurial endeavors could bring financial stability, economic success did not necessarily equate to greater social positioning, such that respected positions and leadership roles in Korean ethnic organizations and associations were attractive (V. H. Kwon et al., 1997; Min, 1992). Korean churches, which tend to have well-developed lay leadership hierarchies, numerous special committees, and district-level leadership opportunities, are thus attractive to Korean immigrants seeking to enhance their social positioning (V. H. Kwon et al., 1997; Min, 1992). Church administrative, volunteer, and leadership positions ostensibly aid the smooth functioning of the church structure itself; involvement in these roles also elevates social status, enhances overall life satisfaction and well-being, and decreases experiences of depression (Hurh & Kim, 1990a; B.-L. C. Kim & Ryu, 2005).

Cell Group Ministry. To facilitate social interaction, cultural connection, and efficient access to practical support, Korean ethnic churches with large congregations or members who reside across a wide geographic region might utilize a form of organization that centers on smaller social groups of church members living in the same area, which Min (1992) refers to as *Kuyok Yebae* [구역예배] or district meetings. Kwon and her colleagues (1997) examined a similar organizational structure, the cell group ministry, in a large Korean ethnic church in Houston, Texas. Cell groups, which like *Kuyok Yebae* are small, localized church sub-groupings, play a significant role in the social and structural functions of Korean ethnic churches in the United States, "[serving] as the backbone of

an informal service network that assists Korean immigrants in meeting the social, economic, cultural and religious challenges faced by new immigrants in the settlement process" (Kwon et al., 1997, p. 250).

Cell groups are integral to the process of welcoming new and prospective members of the church congregation, who are assigned to a cell group based on their geographic location. Established cell group members help address the immediate needs of newly arrived Korean immigrants, including "such services as aid in buying a vehicle, and finding housing; obtaining job referrals, baby-sitter referrals, social security information, and translating services; making airport pickups; visitations for new babies and hospitalized members; registering children for school; applying for citizenship; dealing with the courts" (Kwon et al., 1997, p. 251). Moreover, the cell group ministry connects immigrants with psychosocial and emotional support that is crucial to them as newcomers in an unfamiliar national, linguistic, and sociocultural setting.

It is clear from this prior research on key features and roles of Korean ethnic churches that they are significant in multiple ways for Korean Americans and Korean immigrants in the United States. While this research gives some insight into how these functions ease Korean immigrants' transition to a new national and cultural setting and how they more broadly support overall acculturation trajectories, it does not yield understanding of the mechanisms themselves – that is, how these processes might take place. My in-depth examination of how church members seek, receive, and act on resources and support in religious institutions addresses this gap, and particularly considers the implications of parental help-seeking in Korean ethnic CCNs for their children's education.

Parental Roles and the Education and Development of Children

In what follows, I first provide a brief overview of education research that links parent involvement to children's educational outcomes and identifies gaps between schools' expectations of parent involvement and ways that parents may be engaged in their children's learning and development. I then discuss alternative patterns and modes of parental involvement among minoritized populations, including immigrant families.

Parent Participation in Children's Learning and Schooling

A significant body of education literature examines linkages between parental participation and various dimensions of children's education. Terms such as parental involvement and parental engagement have been used in education scholarship and practice to describe various forms of parents' participation and collaboration vis-à-vis children's school and educational experiences. These terms are often used interchangeably, and different forms of parent educational collaboration may overlap in the ways the notions of parent involvement and engagement are used in educational research and practice. What follows is an attempt to introduce a range of activities undertaken by parents in relation to their children's education that may constitute parent involvement and engagement.

Parental involvement has been understood by some scholars to encompass parent activities that directly support school-based educational efforts. For example, the education and child development researcher Reginald Clark's (1983) usage of the term referred primarily to direct, home-based activities of parents, including assisting children with their homework and other assignments, talking to children about their expectations and goals for learning outcomes, and ensuring a home space conducive to children's

learning and development. A comparative study by García Coll and her colleagues (2002) also situated parental involvement primarily in or close to home through their examination of parent orientations toward education, school-home communication, and home-based supervision and academic support.

Other research has focused on school-based parental involvement, such as actively taking part in school events and volunteering in organizations to support the general needs of the school (McNeal, 1999), and additional studies have combined approaches to suggest that parental involvement comprises both supporting children's learning in the home environment and being active in the school environment through participation in ways visible to school stakeholders such as events, functions, and volunteer activities (e.g., Lawson, 2003; J.-S. Lee & Bowen, 2006), or have critiqued such approaches focusing on active participation by parents to be inadequate to capture the full possibilities for parental collaboration (e.g., Reynolds, 2010).

These ways of conceptualizing parent involvement might imply that parents are a resource to be made use of by schools to support children's educational experiences, whereas alternative approaches to parental engagement involve a broadening of focus toward parent participation as a school-home collaboration that advances overall student development by linking schools and parents in a partnership. In other words, these framings extend to parents the role and agency of being active stakeholders in their children's education and development, such that robust home-school relationships are regarded as a crucial factor to support children's learning and schools are encouraged to facilitate parent engagement in such relationships (Epstein & Sheldon, 2018; Hara & Burke, 1998; N. E. Hill & Tyson, 2009; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005).

However it is understood or operationalized in research, parental involvement has been recognized as integral to children's educational experiences and achievement. Studies have shown that when parents are actively engaged in their children's education, there are positive impacts along various student educational outcomes, such as school attendance and probability to graduate, student motivation, academic interest, and self-efficacy, attitudes toward school and education, and communication and relationships between parents and children (Epstein & Sheldon, 2018, 2018; W. Fan & Williams, 2010; Gonzalez-DeHass et al., 2005; Jackson & Remillard, 2005; Kantova, 2024). For instance, a meta-analysis conducted by education researcher S. Wilder (2014) using the findings of nine other meta-analyses in its analysis suggested firstly, that there is a positive association between parental involvement and academic achievement; secondly, that the strongest positive relationship was associated with parents' expectations regarding children's academic performance; thirdly, that parental assistance in the form of helping with homework had the weakest positive effect on students' achievement; and finally, that the association between parental involvement and academic achievement remained consistent across age-level and ethnic groups. Similarly, Jeynes's (2024) meta-analysis of 42 studies examining the relationship between involvement by Black parents and school performance indicated that "parental expectations, parental style and parental participation were associated with higher levels of academic achievement" (p. 211). A meta-analysis of academic outcomes and parental involvement in relation to younger children in the early childhood education and early elementary education years found that parental involvement was strongly and positively correlated with learning outcomes (Ma et al., 2016).

Children's Education and Parent Engagement Among Immigrant Families

Parents' capacity to be engaged in their children's education is shaped by various factors, such as parental educational attainment, family socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, and language (Baquedano-López et al., 2013). Direct involvement in schools – often the forms of parental participation most visible to and acknowledged by teachers and other stakeholders – may be challenging for immigrant parents due to a number of reasons. They may experience challenges in common with parents from other minoritized and disadvantaged groups, such as discrimination on the basis of racial or cultural difference, limited formal education, and poverty (Carreón et al., 2005; Doucet, 2011; Sohn & Wang, 2006). In addition, immigrant parents may find their ability to engage directly with schools further impeded by linguistic challenges, differences in expectations of the school, or lack of familiarity with the overall system of education (Crozier & Davies, 2007; Doucet, 2011; Gilbert et al., 2017; Patel et al., 2016; Turney & Kao, 2009; Zhong & Zhou, 2011).

Research suggests that due to factors such as these that can limit their interaction with schools, immigrant parents' engagement in children's education may take different forms than are most often recognized by schools. For instance, due to their own experiences and understandings of education and the school-home relationship, immigrant parents may situate their involvement primarily at home (S. B. Johnson et al., 2016; Sohn & Wang, 2006; Tang, 2015; Thomas-Duckwitz et al., 2013; Zhong & Zhou, 2011). Parents may trust that teachers and others at the school are best positioned to provide academic instruction and draw a distinction between the types of learning they perceive as appropriate for the school and for the home environments (Andrews, 2013;

Miano, 2011). As a result of gaps between the expectations of the school and the practices of immigrant parents, teachers and school staff may not readily recognize the things parents do as strategies to guide and support their children's education. For instance, a qualitative study of the parental involvement of Latino immigrant parents conducted by the professor of teacher education Luis Poza and his colleagues (2014) shed light on three categories of parental engagement that may not be perceived by teachers as adequately supportive or effective: "**asking questions** about school and school processes, **attending** events at school or outside of school that parents deem supportive of children's learning, and **altering/augmenting** children's educational trajectories to improve outcomes" (p. 119, emphasis in original).

Moreover, since school-based communication can be difficult for immigrant parents, the non-school settings in which they do seek and receive information, resources, and support may be particularly significant in guiding how they access and understand formal education in the resettlement context. For example, Alice A. Miano's (2011) ethnographic study of Mexican immigrant mothers in California with elementary school-aged children suggested that one way in which the mothers accessed resources and support for their children's education was by leveraging what she terms family literacy networks – that is, social networks that connect family and community members with differing literacies in written and spoken English.

Research indicates that immigrant parents seek out sources of information, aid, and help within their communities in response to the barriers they encounter regarding access through formal institutions to various types of services or resources. For instance, a strand of research on access to healthcare focuses on the help-seeking behaviors and

pathways of immigrant arrivals. Studies suggest that immigrants seek out trusted contacts in community organizations, religious communities, and other social networks to help alleviate or address barriers to accessing and receiving health and mental health services (Guzder et al., 2013; Yun et al., 2016). Moreover, Yun and her colleagues' (2016) study examining the help-seeking activities of Bhutanese refugees resettled to the United States found that these efforts to seek help from community networks were "not stigmatized and was instead consistent with societal norms valuing mutual assistance" (p. 526).

In addition, the ethnocultural communities in which immigrant families are embedded can have more direct significance for the education and cognitive development of children. The psychologist Barbara Rogoff (2003) argues that children's learning not only emerges from individual development, but also takes shape through participation in the cultural activities of communities. Therefore, social interaction and collaboration among parents, educators, the children themselves, and other significant stakeholders in the community can facilitate incorporation of cultural processes and meaning into children's education. In other words, the cultural contexts and community settings in which the lives and social experiences of children and families are situated can shape their overall learning and cognitive development.

The educational activities that take place in ethnic religious organizations like Korean CCNs may certainly not be evident, visible, or recognized in mainstream institutions or by school stakeholders as sufficiently valuable for supporting schooling outcomes, particularly those that possess significant ethnocultural dimensions. My study will contribute to literature on not only these types of learning activities, but also the learning experiences and social interactions of immigrant and minoritized parents and

families that more broadly shape orientations to and actions regarding children's schooling experiences and overall development.

Parent Involvement/Engagement and the Salience of Ethnic Church Communities

In this dissertation, I use the terms parental involvement and parental engagement interchangeably and broadly to mean the ways in which the parent participants in my study are concerned with and act in relation to their children's learning, formal education, and overall development. I borrow from the findings of a qualitative study of the engagement of Black mothers and grandmothers in children's mathematics learning conducted by the mathematics education scholars Kara Jackson and Janine Remillard (2005) to conceptualize parent involvement/engagement as involving three broad realms and dimensions of parenting activities:

(1) *Involvement in children's learning:* This expands the understanding of children's education to include deliberate opportunities to advance overall learning and "the ways that parents work to structure, foster, and support their children's learning in a variety of contexts, not just those that are related to school" (p. 68).

(2) *Involvement in children's schooling:* This type of engagement more narrowly focuses on supporting school-related activities and assignments, consulting with teachers and other school staff, and supervising children's overall school progress.

(3) *Involvement in children's school:* This approach to school engagement includes the more visible forms of parental involvement, such as participation

in school associations and committees and attendance at school-sponsored events and programs.

This dissertation contributes to the rich bodies of scholarship on immigrant acculturation, the significance of religious institutions, and parental engagement in the following ways:

(1) *Immigrant acculturation:* Theoretical and empirical work on the acculturation experiences of immigrant populations can provide important and often broad, bird's-eye perspectives of patterns of immigrant experiences and outcomes, such as educational attainment and economic prospects. This study adds to scholarship that illuminates deeper processes and mechanisms by which significant ethnocultural institutions shape immigrant life.

(2) *Religious institutions:* A large body of work suggests that religious involvement is good for immigrant belonging and acculturation, as well as other, more specific dimensions of immigrant life, such as mental health, emotional well-being, and economic stability. Additional research points to the salience of educational resources for Asian American and Asian American academic outcomes, including explicitly academic programs that take place in churches and other religious organizations. Less attention is paid to the influence of more holistic parental strategies regarding children's education that involves ethnic religious institutions as well as to the less direct or explicit educational impacts of church-based resources; my study will fill this gap.

(3) *Religion and parental involvement in education:* Activities and processes

relevant to children's education which happen within religious organizations

can be particularly obscure, especially to schools and educational stakeholders

in mainstream institutions. However, these experiences are no less significant,

particularly for immigrant and minoritized parents to whom ethnocultural

institutions like churches are important. This study will expand notions of

what family involvement might look like through examining the experiences

of families who seek and receive significant support in heritage-cultural

settings and faith-based organizations.

Central to this research is the understanding and recognition of the Korean ethnic

church's important role in meeting the social, practical, religious, and cultural needs of

Korean immigrant and Korean American congregation members throughout their

residence in the United States, and therefore its significance for shaping the ways that

parents navigate and act on behalf of their children's formal education and overall

development.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods

Pivoting the Project

When I began developing my dissertation project, I intended to conduct an in-depth qualitative study examining the ways that resettlement agencies, aid organizations, and community contacts and networks shape the resettlement experiences of refugee and asylee families, focusing on the implications for the education and overall development of refugee youth. The original project emerged from prior research conducted on behalf of the International Rescue Committee (IRC) as part of a team examining the needs of refugee youth and families in the Charlottesville, Virginia area (Lawrence et al., 2018). The needs assessment prompted my curiosity about not only how refugee and asylee parents make sense and make use of resources provided by the formal resettlement institutional apparatus, but also where else and how they seek, access, and receive additional support relevant to the education of children and integration into the resettlement context.

The Covid-19 global pandemic developed as I was preparing to begin data collection for my dissertation, bringing social functions and in-person activities, including research, to a standstill. As the Covid-19 vaccine became widely available in 2021 and research activities gradually resumed, I hesitated to pursue my initial research agenda, due primarily to two ethical and logistical concerns. Firstly, I was leery about asking already vulnerable parents and families with experiences of forced migration, whose resources were strained due to the pandemic, to dedicate time, effort, and energy

to participating in interviews for my study. Secondly, due to the U.S. military's withdrawal from Afghanistan in the summer of 2021, resettlement agencies that had previously consented both to make staff members available for interviews and observations and to facilitate interviewee recruitment efforts were inundated with Afghan asylee clients. This influx of individuals in need of assistance meant that the agency and its staff had limited time and resources; I was therefore hesitant to place any additional burden on the busy staff members for my project. I had to adjust my research plan in order to complete my dissertation. Guided by my dissertation advisor and with the approval of my committee members, I pivoted my study to address essentially the same fundamental research questions – about how non-school settings shape the ways that newcomer families navigate formal education and life in a receiving society – in relation to a different population and a different influential institution.

In my revised project, the population of interest comprises Koreans with backgrounds of immigration who are living in the United States. The conditions and circumstances of the migration journey are, of course, vastly different for forced migrants than for Korean immigrants. However, as newcomers to a new country, both groups rely on community organizations and social networks to ease their transition to the receiving society. The process of refugee resettlement in the United States is prescribed by U.S. law and involves the assistance of designated resettlement agencies, such as Episcopal Migration Ministries, Global Refuge, or the IRC, which provide support and assistance to help refugees become settled in their new community (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2024; RCUSA, 2024). Refugees may also turn to other contacts within the resettlement community, including co-ethnics and ethnocultural institutions and organizations, for

additional support. Similarly, Korean immigrants make use of ethnocultural institutions and networks to provide information, resources, and general support. The Korean ethnic church is one of the most significant sources of support for both newly arrived immigrants and more established Korean immigrants and Korean Americans (Hurh & Kim, 1990b; V. H. Kwon et al., 1997; Min, 1992, 2006b). The importance of Korean ethnic CCNs within the ecology of Korean life in the United States make the new institution and population of this study appropriate to pursue my research questions. In addition to this substantive rationale, I shifted to this population and institution due to a pragmatic concern. I anticipated that personal and family connections to the Korean community in the research site would facilitate recruitment efforts and development of relationships and trust in the field. Ultimately, this shift in direction has yielded a project that is more personally meaningful than the research I had originally intended to pursue.

Interpretivist Underpinnings of the Research

The methodology and design of this dissertation are underpinned by a set of interpretivist assumptions. Epistemologically, I view knowledge as not merely the behaviors, actions, and objects under observation, but rather as the meanings attributed to them by individuals, such that meaning and knowledge are co-constructed by the researcher and the participants. The nature of the reality that flows from such an epistemological stance is not reified; my ontological understanding is that reality is constructed and reconstructed through interactions that take place between individuals and social worlds (Erickson, 1984; Merriam, 1998). That is, the epistemological and ontological orientations of this research are intimately interwoven, and what counts as knowledge and reality are negotiated in the interpretation-in-interaction by the

participants and me as the researcher. The methodological implications of this interpretivist paradigm are a concern with examining action together with meaning; situating meaning within broader social structures; and being open to the emergence of patterns and categories (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Moreover, I situate my work within the disciplines of sociology and philosophy of education, and therefore combine analysis of how social positioning and social networks influence educational outcomes with examination of how assumptions and beliefs about the aims of education, human flourishing, and a good society shape both ethical orientations and actions (Burbules & Warnick, 2006; C. Taylor, 2003).

I draw on these premises in the research design of this project in the following ways. I adopt the methodological approach of ethnographic case study, which brings together the methodologies of case study and ethnography and allows deep and holistic examination of a sociocultural phenomenon. I also use modified phenomenological interviews as my primary data collection method, a method which allows for the co-construction of meaning: first, by offering participants an opportunity to interpret and situate their experiences and knowledge during the interview, and second, by engaging my reflexivity as a researcher, during the interview as well as after its conclusion during data analysis. I discuss my methodological choices and selection of methods in more detail below.

Case Study in the Ethnographic Tradition

The methodology I use to achieve my research aims in this study is the ethnographic case study, which combines the methodologies of case study research and ethnography.

Case Study

The case study is a methodological approach concerned with the study of specific, individual cases of broader cultural, social, or organizational phenomena and may take the form of an in-depth examination of a single case, or examination of multiple cases of a particular phenomenon, as in the present study (Stake, 2005; Thomas, 2011; Yin, 2006, 2018). This study is concerned with the ways Korean ethnic CCNs shape how Korean American and Korean immigrant parents understand, interpret, and act in relation to the education and development of children and to their overall experience of life in the United States as the phenomenon under investigation. Because this sociocultural phenomenon is experienced and understood differently by each participant, I have chosen to treat each participant as its own unique case and the overall project as a multiple-case study.

Within-case analysis yielded deep insight into each participant's experiences of the Korean ethnic church, and cross-case analysis across all cases shed light on broader social and cultural patterns related to the role and function of Korean CCNs. This means, for instance, that within-case analysis of each Second Gen parent – those who had immigrated as adolescents and those who were U.S.-born – can illuminate distinct, individual experiences of navigating U.S. school life, and cross-case analysis of all eight Second Gen cases can shed light on educational experiences that converge due to a shared identity as minoritized students of Korean descent. In addition, conducting analysis across multiple cases enabled me to detect patterns in the codes and categories that emerged from within-case analyses and to identify whether and how different perspectives were consistent with one another, thereby supporting data triangulation and

overall study robustness (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2018). In short, the multiple-case approach

generated a holistic accounting of each specific case as well as facilitated a more

complete understanding of the role of Korean CCNs from the perspective of the

participants, making this methodology well suited to address my research agenda

(Rossman & Rallis, 2017; Stake, 2006; Thomas, 2011; Yin, 2018).

Ethnography

Ethnographic approaches are used to conduct social research in a variety of

disciplines to examine actions and behaviors that take place in given social contexts and

ways in which these actions and behaviors are understood by participants. A keystone of

ethnography is the centrality of notions of the cultural, although the concept of culture is

often misunderstood, imprecisely defined, and contested (Spindler & Spindler, 1997;

Wolcott, 1990, 2008). I understand the notion of that which is cultural as being fluid and

continually constituted and reconstituted through interaction and practice by people

(Geertz, 1973), and as encompassing "the acquired knowledge that people use to interpret

experience and generate social behavior" (Spradley, 1979, p. 5), a conceptualization

which permeates the design of this study. For instance, I recognize that among my key

tasks as the researcher is to engage in cultural interpretation, that is to learn from the

perspective of the group members, or insiders, *"what counts as cultural knowledge"*

(Green et al., 2012, p. 309, emphasis in original). I do this by applying my etic

interpretation to the emic perspectives of the participants (the insiders) in an effort

identify patterns in their behaviors, actions, and meanings (Erickson, 1984; Wolcott,

2008).

I refer to my methodological approach as ethnographic rather than as ethnography. Ethnographic research traditions have typically situated the researcher within the research context over an extended period of time during which they engage in participant observation (Anderson-Levitt, 2006; Wolcott, 2008). However, due to constraints associated with conducting research in an environment shaped by the Covid-19 pandemic, I could not embed myself in the study site to conduct participant observation. I therefore turned to more recent developments in the use and availability of various modes of communication, types of technology, and virtual community spaces that have broadened notions of how ethnographic research may be conceptualized and pursued. Along with other researchers who have used virtual communication technologies to conduct research remotely when conditions limit the practice of traditional, in-person research, I conducted online interviews using videoconferencing software that has come into more widespread usage in educational, workplace, research, and other settings since the pandemic (e.g., Howlett, 2022). While this study is not an ethnography, it is ethnographic due to its concern with culture and with applying a cultural lens to data analysis.

Ethnographic Case Study and Narrative Story-Telling

For this study, I adopted an ethnographic case study methodology that guided my approach to research design and data analysis. I conducted in-depth, semi-structured remote interviews as the primary method of generating data. In order to foreground culture/the cultural in these interviews, I turned also to methodological approaches that are concerned with narrative story-telling. Specifically, I drew on the idea that creating and telling narratives are associated with life changes, or a break from things "as they

should be" (Bruner, 1990, as cited in Murray, 2018, p. 264), and the idea of narrative story-telling as constitutive of identity, as "[we] seek to provide our scattered and often conflicting experiences with a sense of coherence by arranging the episodes of our lives into stories" (McAdams, 2006, p. 11). I did so based on the rationale that the experience of migrating from one national context and making a life in another constitutes a rupture from the expected or familiar, and that participation in this study could offer an opportunity for sense- and meaning-making through the sharing of stories. These interviews generated rich narratives and reflection.

Notions of the cultural were also interwoven into my interview protocol and in the follow-up questions I used to probe for additional responses or deeper reflection. For instance, I posed questions that referred explicitly to the Korean ethnocultural dimensions of experiences in school, church, and other settings (e.g., "What are some things about your church you consider Korean, what makes your church a Korean church?"), as well as questions that elicited in more oblique ways responses about cultural experiences and interpretations (e.g., "What was it like moving to the United States?"). My strategy for data analysis drew on case study and ethnographic approaches as well. I conducted both within-case and cross-case analysis to identify codes and categories specific to each case and to detect patterns across my data, as well as applied an ethnographic analytical approach to my data so as to interpret actions and experiences as imbued with cultural meanings (Spradley, 1979; Wolcott, 1990, 2008).

Finally, I engaged methodological orientations associated with ethnographic work, such as a high degree of reflexivity, concern with the emic perspectives and

meaning-making activities of participants, and the significance of context and cultural processes (Erickson, 1984; Small, 2009; Spindler & Spindler, 1997).

Positionality

Qualitative, interpretive research is inherently a social undertaking, and as such, it is intertwined with the identity, social relationships, and experiences of the researcher, such that my perspective and identity have shaped the research project at all stages. Therefore, it is important to discuss aspects of my own identity, background, values, biases, and relationships that may influence the way I come to and conduct this research, including how I formulated the research questions and research design of this project, how I undertook the collection of data, and how I understand, interpret, and make meaning of the data in this study. In this section, I establish my roles and reflexivity as a qualitative researcher and discuss how my positionality has shaped this dissertation.

As I introduced at the beginning of the dissertation, my family immigrated to the United States from Korea when my sister and I were very young, about four months and four years of age, respectively. In some respects, my family's home life differed from that of other Korean families in our vicinity, due to the ways we navigated the intercultural space between our own heritage Korean culture and that of the mainstream American society that did not mirror the strategies of other families. For instance, my parents insisted that we speak exclusively in Korean at home, whereas many other Korean immigrant parents in similar circumstances opted to encourage their children to speak primarily in English to ensure quick mastery of the language. As a result, my sister and I can understand and speak Korean fluently, whereas many of our 1.5-to-second generation counterparts may have more limited proficiency. In addition, due to our

immersion in activities as members of a community swim team, my family became more comfortable participating in American mainstream settings than did many other Korean immigrant families. Due to our exposure to American food culture, for instance, my family developed an affinity for non-Korean food and when we dined out, we usually selected a non-Korean restaurant, whereas Korean families around us almost exclusively ate Korean food, whether at home or at a restaurant.

In several key ways, however, our upbringing and life were typical of many Korean immigrant families around us. Social interactions with other Korean immigrant and Korean American children and families, often in co-ethnic spaces, permeated our childhoods. Many of my memories from my childhood and adolescent years are linked to the Korean churches we attended. I recall searching in the bushes and tall grasses surrounding our church in Raleigh for colorful plastic eggs filled with candy on Easter morning. For some time, I attended *Hangeul hakgyo* on Saturday mornings and stopped going when my parents determined that I had acquired sufficient mastery of Korean. From then on, we supplemented heritage language instruction by speaking only Korean at home and watching Korean television shows together, which we rented each week by the dozen on VHS from the Korean video store. I credit my Korean proficiency to repeated and regular immersion in the home.

My family attended numerous church picnics, some of which were held in the picnic area of local public parks. On the foil-covered grates of the outdoor park grills, the men cooked large quantities of *bulgogi* (불고기; marinated grilled beef) that had been marinated by the *ahjummas* the previous day, as the women filled paper plates with rice from giant rice cookers alongside lettuce wraps and *kimchi* (김치; fermented vegetable

side dish). I remember looking around the public park, which felt like a quintessentially American setting, and marveling that I was surrounded by so many faces that looked like my own.

Later in my teenage years, I was an indifferent member of the English language youth group at my family's church in the Washington, DC metropolitan area, Agape Love Fellowship Church (ALFC), which I attended regularly, but not actively. Occasionally, I volunteered for behind-the-scenes roles like designing and editing the youth group yearbook, cutting up fruit during youth group meetings at the youth pastor's house, or lending my voice to the chorus of the church holiday musical. When there were SATs or final exams to prepare for, I stayed home from church to study, with my parents' full approval, which I suspect frustrated the youth pastor and distinguished me from church peers who were more dedicated attendees and more active youth group members than I.

As a college student, I participated only sporadically in religious activities. For instance, I occasionally attended a campus-based Lutheran service at St. Paul's Chapel on Columbia University's campus, or services at churches in Morningside Heights, such as Riverside Church, an interdenominational church, or Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine, an Episcopalian congregation. I joined Muslim friends for Iftar during Ramadan and welcomed opportunities to attend Shabbat dinner. In retrospect, I was eager to expose myself to faith practices and traditions different from what I considered a somewhat rigid and limited Southern Baptist upbringing.

My personal experiences, observations, and participation in religious settings, my identity as a Korean American and Korean immigrant, and the reading, thinking, and

writing I have done as part of my intellectual training have shaped the development of my research questions and design of this study. My curiosity about how significant non-school settings shape the ways that immigrant families experience, understand, and act in relation to education and life in the United States emerged from my family's relationship to both the Korean churches and other mainstream cultural environments (such as the swim team) in which we participated, and in turn shaped the development of the research questions that I address in this dissertation. Furthermore, my understanding that meaningful personal and family narratives emerge in the recounting of stories has shaped my methodological decisions, that is, my selection of ethnographic case study as the methodology and of intensive phenomenological narrative interviews as the primary method of generating data.

In addition, my identity, experiences, and relationships have positioned me both as an insider and as an outsider to the participants of my study and in my research context. I hold insider status due to my familiarity with the structures and practices of Korean ethnic churches, understanding of Korean cultural norms and etiquette, and my identity as a Korean, Korean immigrant, and native speaker of Korean. Moreover, my parents remain active and trusted members of ALFC, the church I attended during my middle and high school years and which several participants attended at the time of their interviews. (In the next section, I will introduce in more detail the participants of this study.) That is, as the researcher, I could be an insider to the community of interest in this study due to cultural and social experiences in common (Villenas, 1996). My insider status established a shared frame of reference with my participants that facilitated the formation of trust and their willingness to participate in this project.

Simultaneously, I am an outsider to the community I studied for this project due to several factors: I am not particularly religious at this stage of my life, I am married to a non-Korean partner, and I am not a parent. Although my research is concerned with the interactions between religious affiliation and the experiences of immigrant communities, I am no longer an active member of a religious community. When I do participate in religious activities, I tend not to go to Korean ethnic churches or Southern Baptist churches like the one I grew up attending. Rather, I gravitate toward multinational, diverse nondenominational or Episcopalian churches, or attend Catholic mass with my in-laws during holiday visits. In addition, I am married to a White man who was raised with different faith and cultural traditions than I was. Unlike the participants I interviewed, my husband and I do not have children of our own and therefore lack direct experience as parents, though there are many young people we love and whose well-being we care about, including our niece and two nephews.

Finally, I held outsider status because I approach the interviews and this project from the perspective of a Ph.D. student and researcher. Respect for elders is an important cultural value, yet Koreans tend also to have a deep respect for education and the pursuit of formal educational attainment that influenced how the participants in this study related to me. Participants who are my parents' age or older – and therefore my elders – treated me with respect, including addressing me by the title of "teacher," or *seonsaengnim* (선생님). *"Nim"* (님) is an honorific suffix attached to the titles of those in respected professions, such as doctors and professors, people in positions of authority, such as

executives in a company, or respectful kinship terms (for instance, *Halmeonim,* 할머님[5]).

That is, the distance created by the respect afforded me by my participants helped

position me as an outsider.

My multiple roles as an insider and outsider have supported my ability to carry

out this project, for instance by facilitating my access to the research context and

participants, and have enabled me to reach a deeper understanding of the experiences,

meaning-making, and perspectives of the participants in this research. At the same time,

my insider-outsider status has required me to engage in a consistent project of reflexivity

about how my multiple identities relate to the research so as to maintain research rigor

(R. B. Johnson & Christensen, 2012). To maintain reflexivity, I explicitly noted and

accounted for ways that my own experience and meaning-making as a Korean American

and Korean immigrant shaped my research process and analysis during interviews, data

analysis, and writing. I did so by writing fieldnotes during each interview and recording

additional reflective notes directly after the interview and during data analysis, as I

elaborate below in my discussion of data collection processes.

My approaches to data collection and analysis have been shaped by my

positioning vis-à-vis the relationships that gave me access to the research setting and

participants, with implications for how knowledge has been co-constructed with the

participants. Two of the most important people in my life – my parents – and several of

the participants in this study are linked to overlapping CCNs, such that there are

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[5] The honorific suffix might not be appended to the kinship term for one's own grandmother or other family elder in favor of a more intimate and familiar term. For instance, I use the more familiar *Halmeoni* (할머니, Grandma) to address my grandmother, rather than the more formal *Halmeonim* (할머님, Grandmother), which I used during interviews to refer to the grandmother of a participant's young child.

relatively few degrees of separation between my parents and some study participants. In addition, I grew up not just exposed to, but rather fully immersed in Korean traditional beliefs about age-based hierarchy and respect. To this day, whenever I encounter Korean elders – regardless of setting, whether I am at a Korean church or grocery shopping at H Mart, for instance – I automatically smile, bow, and greet them in Korean. Interlinkages between the CCNs of my parents and of the participants, as well as the degree to which I have internalized norms of respect for elders, shaped methodological decisions made throughout the study. While conducting interviews, for example, there were moments I did not push or probe further about sensitive topics, which I noted in my fieldnotes and reflective notes.

Moreover, the knowledge that my parents are part of complex webs of social relationships that involve my interlocuters to varying degrees shaped my meaning-making both while conducting interviews and while analyzing data, such that my interpretation is ultimately, perhaps, less critical than may have been the case in the absence of these social connections and relationships.

Research Context and Participants

Study Site

The site for this study was the greater Washington, D.C. metropolitan area and comprised three Korean ethnic churches located in the region: Abundant Grace Church, Agape Love Fellowship Church, and Faith Community International Church. The oldest and largest of the three churches represented in this research is Agape Love Fellowship Church (ALFC). ALFC was established in 1974 with the assistance of the Southern Baptist Convention and operated primarily as a Korean church with English-language

youth and children's programs until 2018, when the ALFC English Ministry (EM) was officially established (ALFC website, 2024). The EM and Korean Ministry (KM) of ALFC share an overarching infrastructure and facilities. Fourteen participants in this study are current or former members of ALFC. ALFC is the church that I attended as a middle and high school student, my parents are both active members, and my mother is the office manager of the ALFC Korean Ministry (KM). My and my family's connections to ALFC made it an ideal site for initial recruitment for this study.

A former member of ALFC who participated in this study connected me with contacts at Abundant Grace Church (AGC), a non-denominational and primarily a Korean ethnic church which she had also attended for a time. AGC holds worship services twice each Sunday in Korean and one service in English, as well as one Spanish service (AGC website, 2024). Two participants in this study currently attend AGC, and one participant is a former member.

The third church represented in the study, Faith Community International Church (FCIC), is a member of the national Presbyterian Church in American (PCA) and has both a Korean Congregation (KC) and English Congregation (EC), which similarly to the KM and EM at ALFC operate separately while maintaining their relationship. The two congregations at FCIC are located in separate buildings, however, and a Chinese church congregation makes use of the FCIC-EC building to hold their own worship services (FCIC-EC and FCIC-KC websites, 2024). Two participants, Amelia and Evelyn, are members of FCIC. Table 3.1 summarizes the participants and church affiliations represented in the study.

Table 3.1

Church Affiliations Represented in the Study

Church	Denomination	Participants
Abundant Grace Church (AGC)	Non-Denominational (ND)	Chloe Laura Jane (former member)
Agape Love Fellowship Church (ALFC)	Southern Baptist Convention (SBC)	Mrs. Ahn Mr. & Mrs. Chung Ellen Eun-ju Jae Joo-hyun Mrs. Kwak Melissa Olivia Yeong-cheol Amelia (former member) Jane (childhood member) Mrs. Nam (former member)
Faith Community International Church (FCIC)	Presbyterian Church in America (PCA)	Amelia Evelyn

Participant Recruitment

Two recruitment strategies were used to reach participants for this study. Recruitment began in early 2022. Initially, I leveraged existing relationships to disseminate information about the project to potential participants. My parents, who are active members of ALFC, distributed an information sheet about the project to two groups of potential participants at ALFC: (1) parents of young children currently enrolled in K-12 education, and (2) parents whose children are now adults and themselves parents of children in K-12 education. Fifteen potential participants responded to these recruitment efforts; ultimately, twelve of these individuals participated in a total of 11

interviews for this study. (One couple, Mr. and Mrs. Chung, elected to participated in a joint interview.)

In addition, I used snowball sampling methods to contact and recruit additional interviewees by asking participants at the end of interviews either to share the study information sheet with other contacts or to provide contact information for other potential participants who agreed to be contacted by me about the study. Snowball sampling increases the number of respondents, builds upon trust generated with participants who deem the researcher as worthy of trust, and enhances the likelihood of generating richer data from deeper interviews (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). When this recruitment approach is used, the participant pool is more likely to be members of the same, similar, or overlapping social networks (Small, 2009). This may not, therefore, be understood to constitute a representative sample, however, it does not detract from my study aim to seek insight into the significance of social ties developed via CCNs. Five additional participants were referred by prior interviewees and all agreed to be interviewed.

Table 3.2

Early Wave Parents and Recent Wave Parents

Interviewee	Children	Immigration Year	CCN Affiliation
		Early Wave Parents	
Mrs. Ahn[6]	1 adult son; 1 adult daughter	1976 (with husband, who immigrated in 1967)	ALFC
Mr. & Mrs. Chung[7]	2 adult sons	2000 (with husband & both sons)	ALFC

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[6] A daughter, Amelia, was also interviewed for this study.
[7] A son, Yeong-cheol, was also interviewed for this study.

Ellen[8]	2 adult daughters	1973 (with husband)	ALFC
Mrs. Kwak[9]	1 adult daughter; 1 adult son	1998 (with younger son; husband & older daughter immigrated in 1995)	ALFC
Melissa	2 adult sons: Jonah (born in U.S.; has 4 children) Aaron (born in U.S.; has 2 children)	1980 (unmarried/ single)	ALFC
Mrs. Nam	2 sons: Dae-hyun (29 years old; born in Korea) Dae-seong (27 years old; born in U.S.; married) 1 daughter: Clara (21 years old; born in U.S.)	1995 (with husband & oldest son)	Formerly ALFC
Recent Wave Parents			
Eun-ju	1 daughter: Bora (10 years old; born in U.S.) 1 son: Jesse (5 years old; born in U.S.)	2011 (with husband)	ALFC
Joo-hyun	2 sons: Jong-in (11 years old; born in Korea) Jong-soo (6 years old; born in Europe)	2021 to U.S. (with family)	ALFC
Olivia	1 son: Min-su (6 years old; born in U.S.)	2016 (with husband)	ALFC

Note: Early Wave Parents include first-generation Korean American participants who immigrated from Korea to the United States as adults over the age of 19 (in Korea, 19 is the legal age of adulthood). The interviewees in this study arrived between 1973 and

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[8] A daughter, Evelyn, was also interviewed for this study.
[9] A son, Jae, was also interviewed for this study.

2000. One participant was unmarried and immigrated to the United States by herself; other participants were married and arrived with their spouses and/or children. Their children are now adults and may have children of their own. Recent Wave Parents include first-generation Korean Americans and Korean immigrant participants who arrived as adults and immigrated post-2000. The participants in this study immigrated between 2011 and 2021. All of the study's participants in this group immigrated with spouses and/or children, and came directly from Korea, except for one participant who arrived from Europe. Their children are young and participate in K-12 education.

Study Participants

Seventeen Korean American and Korean immigrant parents took part in 16 total interviews for this study. All participants in this study are ethnically Korean; all but four participants were born in Korea. The earliest to emigrate from Korea to the United States arrived in 1973, less than a decade after the 1965 Amendment to the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952. She and six other participants in the Early Wave Parents group immigrated to the United States between 1973 and 2000. Three participants immigrated more recently as part of the first-generation, Recent Wave Parents group. The most recent participant to arrive came to the United States in 2021, after having lived in Europe between 2015 and 2021.Six participants are part of the Second Gen Parents group, four of whom were born in Korea and immigrated to the United States with their families in late childhood to adolescence, and four who were born in the United States.

Table 3.3

Second Gen Parents

Interviewee	Children	Birthplace	Church Affiliation
Amelia[10]	2 daughters: Jenny (12 years old) Hanna (10 years old)	Born in U.S.	FCIC
Chloe	2 sons:	Born in U.S.	AGC

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[10] Mother Mrs. Ahn was also interviewed for this study.

	Micah (9 years old) Kevin (7 years old) 2 daughters: Grace (4 years old) Alice (2 years old)		
Evelyn[11]	1 son: Ethan (12 years old) 1 daughter: Samantha (8 years old)	Born in U.S.	FCIC
Jae[12]	1 son: Noah (6 years old)	Born in Korea; immigrated to U.S. in 9th grade	ALFC
Jane	2 sons: Caleb (5 years old) Isaac (3 years old)	Born in U.S.	Formerly ALFC (child/youth); formerly AGC; currently attends smaller church
Laura	2 daughters: Rachel (15 years old) Rebecca (12 years old)	Born in Korea; immigrated to U.S. at 9 years old	AGC
Yeong-cheol[13]	2 sons: Jason (9 years old) Samuel (6 years old)	Born in Korea; immigrated to U.S. at 17 years old	ALFC

Note: The Second Gen Parents cohort comprises 1.5-to-second generation Korean American participants, including those who were born in the United States and participants who immigrated with their families during late childhood through adolescence, between the ages of 9 and 17. They are now adults whose parents are part of the first group (first-generation Korean Americans, pre-2000 arrival). Participants in this group have children of their own who are in K-12 schools.

Of these 17 total participants, nine are part of four family dyads. The family dyads

comprise participants of two generations: an Early Wave Parent and their Second Gen

child, who is now an adult with young children enrolled in K-12 schools. One dyad

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[11] Mother Mrs. Kwak was also interviewed for this study.
[12] Mother Mrs. Kwak was also interviewed for this study.
[13] Parents Mr. and Mrs. Chung were also interviewed for this study.

consists of Mr. and Mrs. Chung and their adult son, Yeong-cheol; I interviewed the older

generation, Mr. and Mrs. Chung, together as a group interview, at their request. I

considered each family dyad to be a single case with embedded sub-units, allowing for

within-case analysis, between-subunit analysis, and cross-case analysis across all cases

and subunits. Each non-dyadic interview constituted its own case. Thus, there is a total of

12 cases in this ethnographic multiple-case study, of which four cases have two

embedded sub-units each. This number of cases displays sufficient variation for depth of

understanding as well as enough similarity for analysis across the cases (Stake, 2006).

The total number of participants recruited to take part in this study therefore is consistent

with the recommended numbers of cases both for multiple-case study designs and in-

depth qualitative interview research designs (Roulston & Choi, 2018; Seidman, 2019;

Stake, 2006; Yin, 2018). Table 3.2 summarizes information about Early Wave and

Recent Wave parents, that is, the first-generation Korean immigrant participants; Table

3.3 provides an overview of the Second Gen parents; and Table 3.4 offers information

about the four family dyads.

Table 3.4

Family Dyads

Interviewee (Second Gen)	Children	CCN Affiliation	Interviewee (Early Wave)	Immigration Year	CCN Affiliation
Amelia Born in U.S.	2 daughters: Jenny (12 years old) Hanna (10 years old)	FCIC	Mrs. Ahn	1976 (with husband, who immigrated in 1967)	ALFC
Evelyn Born in U.S.	1 son:	FCIC	Ellen	1973 (with husband)	ALFC

	Ethan (12 years old) 1 daughter: Samantha (8 years old)				
Jae (father) Born in Korea; 9th grade at time of immigration	1 son: Noah (6 years old)	ALFC	Mrs. Kwak	1998 (with younger son; husband immigrated with older daughter in 1995)	ALFC
Yeong-cheol (father) Born in Korea; 17 years old at time of immigration	2 sons: Jason (9 years old) Samuel (6 years old)	ALFC	Mr. & Mrs. Chung	2000 (with husband & both sons)	ALFC

This study's relatively small sample size limits the generalizability of the findings to the experiences of all Koreans living in the United States and who have experiences or backgrounds of immigration. However, an advantage of case study methodology, and particularly studies that use a multiple-case approach, is that it is intended to yield deeper understanding of a phenomenon rather than to widely test a hypothesis for generalizability (Merriam, 1998). In other words, this study offers a rich understanding of the "how" and "why" (Baxter & Jack, 2008) of the phenomenon of the significance of Korean ethnic church participation for Koreans living in the United States.

Methods

Data Collection

In this ethnographic case study, I turn to phenomenological approaches to conducting interviews, which are intended to understand the experiences of a particular

group through the meaning-making of the participants (Pollio et al., 1997; Vagle, 2018). There are various methods for pursuing interviews in the phenomenological tradition, such as descriptive interviews and hermeneutic interviews, which turn the focus toward "interpretive meaning aspects of lived experience material" (Adams & van Manen, 2008, p. 618, as cited in Roulston, 2010, p. 17), while some research that is described as phenomenological may more properly be considered in-depth qualitative interviews, if they do not hew to more rigid assumptions that underpin phenomenological research (Roulston, 2010; Roulston & Choi, 2018; Vagle, 2018; van Manen, 2016).

Seidman's (2019) method calls for a series of three in-depth interviews: the first interview elicits an initial "focused life history" (p. 21), the second focuses on current lived experiences relevant to the topic under study, and the final interview provides an opportunity to make meaning of participants' experiences and situate them in the overall context of their life. While Seidman's phenomenological interviewing method is intended to yield rich data, it requires a large investment of time for participants to take part in three, 90-minute interviews. It became clear early in my recruitment efforts that participants were wary of making such a significant commitment, due to two primary reasons. Firstly, by the time data collection took place, pandemic restrictions had eased, so that participants and their families were kept busy by their children's or grandchildren's involvement in social and extracurricular activities that had previously been limited. Secondly, participants expressed experiencing "Zoom fatigue" due to the increase in online meetings, virtual school, remote work, and other web-based communications that emerged during the Covid-19 pandemic.

I responded to the participants' hesitancy to commit to multiple phenomenological interviews by adopting a modified, condensed version of Seidman's framework of focused life history, current lived experiences, and experience reflection. That is, in lieu of the three-interview series, I used a single intensive phenomenological narrative interview protocol intended to situate participants' narratives alongside "experience contextualization" (Bevan, 2014). This approach also allowed me to draw on a modified form of the life stories interview approach, whereby I asked participants to walk me through key experiences of their life relevant to this research, elicited stories about their daily experiences and routine, and asked them to recount particularly memorable moments of change (McAdams, 2006; Murray, 2018). I began with open-ended questions, such as "I am interested in what your childhood was like. What was school like when you were young?" I then introduced "narrative-generating questions" (Rosenthal, 2004, p. 52), both to expand upon stories the participants had already shared, and to introduce new or different ideas (Murray, 2018; Rosenthal, 2004). This approach to interviewing engaged my reflexivity as a researcher, and due to the questions I posed and aspects of the participants' experiences I chose to probe further, contributed to the co-construction of narrative and meaning-making.

Interviews

Data for this study was primarily generated through semi-structured, in-depth intensive phenomenological narrative interviews with Korean immigrant and Korean American parents. Interviews took place from September 2022 to August 2023, with most taking place in the spring and summer of 2023. At the time data collection took place, the Covid-19 vaccine was widely available to populations of all ages, including

young children. However, several of the participants in my study were reluctant to commit to in-person, face-to-face interactions and expressed strong preference for and comfort with participating in interviews remotely. Therefore, all interviews were conducted remotely using online videoconferencing platforms; one interview was conducted using FaceTime, and all other interviews used Zoom. The typical length of the interviews was between 75 and 90 minutes. Interviews were recorded using the video and audio recording features of the videoconferencing platform.

In addition to an interview protocol that asked broad questions about immigration, education, and participation in Korean ethnic CCNs, I used follow-up questions and probes to explore specific dimensions of their experiences and encourage reflection (Roulston & Choi, 2018). The semi-structured nature of the interview meant that it did not hew strictly and explicitly to the questions and sequence of questions in the protocol; rather, I was responsive to the participants and to the content and flow of each interview. For instance, questions about the immigration journey to the United States might jump to a line of inquiry about a child's first day attending school in the United States rather than about the initial settlement process of finding a place to live, securing employment, or purchasing a vehicle.

Throughout each interview, I kept careful fieldnotes, in which I noted participant responses that struck me as particularly meaningful, narratives or anecdotes I wished to probe further, and additional questions that I wished to ask. I initially added these notes by hand to a printed copy of the interview protocol, on which I also noted the order of topics/lines of questioning by numbering the questions in the order I asked them. Immediately after the conclusion of each interview, I created a copy of the protocol

specifically for the interview in which I reorganized the questions in the order they were asked and reproduced my handwritten fieldnotes. I then augmented my interview fieldnotes with reflective journaling, which was a valuable opportunity to elaborate on methodological decisions I made during the interview.

For example, I explicitly addressed in my fieldnotes when, how, and why my own childhood experiences and background prompted me to pursue particular lines of inquiry or ask follow-up questions about specific anecdotes during interviews, such as when participants like Yeong-cheol and Jae, who had immigrated later in adolescence, reflected about how difficult it had been for them to communicate with teachers and school peers during their earliest years in the United States due to language barriers. My fieldnotes read:

> Follow up on [YC]'s comment, re: not saying a word during school 1st year in U.S. Reflective journaling: I guess it's clear why I chose to pursue this thread of inquiry, as someone that couldn't read, and didn't? couldn't? really communicate in English at all until early in 1st grade. M&D were called out by Mrs. Earp during the fall parent-teacher conference about my "disruptive presence" in the class. I'm pretty sure they were mortified, understandably. I don't recall exactly how I felt at the time, but I can't help but think how exciting it must have been to finally be able to understand and speak to my classmates. No wonder I felt sympathy when [YC] stated that his nickname in high school was "Mute," and opted to circle back with probes. What a harsh nickname – and at such a sensitive age!

I also noted and reflected upon instances when I opted not to ask follow-up questions that probed or pursued certain topics, for example when I sensed an experience may have been sensitive or difficult, particularly for a participant I regarded as my elder by life stage. My fieldnotes and reflective notes for the interview with Mrs. Kwak read:

> Interesting – [Mrs. Kwak] on regrets re: her son [Jae]. Come back to this if poss?? Reflective journaling: I wish I had/could have pushed her further about that moment, but she seemed v. upset & sad about it. I hoped that an opportunity to ask further would come up, but it didn't really happen

organically. I could have circled back and asked about it explicitly, but it would have been like pressing my own mom on what I'm certain is a sore spot. I wasn't comfortable with that.

That is, I made deliberate efforts to be transparent and explicit about examining my own experiences and perspectives in relation to the research.

Ultimately, the fieldnotes and reflective journaling notes were incorporated into the final interview transcripts, as I will detail further in my discussion of data analysis procedures. The fieldnotes and reflective journaling notes produced throughout the interview process comprised both data collection and preliminary data analysis, because these forms of researcher reflexivity contributed to the co-construction of knowledge with the participants of the study.

Half of the interviews in this study were conducted in English, and the other half in Korean.[14] There are multiple approaches to handling interviews that have been conducted in a different language from that in which the study is written and presented to the audience (Temple & Young, 2004). I made the decision to translate the data prior to data analysis to maintain consistency in my analysis. Where appropriate, I have provided specific words or phrases in the original Korean alongside translations. For interviews that were conducted in Korean, I used the web-based transcription and subtitling service Happy Scribe to produce Korean-language transcripts. With the aid of the translation tools Google Translate and Papago, a translation software developed by the Korean online platform Naver (the "Google of Korea"), I produced initial English transcripts from Korean transcripts generated by Happy Scribe. Initial transcriptions of interviews

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[14] Mrs. Ahn, Mr. and Mrs. Chung, Eun-ju, Joo-hyun, Mrs. Kwak, Melissa, Olivia, and Mrs. Nam were interviewed in Korean. Amelia, Chloe, Ellen, Evelyn, Jae, Jane, Laura, and Yeong-cheol were interviewed in English.

that were conducted in English were automatically produced by Zoom. I then refined

each of the initial transcripts using the interview recordings both to ensure accuracy of

transcription and translation and to incorporate the fieldnotes and reflective journaling

notes I had taken during the data collection process. My fieldnotes comprised detailed

observations, including impressions in real time of the content of the interview (i.e., what

the participant said) and of my interpretations in relation to the context of the interview as

a whole and reflections as a researcher throughout the study. My fieldnotes also allowed

for cross-checking of my data and supported triangulation (Deggs & Hernandez, 2018;

Donkoh & Mensah, 2023; Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018).

Documents

Documents were an additional source of data to supplement the data generated

through interviews (Wolcott, 2008). Documents such as websites, publications, and other

public resources associated with the churches represented in this study and with other

community contacts and resources provided valuable contextual understanding. For

instance, I used church missions, philosophies, and historical timelines available publicly

to better understand the Korean ethnic CCNs in which participants are involved. In

addition, because church websites and other public documents are available to and used

by the participants, I was able to be more fully immersed in the context in which they

regularly are a part.

In order to protect the identities and maintain the confidentiality of all participants

and institutions, I have substituted pseudonyms for participants and other individuals,

churches, and institutions. Within the dissertation, I cite documents that might contain

identifying information by using a description of the source or an appropriate

pseudonym.

Data Analysis

As research guided by the philosophical and methodological assumptions that

underpin ethnographic approaches, the analytical and interpretive work of the researcher

is as significant to the final product as the data generation methods (Green et al., 2012;

Wolcott, 2008). Therefore, data analysis foregrounded the salience of cultural

interpretation and took place iteratively and recursively through multiple stages of

inductive analysis in which emergent codes, categories, and themes were identified

(Erickson, 1984; Wolcott, 2008). Each case and sub-unit in this multiple-case study was

analyzed separately and then comparatively, as themes which emerged within each

discrete case were compared across the twelve cases (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2018).

An initial stage of data analysis took place as I listened to each interview

recording during the editing and refinement of the auto-generated transcripts of

interviews conducted in English, and during the translation, editing, and refinement of

transcripts of interviews conducted in Korean. During this stage of transcription and

translation, I added the fieldnotes I had taken during interviews and reflective journaling

undertaken after each interview had concluded to the appropriate corresponding sections

of each transcript. This initial stage of analysis provided an opportunity to begin

identifying words and phrases that appeared potentially significant, which I compiled into

comprehensive coding lists. By the end of the first stage of analysis, when I had edited

and read all 16 transcripts, I was able to begin organizing and combining codes into broad

categories or groups of similar codes. These codes and categories formed the basis for an

initial codebook. I uploaded each of the interview transcripts and the initial codebook to the qualitative data analysis software Dedoose.

Once the transcription process was complete, I iteratively and recursively read the transcripts to detect additional significant codes and to identify salient data segments (i.e., quotations) that supported these codes and categories. As I examined each case and dyadic sub-unit individually, I applied the initial set of codes and refined, added to, and combined codes, in the process refining the codebook by combining and grouping together similar or related codes, organizing related parent and child codes into coding hierarchies, and identifying potential broad themes based on code groupings. In addition, throughout data analysis, I generated case memos about each of the participants and wrote analytic memos to note intuitive ideas, emergent patterns, and possible themes.

Within-case data analysis was followed by cross-case analysis, deepening the analytical strength of the study by treating each case on its own as well as amassing findings across the body of data to identify patterns. To undertake cross-case analysis, I examined each case individually then analyzed across the cases to identify shared categories and emergent themes (Yin, 2018). This analytical approach took place by compiling and categorizing the codes and data segments from within-case analysis into a cross-case coding matrix (Saldaña, 2016; Yin, 2018). That is, each case and family dyad sub-unit was placed in its own column of the matrix, each code occupied a row, and data segments were placed into the cells of the matrix, arranged by code-case combination. Creating the coding matrix presented an opportunity to continue organizing and consolidating codes and code groupings, as similar codes were merged and related codes were combined into categories or themes.

The matrix arrangement made comparison and detection of patterns across the codes and categories more visible (Maxwell, 2013). For example, the coding matrix made it easy to visually detect that on the one hand, the code *"Immigration reason: Military"* applied to only one case (Mrs. Nam: "[my husband] didn't want Dae-Hyun to have to go to Korean military service. The way to avoid sending Dae-Hyun to the military was to come to the U.S. and become an American citizen, because then he wouldn't have to go, right?"), suggesting that it was not an impetus for emigrating from Korea that was shared across cases, whereas on the other hand, the codes "Hangeul hakyo," *"Korean language instruction,"* and *"Ability to communicate in Korean"* were applied to transcripts for interviews with participants who spoke about the significance of the Korean language (e.g., Jane, Mr. and Mrs. Chung, Mrs. Kwak, Olivia), suggesting *"Korean heritage language maintenance"* as a theme encompassing the aforementioned language-related codes to be meaningful across cases.

Convergence and divergence across the cases allowed for more robust, holistic analysis of the social phenomenon. Undertaking multiple rounds of coding and analysis provided opportunities to test these codes and themes across the entire body of data for confirming and disconfirming evidence (Erickson, 1984; Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2011).

Reflections on Research and the Covid-19 Pandemic

I return to the beginning of this chapter to reflect upon the experience of conducting this research and completing this dissertation against the backdrop of the Covid-19 global pandemic. In February 2020, as news circulated about the emergence of a new, highly contagious virus, I returned from presenting a paper at the 32nd Annual

Ethnographic & Qualitative Research Conference in Las Vegas, Nevada, in retrospect perhaps a risky place to be at that time. Shortly thereafter, schools and universities closed their physical doors and shifted to remote instruction, churches and other religious institutions shut down in-person activities and began holding worship services online, and restaurants and other businesses pivoted their operations. The ways in which people interacted with and related to one another changed, as people became familiar with things like social distancing measures, the wearing of masks, and intensive hand-washing protocols. I learned how to use my sewing machine so that I could sew dozens of fabric masks and distribute them to as many family members, friends, and neighbors as I could. I taught my first course as the instructor-of-record completely virtually, and together, the students and I grappled with realignments across how we envisioned the course of our lives and the place of education in those pathways. Like many people, I worried about my loved ones, tracked with horror and fear the mounting infection rates, and mourned the lives of those who fell victim to the virus.

The Covid-19 pandemic also impacted how social science research was conducted, even after restrictions on conducting in-person research were gradually loosened. I had defended my original dissertation research proposal late in the fall of 2019, and I was prepared to begin data collection early in 2020. Then the Covid-19 pandemic shut everything down, including my project, and there was a high degree of uncertainty about what the future would hold. After the Covid-19 vaccine was introduced in spring of 2021, the situation appeared to stabilize enough that I could resume my project, but it became clear due to global geopolitical events that it would be best to change my project. My new project has shifted in focus to a different research context

and population. My study design reflects the conditions associated with the impact of the pandemic, the overall change in direction of my project, and ways that the participants relate to one another and to this research. Despite my prior connections to the new research site, recruitment efforts were challenging and slow, as parents, already exhausted from educating and supporting their children through the disruptions of the pandemic, were concerned about taking on the additional commitment of participating in interviews for my research. I have made the best choices I could in conducting this project based on the information and resources available at the time, and in the end, this dissertation has been a tremendously valuable learning opportunity which will enhance my future development as a researcher and scholar.

Chapter 4: What Is Education For? Parental Experiences and Orientations to Children's Learning and Development

Chapter 4 focuses on how Korean American and Korean immigrant parents understand formal education in the United States. That is, I examine how the parents in my study make sense of formal education, how interactions with their children shape their perspectives, and how their own experiences of education – whether in Korea, in the United States, or in both national contexts – and other experiences of migration have shaped their understanding of, approaches to, and decisions about their children's education, learning, and overall development. In doing so, I address the former part of the first research question: *How do Korean American and Korean immigrant parents understand and navigate formal schooling in the United States?*

Findings suggest firstly that parents form understanding and develop actions regarding their children's formal education and overall learning and development in response to their conception and ideas about the purposes, roles, and aims of education and learning; conversations with their children about their school and social lives; and knowledge of children's personalities, affinities, and preferences. Moreover, parents' own experiences of immigration, formal education, and post-educational pathways, together with how they interpret and make meaning of those experiences, contribute to how they understand and navigate their children's schooling. For instance, parents may hope children accomplish upward socioeconomic mobility through education if they experience economic instability in their own post-immigration circumstances.

Conversely, parents who felt an economic aim of education was too narrow or limiting may take a more holistic view of children's learning. Finally, findings suggest that the social, economic, cultural, historical, and material circumstances which define and shape the unique experiences of the three generational cohorts in my study – Early Wave, Recent Wave, and Second Gen Parents – may in turn have implications for their approaches and orientations to children's education. For instance, Early Wave parents in this study conceived of the aims of education as encompassing more narrow definitions of academic learning, whereas their younger first-generation counterparts in the Recent Wave and the Second Gen parents attached greater value to the role of play, music, sports, and other non-academic activities for children's overall development.

The Role and Importance of Parents: Parent Practices, Schools, and Legitimacy

A large body of research examines the relationship between parent involvement and educational participation, academic outcomes, and behavioral aspects of children's learning and development (X. Fan & Chen, 2001; N. E. Hill & Taylor, 2004; Jeynes, 2007; López et al., 2000; McNeal, Jr., 1999; Wilder, 2014). For instance, Lahaie's (2008) analysis of data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Survey–Kindergarten Cohort suggests that parental involvement, operationalized as learning and cognitive development activities in the home, out of the home, and at school, is positively correlated with key educational benchmarks for the children of immigrants, including increased English proficiency, improvements in math achievement, and enhanced readiness for school.

Indeed, the role of non-school spheres in the development of children is recognized in educational policy and implementation that draw on frameworks such as Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological systems model, which emphasizes the significance of multiple overlapping contexts for the overall development of young people, and Epstein's (1992, 1995) theoretical work which situates students at the confluence of family, school, and community contexts that "operate optimally when their goals, missions, and responsibilities overlap" (Baquedano-López et al., 2013, p. 149). Active parental engagement is assumed in the practices and frameworks of U.S. education systems, including, for instance, parents' supervision of schoolwork and communication with teachers (García Coll et al., 2002; García Coll & Pachter, 2002). However, such approaches risk delegitimizing the value and effectiveness of parent and family contributions to students' education, development, and general well-being, particularly those of immigrants and other minoritized parents, who may experience significant barriers and challenges that preclude or limit their capacity for engagement, such as limited proficiency, comfort, or familiarity with the language, systems, and expectations of the dominant society, as well as constrained material resources or time (e.g., Antony-Newman, 2019; Gilbert et al., 2017; Huot et al., 2016; Patel et al., 2016; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Turney & Kao, 2009). For instance, Korean mothers interviewed about immigrant parents' involvement in U.S. schools identified concerns about their limited English proficiency, differences in cultural values and customs, and possibility of racial or ethnic discrimination as barriers (Sohn & Wang, 2006).

Moreover, research suggests significant complexity and variation in the nature and extent of parental involvement (e.g., Fantuzzo et al., 2004; Grolnick et al., 1997; Kim

et al., 2018; Kohl et al., 2000), even as teachers and parents hold differential expectations and perspectives regarding what entails appropriate and effective parental involvement (Myers & Myers, 2015). Research by education professor Luis Poza and his colleagues cites common critiques by teachers of Latino parents' low school involvement – such as low participation in teacher-parent meetings or deferring to teachers' expertise rather than taking a more active role in children's learning endeavors – and suggests that the strategies Latino immigrant parents *do* utilize for their children's schooling are effective yet inadequately perceived as valuable by schools, such as "asking questions about schooling and education, altering or augmenting children's schooling experience, and attending events related to children's education, albeit often through organizations and social networks outside the school—thus not receiving recognition from teachers or administrators for their efforts" (Poza et al., 2014, p. 120). Similarly, qualitative analysis of an open-ended survey question suggests that Korean immigrant parents consider home-based activities as parental involvement, whereas mainstream American education systems and stakeholders may be more likely to recognize school-based involvement, such as participation in parent-teacher associations, formal school-based volunteer activities, and school events (Kim et al., 2018). Misalignments such as these are constructed and perpetuated at the nexus of factors such as race, class, culture, ethnicity immigration status, and structural and institutional policies and inequalities that ascribe varying degrees of legitimacy to particular parental actions, as well as deficit perspectives that assume minoritized groups do not value or appreciate the importance of formal education (Baker et al., 1999; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Lareau, 2000; Valenzuela, 1999).

Rather, the expertise and "funds of knowledge" (González et al., 2005; Moll et al., 1992) that immigrant parents possess ought to be recognized as strengths rather than deficits and leveraged to develop innovative, effective school-home partnerships and programs (Baquedano- López et al., 2013; Melzi et al., 2018; Manning, 2016). In what follows, I focus on the "funds of knowledge" of Early Wave, Recent Wave, and Second Gen Korean American and Korean immigrant parents by examining the ways they understand and navigate children's formal education, drawing on both ideas about the purposes of education, and experiences of education and migration to support and actively engage with and oversee their children's learning and development.

What is Education For? Competing Conceptions of Learning and Schooling

For parents to navigate the education of their children, they must have a sense of how they conceptualize the reasons and ultimate goals for pursuing formal education. For the participants of this study, the aims attached to education ranged from an almost exclusive concern with academic education and achievement, to emphasis on the development of less instrumental capacities and broader orientations, such as innate curiosity and motivation to learn, or the nurturing of robust social and emotional health. As the parents described how they envisioned their children's formal education in relation to their life trajectories, they consistently used the language of what it might look like for their children to "live well" or to "live a good life." For instance, Mrs. Nam, an Early Wave parent who was interviewed in Korean, indicated that she and her husband tell their now-adult children that, "Dad and Mom just want you to live well" ("아빠 엄마는 너희들이 잘 살면 됐어"). Similarly, Recent Wave participant Joo-hyun noted, also in Korean, "I pray for them to have a good life" ("애들이 잘 살길 기도하고"),

while Laura, a Second Gen parent, described wanting her children to pursue "something that is fulfilling for them."

Linear Progress and Pathways

Conventional conceptualizations of education envision learning as linear progress through the formal educational system and directly toward a career pathway and economic stability. Early Wave parents largely framed the impetus for immigrating to the United States through the lens of accessing more opportunities – understood both as more numerous and diverse – for their children. While they tended to use more lofty and vague language about better lives and satisfaction, they explicitly invoked employment as a key concern and accomplishment for their children. Mrs. Kwak came to the United States with her younger son Jae (also interviewed for this dissertation) in 1998, three years after her husband had immigrated with Jae's older sister, due to hesitation about relocating to a strange and unfamiliar place. Ultimately, she is satisfied with the decision to migrate, due to their children's "settling into their correct place," such that,

> if the children have a job they like and are good at, if they have a job like that, that would be happiness, [my husband and I] thought like that. But fortunately, both Jae's older sister and Jae himself just got connected to a good job, so I am very thankful. It's also a problem of how greedy (ambitious) you get. If you understand your child's abilities, personality, and interests, you can be grateful that he got a good (decent) job.

While Mrs. Kwak suggests that one should not become overly ambitious or overreach oneself on the career pathway and should be content with a job appropriate to one's aptitude and talent, it is clear that she explicitly associates the attainment of happiness and pursuit of a good life with securing a good or decent job. In fieldnotes, I observed that having expressed satisfaction with regard to her children's accomplishments, Mrs. Kwak then made an effort to temper this expression of palpable pride by suggesting that a

"good job" should not come at the expense of allowing ambition or "greed" dominate the career or life pathway.

I noted similar patterns at other points throughout the interview, such as moments when Mrs. Kwak promoted her children's accomplishments paired with efforts to express modesty or emphasize desirable character traits ethical dimensions. For instance, after she had described at length her daughter's training as a pianist ("not just a regular lesson, but in a very professional way, to the extent that she could participate in a big orchestra") and had recounted that Jae's instructor at a renowned music conservatory believed "this child should study oboe in college and offered a 4-year scholarship to study it," Mrs. Kwak was quick to ascribe their skill to their diligence in pursuing lessons they did not particularly enjoy, as "nice" children who were obedient to a father who insisted on intensive musical training. My fieldnotes observe that the latter statement seemed akin to an afterthought relative to her initial praise of Jae's and his sister's musical achievement.

Similarly, Mrs. Nam, an Early Wave parent who immigrated to the United States in the mid-1990s, spoke at length and with pride that all three of her children were pursuing careers in medicine, and only then noted her satisfaction that their chosen career pathway would enable them to do good for their community, and thereby bolster their ability to pursue a good life of meaning and worth. Efforts such as these to balance an emphasis on the children's material, worldly success, such as through attaining a successful career or developing musical proficiency to a level praised by professionals, by remarking on moral or ethical aspects and traits suggest that it is the concern with economic and professional stability and success which primarily guides these Early Wave parents' ideas about their children's educational and career pathways.

In contrast to Early Wave parents' attempts to express a somewhat nuanced understanding of satisfaction as attached to finding the right job as opposed to being greedy for the most prestigious or most lucrative career, the children of Early Wave parents, that is, Second Wave participants, more unequivocally understood economic security to be their parents' goal for them and the primary reason for schooling. Chloe, a stay-at-home mother of four young children under the age of 9 years, stated somewhat wryly that her parents would say they wanted for their children "just like a happy life or whatever. But I think the real answer is financial stability and independence, I think, would be like their bigger things that they really would want for their kids." After describing the day-to-day struggles and economic precariousness that could accompany her parents' work as the owners of a dry-cleaning business, Chloe reiterated:

> I do feel like my parents came in again, [with] like a general goal of financial stability and independence. And so I think, like to them, the most effective route to that is education. And so again, I don't think they pressured me into education, but [at] the same time I do feel like there was a very high value on education.

By financial stability, Chloe means that her parents wanted economic security in the future for their children after they were adults with lives and families of their own, especially in light of their own experiences as entrepreneurs who worked long hours in their working-class business, and further, that they explicitly linked its attainment with formal education.

Such differences in the goals attached to education may be attributed to variable experiences of socioeconomic status and occupational opportunities by the different generations. A large proportion of Korean immigrants to the United States originated from relatively well-educated, middle- and upper-middle socioeconomic status groups,

but many of those who encountered difficulty transferring educational credentials and other professional skills to comparable prospects in the U.S. context responded by pursuing entrepreneurial opportunities, such as opening small businesses, which could mean downward mobility and economic precariousness (Min, 1991, 2006b; Yoon, 2012). Experiences like these made the pursuit of education even more crucial to the project of upward intergenerational mobility via access to enhanced occupational prospects. Even though by 1990, a larger proportion of Koreans living in the United States had higher educational degrees relative to both the White and the total U.S. population, a closer examination suggests a greater rate of postsecondary educational attainment by U.S.-born Korean Americans than by non-U.S.-born Koreans: 25 percent of U.S.-born Korean Americans versus fewer than 15 percent of non-U.S.-born Korean immigrants, respectively, according to an analysis of data from 2000 (Min, 2006b; Yoon, 2012). That is, economic motives for parents' educational aims are situated alongside the broader social, educational, and economic conditions experienced by many Korean immigrants.

For families that immigrated to the United States with limited resources, concerns about the securing the immediate financial stability and ongoing economic status of the entire family drove educational and career decisions. Yeong-cheol immigrated in late adolescence as a 17-year-old high schooler with his older brother, who was college-age at the time, and their parents, Mr. and Mrs. Chung, who also participated in this study. Due to the family's financial situation, Yeong-cheol and his brother decided Yeong-cheol would be the one to focus on schooling, because "[my brother told me] 'you have a brighter future. I'm going to invest my time on you,'" while he himself worked multiple jobs to help support the entire family. Although this afforded Yeong-cheol educational

opportunities, it also channeled him in a direction that prioritized economic concerns over his own affinity or interests:

> If we were financially stable and we didn't have to take care of our parents as a guardian, I think I could have thought of different career, I guess something that I really wanted to do. But because of the situation, my top priority was stable job with a decent pay so that I can feed my family. It kind of shaped my career if that makes sense… I love music and sports, but I couldn't really go into it because it's riskier, and you know, succeeding in that area is a lot harder than typical like known like, so I went to engineering school. It's a lot harder, you know, it's not. It's not, you know, guaranteed I will say. So I think that those are just things that maybe, what if, you know?

In addition to the pressure of struggling to master English proficiency as quickly as possible and to achieve academically, Yeong-cheol carried the additional burden of knowing of his brother's sacrifice for his and their family's sake. The emotional pressure he experienced, sense of responsibility to his family, and question of "what if" underpin Yeong-cheol's approach to raising his own sons, 9-year-old Jason and 6-year-old Samuel.

Innate Curiosity, Desire for Knowledge, and Social and Emotional Development

The children of immigrants may grapple with the pressure to live up to their parents' expectations for traditional academic attainment or to make the parents' decision to move to the United States worthwhile by achieving educational and career success. If fulfilling such expectations comes at the cost of their enjoyment of schooling, motivation to learn, or overall well-being, then by the time they are themselves parents, they may formulate different notions about the aims of education which in turn shape the ways they approach their children's learning and school experiences.

Chloe, who attributes to her parents' financial concern as a primary or even the sole goal of educational attainment, conceptualizes her hopes for the education of her own children in quite different terms:

> I think what I want for my kids in terms of schooling is for them to really enjoy learning and so like, I feel like I walked away from school like trying to get A's to get to the next thing, or to like get something out of it. But I didn't enjoy learning anything, it was just purely for the A. It was purely for the grade. You know what I'm saying? And so what I would hope for [my children] is to like, enjoy learning so if there's a subject or something they really like, seeing the value of learning, and exercising their mind in that way… and seeing the purpose and value of doing that.

That is, Chloe envisions the purpose of her children's education as encompassing the development of a deep desire and joy in learning, rather than a more narrowly and instrumentally defined aim of acquiring knowledge merely to advance to the next stage of education and then to whichever career and life benchmarks follow. Chloe's orientation to her children's education – that is, her concern with fostering her children's intrinsic curiosity and desire for knowledge – makes sense because of the way she understands her own relationship to formal education and academic achievement, which in turn arises from how she interprets her parents' aims for her to achieve economic stability through education, due to their own experiences as working-class immigrant entrepreneurs.

A concern with which pedagogical approaches would help children develop motivation to learn and enjoy learning emerged in other education-related issues and decisions. For instance, Jane, a Second Gen parent who was born in the United States to Korean immigrant parents and raises 5-year-old Caleb and 3-year-old Isaac with her husband, carefully considered the decision of whether to educate Caleb at home or to send him to the local public school. She not only consulted with school-based educators, home-schooling parents, and other contacts in her social networks, but also explored numerous home-school programs, including a song-and-music-based program:

> when I saw those kids I was like, wow, they learned so much… and comparing to kids that I know that go to public school, they don'' know as much or like, they're not as excited about learning as much as these kids

that I saw [being home-schooled]…. We're kind of more of a relaxed easygoing, I think me and my husband, we want the kids to have a really fun, memorable childhood instead of a very like, education focused childhood…. I tried during the pre-K years doing activities and worksheets at home. And instead of having [Caleb] enjoy it, I realized I was making him kind of hate learning. I was like forcing him to learn, or saying, "you have to do two more worksheets," or "you have to like work on your handwriting," or "you have to tell me these letter sounds and what they are." And um I realized that he was crying and having a hard time. I was emotionally distraught teaching him. And so we were just like, this is not fun, and I don't want to take the joy out of you know, learning something new and fun.

In the end, realizing that home-schooling Caleb may preclude his developing an innate motivation and desire to learn, Jane and her husband decided to send Caleb to kindergarten at the local public elementary school.

Whereas older generations of parents, including those among the Early Wave parents, viewed attending school and participating in education as naturally a child's duty or responsibility – or, to borrow from a Korean saying, "the work (job) that children do" – parents of younger children explicitly stressed the importance of enjoyment, personal drive, and desire in regard to education. They not only regarded this dynamic as beneficial for the children themselves, but also derived their own satisfaction of having fulfilled a key responsibility of parents as they witnessed it. A Second Gen parent, Amelia[15] was born in the United States and is currently a full-time mother of two daughters, Jenny (12 years old) and Hanna (10 years old), whose independence and ability to pursue their interests she values:

It's really encouraging as a parent to see your kids really enjoy something and not… have to wake them up and drag them out of bed and argue with them and fight with them and tell them to get dressed, and all this stuff to get going. When they enjoy something, then they'll take the initiative and do it themselves, and they want to get better.

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[15] Amelia's mother, Mrs. Ahn, was also interviewed for this study.

Of course, Amelia appreciates the utility of not having to cajole, argue, bribe, or coerce her children into educational pursuits. More so, however, she experiences pride and reassurance that her daughter is driven by an innate desire for knowledge and the drive to attain it through education, such that Amelia not only considers seriously her daughter's preferences and opinions about the direction of her schooling, but also trusts that if Jenny's overall development is attended to, academic and other learning will follow.

Keenly aware that Jenny tends to be motivated by test scores, grades, and scholastic competition, which she acknowledges is natural in an academically rigorous school district, Amelia hopes her daughter will acquire a more balanced approach to academics:

> I'm like, "you don't have to be so competitive about grades and scores with your friends and classmates, there's more to school than just grades." So it's almost like I'm telling her to chill out a little bit, you know, just relax, and her personality in general is very like, she's super anxious…. So for her, I want to encourage her to just be more relaxed and try and enjoy her childhood a little bit more…. Because I do not want you to have that anxiety and live that kind of life. Just do your best. You try your best, you try your hardest, and if you succeed sometimes, you're also going to fail sometimes. And that's okay, you know?

Amelia is concerned with creating distance for Jenny from the stress and pressure she associates with traditional markers of school achievement, ubiquitous in the external educational, social, and cultural environments in which their family is situated. In addition, she identifies other skills and lessons she sees as worthwhile and important to impart to children, namely, that the experience of trying and failing is itself a valuable learning opportunity.

For younger children, particularly those whom the Covid-19 pandemic limited exposure to mainstream school-based education, parents are more concerned with social

interaction and emotional coping strategies which children may benefit from learning and practicing in school spaces. For instance, Chloe credits the school's adoption of a behavior-based reward system that teaches "connecting to like your emotional zone so like if you're in the red zone, and you're super mad, and you need to kind of calm down" as having a positive influence on her sons Micah (9 years old) and Kevin (7 years old). Perhaps it is not surprising that Chloe emphasized the importance of helping her children develop their emotional capacities: she understood her parents to be, at least outwardly, "emotionally distant" for much of her life.

Valuable educational experiences are not confined to the school environment, and participation in athletic and musical activities offer opportunities for growth and learning. For instance, Yeong-cheol assesses Jason's personality as being quite introverted and shy, and perceives extracurricular sports as a space to develop traits like assertiveness and confidence:

> I'm not saying introvert is a bad thing, but I want him to be more active at least, you know, he can share his thought to other people. He joined the soccer team and I volunteered as head coach of that team… It helped a lot, because, you know, soccer, you gotta speak up, you got to shout… He felt a little uncomfortable, but then, watching me playing you know, I guess the wall kinda got melted. I could see he acted more outgoing.

Moreover, in contrast to his own parents' more hands-off approach to parenting, Yeong-cheol chooses to take an active role in exposing Jason to new situations and helping his son develop characteristics he believes is important to learn and engage.

Navigating Tension between Academic and Holistic Development

Recent Wave parents are familiar with the education systems and practices in both Korea and the United States. This perspective affords them the ability to perceive and navigate tension between the inclination to hew to rigorous academic approaches familiar

to them from education in Korea and feeling of relief that their children have been removed from that environment of intense pressure. Their understanding of and aims for their children's education reflect this tension: desire to allow their children a more "natural" childhood with time for play, leisure, and extracurricular activities, and the urge to "push" their students in academic endeavors.

For instance, Eun-ju and her husband immigrated in 2011 and are the parents of Bora, a 10-year-old daughter, and Jesse, a 5-year-old son. Eun-ju is pleased that in the United States she can enact her belief that "instead of raising [children] strong (i.e., with a lot of pressure), they should play when it's time to play, work when it's time to work, and learn in a less cruel environment." However, she also observes that by the third grade, children need to become disciplined to the habit of studying, because,

> if [Bora] didn't know the basics, then the foundation would start to shake. So it became important to do a few pages of the workbook every day. If it didn't become a habit, it would just get harder. She doesn't like it, but I tell her that everyone, even your mom and dad, have to do things that they don't like to do. Even though your dad doesn't like to work, he has to do it. So in this way, I try to teach responsibility and understanding that you have to do things you don't want to do.

Eun-ju attempts to tread a balance between what she thinks would be her approach had the family moved back to Korea, where the so-called Korean "education fever" and atmosphere of intense academic competition would have induced her to "push" her children so as to prepare them for more rigorous academic work. In fact, she noted that when she heard about the intensive academic activities in which her counterparts in Korea enrolled their children, she felt tempted and even pushed to do the same for her own young children. Eun-ju appeared to experience this pressure especially keenly in the United States, where she understood mothers as having a greater hands-on role and

encountering more decisions about raising and educating their children, due to the contrast between Korea, where "the *hakwon* system is well-developed," and the United States, where "the cost is expensive, and you have to give them rides everywhere they go… So whenever possible, the mom helps with the homework, has to find extracurricular [activities] for them and do that." That is, through the childrearing decisions she faces, Eun-ju negotiates tension between her daughter's ability to enjoy a good childhood full of play and activities that are not strictly concerned with linear academic progress, and an understanding that failure to master "the basics" could risk damage to a "foundation" for a good life of flourishing and satisfaction in the future.

To navigate, make choices, and take actions regarding children's formal education and informal learning, parents must also understand their children's needs and dispositions, as well as the ways in which children themselves experience and understand their school and social worlds. In what follows, I examine ways that parents seek and obtain such knowledge through direct interaction with their children and through the indirect influence of their own experiences, both of education and of being Korean American and Korean immigrants in the United States.

Understanding Children's School Lives

Research suggests that parents' efforts to engage with their children's education by obtaining children's direct insight into school life and practices – that is, by talking to their children to gain information and knowledge, and therefore understanding, about the functioning of schools and children's experiences of formal education – may not be recognized or regarded as valuable parental contributions by mainstream education stakeholders (e.g., Poza et al., 2014). However, parents must first know about what

happens in schools in order to actively participate in ways that may be more legible to and considered more legitimate by teachers, administrators, and others. For the participants in this study, this knowledge and understanding emerges in two significant ways: (1) parents learn about children's school lives by conversing with their children, and (2) apply insights drawn from personal experiences of education and from identities and backgrounds as Korean immigrants and/or children of immigrants.

In contrast to Early Wave parents, their younger counterparts among the Recent Wave parents and Second Gen parents seek and receive information about both academic and non-academic aspects of school through conversations with their children. For instance, Amelia's older daughter Jenny tends to be forthcoming about her school day, particularly the social aspects: "[Jenny] is definitely much more chatty… She's always shared her day ever since kindergarten… she volunteers a lot of useless information, that I don't really need to know. But also… some valid things…. [like] when assignments are due. How did the partner group projects go?"

At times, in order to elicit information about school from their children, parents must leverage conversations with other key contacts. For example, unlike with Jenny, Amelia must directly question and prompt her younger daughter Hanna:

> [Hanna's best friend] will go home and tell her mom all the things that happen at school…. And then her mom will text me and say, "Did you hear about x, y, and z, did you hear that this happened?" And I would, of course, not have heard anything. So when I would ask Hanna, did this happen at school today? All of a sudden she'll remember [and] be like, "Oh yeah, let me tell you about that," and then she'll tell me so, she's not really hiding it. She just doesn't think it's important enough to share.

While Amelia regards details about the daily patterns and events of school to be "useless information," and prefers to elicit practical information about schoolwork itself,

understanding the social and other aspects of the school day helps her to navigate decisions about her daughters' education, such as when a desire not to separate Jenny from her social circle and instead to nurture her social well-being leads the family to send Jenny to the local neighborhood middle school together with her friends.

Parental conversations with children also serve as opportunities to address academic learning, engage more broadly about diverse topics, and understand the child's world. For instance, Yeong-cheol's son Jason attempts to understand difficult academic concepts or to reconcile what he perceives to be divergent messages in conversation with his dad: "he'll ask me something that he couldn't really understand like science, math, English, whatever, we talk about it…. And nowadays... what he always brings up [is]… 'In the Bible it says this. But that's not what I'm learning at school… help me understand.'" Conversations such as these serve multiple purposes. Firstly, they allow parents like Yeong-cheol to understand what a child may or may not understand and subsequently to support and guide his child's academic learning. The conversations also provide parents opportunities to gain valuable insights into how a child observes, understands, and relates to the world around them. Moreover, conversations strengthen ties of trust and goodwill between parent and child, making it more likely that the child will continue to engage in such interactions. Finally, the knowledge, understanding, and relationship gleaned through parent-child conversation supports parents' capacity to navigate their children's education and overall development.

Individuals act in ways that are shaped by their own experiences of life, including the decisions parents make about their children. In interviews, the parents in this study explicitly reflected upon and invoked the significance of their experiences – of schooling,

immigration, or being parented – in guiding their own approaches to raising children and determining how they navigate their children's formal education. For instance, Amelia believes that her mother Mrs. Ahn, a college graduate at a time when postsecondary educational attainment was less common for Korean women, did not feel satisfied about being a full-time mother. However, Amelia decided to be a stay-at-home mom, because she treasures memories of the childhood that having a full-time mother afforded her and wishes to do the same for her daughters. Even though "I do feel judged by my parents for not working… they want to know when I'm going to go back to work… and you're wasting your brain away, that kind of thing," being at home allows Amelia to focus all her time, energy, and attention on raising, understanding, and attending to the needs of her children, which she believes makes her better and happier as a parent, and in turn, her daughters better and happier as students and young people.

The way Amelia experienced and now understands her childhood shaped her decision to primarily focus on raising her daughters. Other participants' childhoods led them in the opposite direction. Olivia is a Recent Wave parent who, together with her husband, immigrated to the United States in 2016 and now is raising their U.S.-born, 6-year-old son Min-su. She describes herself as having been a child with "a very agreeable (compliant) personality" who followed her mom's direction. If her mother told her she had been enrolled in an activity, "I would say, 'Neh [네; yes, often said politely to elders]'… then I would just go… I did what my mom told me, and ultimately, those things were good for me…. [My parents] sacrificed a lot for us." In contrast, her approach to childrearing is less authoritarian and less "all in," so that her goal is "just to try to have fun with Min-su, so that he has a lot of fun spending time with us…. One

other thing, my mom and dad didn't really enjoy their life. But for us, we want to live in a way that we can do what we enjoy while supporting our child." To Olivia, finding balance between a positive childhood for Min-su and a satisfying life for her and her husband is crucial to creating a healthy family life.

Similarly, Yeong-cheol draws on the emotions he attaches to childhood vacations and experiences in his efforts to cultivate a happy childhood for Jason and Samuel: "I couldn't remember the exact location and time. But… I still remember the feeling, right, [of] going to those daily trips, or even like playing catch ball with my dad out in the park when I was in middle school or elementary school." Moreover, Yeong-cheol retains vivid memories of how his father washed and pressed his school uniform weekly for a dozen years of his childhood in Korea, even though they were unable to spend much time together because his father worked long hours. Because of Yeong-cheol's childhood experiences, it is important that his boys experience lingering positive associations and feelings of being cared for, even if they will not be able to retain detailed memories of the events or activities themselves, and the full extent of his love and care for them.

Parents' knowledge of children's academic and social lives and meaning-making of their own experiences contribute to the ways in which they navigate their children's education. So too, does parental assessment of children's character and interests shape how parents choose to act in regard to children's learning and development.

What Children Want: Children's Personalities and Preferences in Educational Decision-Making

Many parents display firm ideas about the kinds of activities their children ought to participate in for broader educational purposes – for instance, the Korean American

and Korean immigrant parents interviewed for this study advocate the necessity of

mastering a sport or athletic activity, as well as a musical instrument. In pursuing these

aims, Second Gen and Recent Wave parents particularly appear attuned and responsive to

their children's personalities, talents, and preferences. For instance, Olivia's 6-year-old

son's choice of both sport and instrument may ultimately rest with her child rather than

her and her husband:

> [Min-su] started piano because [my husband and I] thought it was part of the basics. To be honest, later on I want him to play violin or cello, but I don't know if he will be interested in that. My child really likes the trumpet, so he might end up playing the trumpet later, but for now, he started playing piano for the basics…. As for sports, he used to play soccer. But after he did it for a while…. more than anything else, my child didn't like doing it. So we decided to try something else.

Olivia and her husband may be willing to consider Min-su's dislike of soccer and

eventually, his desire to play trumpet rather than a stringed instrument, because like

Amelia, Chloe, and Jane, they believe a child must enjoy and want to learn something to

be successful and fulfilled by doing so.

Similarly, Jae's decision-making involves careful thought about what his 6-year-

old son likes and does not want to do, for instance when Noah did not want to continue

playing soccer. According to Jae's mother Mrs. Kwak, "[Jae says] if Noah doesn't want

to do something, he has decided he will never make [Noah] do it," because as a teenager,

> Jae played oboe but not because he wanted to do oboe, but because his father pushed so much that he didn't think he could defy him, that's what he says…. Every week, every Saturday, we went to [a top teacher at a renowned music college] for the lesson, [and] it was probably another source of stress for Jae. Because he didn't enjoy it that much… It was all because their dad was so enthusiastic (dedicated).

Jae's father, an Early Wave parent, was disinclined to accommodate Jae's preferences

and interests in decision-making about the kinds of education and learning he considered

appropriate and necessary for his son. Mrs. Kwak emphasizes that such strategies by Mr. Kwak were not employed because he was cruel or uncaring, but because of the very opposite: he was showing his love and dedication by attempting to provide his children the best possible opportunities, which would set them on the path to success and therefore make the challenges of immigration and settling in a new country worthwhile. The experience of having to pursue instrumental lessons that he did not want to do, however, contributed to shaping Jae's approach to raising and making decisions that involve his son.

The Immigrant Factor

This study suggests that Korean American and Korean immigrants' understanding and navigation of children's formal education and development emerge from their ideas about the goals and functions of education; their understanding and knowledge about their children's schooling, social lives, and preferences and interests; their interpretation of their own experiences of education, childhood, and parenting; and the sociocultural, economic, and other factors that have shaped their lives, including those characteristic of the three generational cohorts in this dissertation.

Early Wave parents displayed a primary interest in academic attainment and learning, whereas Recent Wave and Second Gen parents emphasized the importance of play, activities, music, and sports in the overall development and learning of children. These divergent concerns reflect (1) Early Wave immigrants' interest in developing their children's ability to secure economic stability and sound employment, and (2) their understanding that academics would provide the best and most certain pathway to achieving that stability and success. Their approach was in many cases hands-off in

particular domains, due to factors such as busy work schedules and limited language fluency. In some cases, they needed to seek and access information from their children and from contacts at church (Chapter 5), rather than directly from teachers and others at school. Early Wave parents' expectations were high, and they expected their children to focus on their own progress, narrowly defined in terms of academic achievement.

Second Gen parents' aims and approaches to their children's education contrast with those of their parents and are filtered through their interpretation of their own childhood and educational experiences. Rather than immense wealth or high income as an explicit goal, they describe instead a desire for their children to be able to be independent and make enough to support themselves, and to have the capacity and resources to contribute positively to their communities. They want their children to pursue knowledge, interests, and careers that they wish, especially those that felt constrained by pragmatic concerns in their own pathways. Recent Wave parents in this study perceive and navigate a tension between pressure to push their children toward academic achievement, reminiscent of the rigorous educational environment of Korea, and their wish to provide children with a more holistic and "gentle" experience of learning and overall development. Finally, conversations between parents of the younger generations, that is, Second Gen and Recent Wave parents, and their children take on a different tenor than they recall experiencing with their own parents. For instance, they are more concerned with knowing how their children understand or feel about things that happen in school and understanding the children's personalities, preferences, and interests, and then using such information to support and nurture their children's

capacities to enjoy learning, than with how to take practical, logistical steps to reach the next academic stage.

The Recent Wave and Second Gen parents in this study envisioned broader purposes of education and more expansive notions of what constitutes children's learning and "living well" than did their Early Wave predecessors, ideas that were constructed and reconstructed due to the ways they had lived and made sense of their own experiences of education and their immigration journeys. These findings contribute to scholarship that sheds light on the dynamic, complex processes by which parenting values, orientations, and practices are shaped by the cultural, social, historical contexts in which family life and immigration experiences take place, and by doing so foregrounds the salience of the socioecological spheres in which the education and overall development of children are embedded. These findings may also provide guidance to advance efforts to support meaningful educational engagement as well as the holistic development of children.

Chapter 5: "Where People Can Get Closer and Closer to One Another": Social and Pragmatic Dimensions of Korean CCNs

Chapter 4 focused on ways that Korean American and Korean immigrant parents make sense of and navigate their children's education. This chapter delves more deeply into the mechanisms by which the orientations, views, and actions of Korean American parents regarding the formal schooling, education, and development of children may be influenced by exposure to significant settings and interactions with contacts outside of the formal school context. I particularly focus on the key institution of interest of my study, the Korean ethnic church as a nexus of a broader network of institutions, individuals, and groups, which I collectively refer to as a church community network (CCN), and on the ways that Korean CCNs guide, direct, and shape parents' decision-making and action regarding how they educate and raise their children. That is, Chapter 5 addresses the latter part of first research question: *How do Korean American and Korean immigrant parents access information about and navigate formal schooling in the United States?* and the second research question: *How do Korean ethnic churches and key non-school settings linked to the churches, i.e., church community networks, shape understanding and navigation of education?* This chapter focuses on the instrumental, tangible support sought and accessed in Korean ethnic CCNs; the subsequent chapter will home in on Korean ethnic CCNs as significant contexts where non-material needs of Korean immigrant families may be met, and with what implications for their experiences of

identity formation, belonging, and broader incorporation and acculturation to life in the United States.

Findings suggest that Korean American and Korean immigrant parents leverage both formal and informal CCN-connected mechanisms of support and information in their efforts to understand, guide, and act in regard to their children's formal education and overall learning and development, such as by making use of formal educational opportunities like church-based *Hangeul hakgyo* (Korean language school), by accessing formal church-based programs like cell group ministry, and by developing ad hoc social relationships. Crucially, these avenues by which church members seek and receive information are embedded within the structure of the Korean CCN; in other words, the Korean ethnic church is designed to facilitate these forms of support. Moreover, while the Korean ethnic church and associated contacts that comprise Korean ethnic CCNs remain significant resources, the support that participants seek and the mechanisms by which they access information can vary by the distinct immigration trajectories and contexts of the three generational cohorts. For instance, Recent Wave parents may develop broader and less localized networks including in virtual, online spaces than their Early Wave counterparts, whose reliance on community and support were concentrated in Korean ethnic CCNs, while Second Gen parents make use simultaneously of CCN-centered and non-localized contacts, such as neighbors and other parents from their children's schools.

Korean CCNs in the Ecology of Korean American Life

To situate the role of Korean ethnic church community networks in the lives of Korean American and Korean immigrants, I begin by homing in on reasons that individuals may gravitate toward particular churches. For immigrants that settle in less

populated and less diverse areas, the choice of church may be quite limited and in essence, predetermined, as was the case for Mrs. Nam, her husband, and their oldest son when they immigrated in 1995 to a Midwestern university town with only one Korean church. In areas with multiple church options, newcomers' decision-making matrix may be more complex and less constrained by material conditions. For some participants in the present study, the selection of church was guided primarily by existing relationships. The choice was therefore pragmatic, convenient, and relatively straightforward: Ellen and her husband were invited by a nursing mentor to attend her church, Olivia selected ALFC due to her prior affiliation with its sister church in Korea, and Amelia's family joined the church attended by her daughter Jenny's friend, for example. Being introduced to a new church by a friend or acquaintance who was already a part of the church community and therefore familiar with the institution and its members meant a lower likelihood of social friction for newcomers in their efforts to become part of the CCN.

Parents of children tended to be drawn to larger churches with more extensive programs for young people, which conveyed greater and easier access to resources relevant to the education and raising of children. After Mrs. Nam and her growing family moved to a major metropolitan area with a larger Korean population than the Midwestern town where they had initially settled, she sought a church with resources for her young children. Similarly, Jae, who arrived in later adolescence, describes the "delightful change" of moving from a small church without a Korean ministry for children to a larger church with a well-developed Korean youth ministry.

For Korean immigrants, joining a church was not necessarily, primarily, or solely, a religious decision. Pyong Gap Min (1992), a scholar of Asian Americans and religion in

the United States, estimated that approximately 40 percent of Korean immigrants who were not Christians prior to immigration participate in Korean churches in the United States (p. 1381), highlighting the ubiquity and centrality of the Korean church in Korean American and immigrant life. This is not surprising: although fewer than 20 percent of Koreans living in South Korea identify as Protestants, over 60 percent of Korean Americans in the United States identify themselves as Protestant Christians and over three-quarters of Korean immigrants attend Korean churches (Central Intelligence Agency, 2025; Connor, 2014; Hurh & Kim, 1990a; Pyun, 2017). For instance, at the invitation of a family friend, Chloe's family began attending church, even though her father had not been particularly religious prior to that point: "I feel like that's the time my dad's faith really grew, and so he was really drawn to the lead pastor, and like the lead pastor's teaching and so he felt really committed."

The purposes that Korean ethnic churches and CCNs serve in Korean American communities shed light on why even non-Christian Koreans might begin attending and participating actively in churches. Min's (1992) identification of four major functions of a Korean church – to provide social services and material resources; to offer opportunities for social interaction and fellowship; to encourage ethnocultural continuity and maintenance; and to convey social status – offers a useful structural and functional framework for this study. In what follows, I discuss three of these functions, beginning with a key feature of CCN structures and organization that facilitate their accomplishment, and their implications for how Korean American and Korean immigrant parents seek, receive, and make use of information and guidance relevant to the education

of children. I will save discussion of the fourth function of churches – to confer social status and prestige – for Chapter 6.

Cell Group and Other Church Ministries

A central feature of many Korean churches is small, localized church sub-groupings, often referred to as *cell groups* or *cell group ministry*. According to the sociologist Victoria Kwon and her colleagues (1997), who conducted an ethnographic study of a cell group ministry in a large Texas-based Korean church, cell groups play a significant role in the social and structural functions of Korean ethnic churches in the United States, "[serving] as the backbone of an informal service network that assists Korean immigrants in meeting the social, economic, cultural and religious challenges faced by new immigrants in the settlement process" (p. 250). Cell groups are organized so as to connect congregation members living in close geographic proximity to one another, and encourage the cultivation, maintenance, and reinforcement of intra-church relationships and social affinities through participating in regularly occurring meetings, partaking of shared meals, and organizing and attending other social events, often in cell members' homes (Kwon et al., 1997; McBrayer, 2017).

Cell groups are integral to the process of welcoming and integrating into the church community new and prospective members of the congregation. Newcomers are assigned to a cell group based on their geographic location, the members of which help address the immediate needs of newly arrived Korean immigrants, including "such services as aid in buying a vehicle, and finding housing; obtaining job referrals, baby-sitter referrals, social security information, and translating services; making airport pickups; visitations for new babies and hospitalized members; registering children for

school; applying for citizenship; dealing with the courts" (Kwon et al., 1997, p. 251).

Moreover, the cell group ministry connects immigrants with psychosocial and emotional

support that is crucial to them as newcomers in an unfamiliar national, linguistic, and

sociocultural setting, a function I will explore in more detail in Chapter 6.

Together with members of the church's pastoral staff who are tasked with

orienting new members, cell group leaders take the lead both in connecting newcomers to

practical resources and in initiating them into the church community. Initiation activities

may include a formal introduction by the pastor to the entire congregation during worship

service, informal "meet-and-greets" during lunch after the service which are overseen by

cell group leaders, and home visits by pastoral staff and cell leaders (V. H. Kwon et al.,

1997). All participants in the study explicitly cited cell groups or comparable small-group

structures as significant to their overall experiences of church and identified them as

crucial parts of their church-connected social and religious networks. In multiple

instances, participants emphasized the closeness of their respective cell groups, referring

to them as "family." For instance, Olivia, chuckling, mentioned during the interview that

she and her husband would be hosting their cell group that evening in their home: "Well,

I am in a cell group now, and we have a close relationship with my new cell group

family. Actually, a few families are coming over for dinner later." In short, cell groups

play an important part in facilitating the formation and maintenance of social connections

in Korean ethnic CCNs.

Cell group ministry is but one of many church-based programs that are intended

to meet or mitigate essential needs of congregation members: "The most characteristic

feature of Korean ethnic churches is 'comprehensiveness.' Situated at the centre of

Korean immigrant communities in Canada and in the U.S.A., Korean immigrant churches have offered Korean immigrants almost 'everything possible' necessary for life, from religion and immigrating, to diverse social services" (Cho, 2004, p. 55). For instance, Mrs. Nam participated actively in the *yusunghae* (international students' group), while Olivia describes the welcoming atmosphere when "[someone] from the New Family Ministry approached me so naturally and warmly and personally, and so then I started going to a Bible study called Women's Discipleship."

Korean ethnic CCNs also offer access to a spectrum of activities and programming for Korean community members of all ages. Programs for children commonly include those cited by interviewees in this study: VBS, children's worship service, Sunday school, holiday performances, and *Hangeul hakgyo*, or Korean language school, which I discuss later in this chapter. Newly arrived Korean immigrants may take advantage of church-based English language instruction, while parents of young children may find assistance with childcare (Kogan et al., 2020, pp. 3547-3548). Although outside of the scope of the present project, scholarly literature identifies mental and physical health, social services, recreational and educational programs – or "ethnic senior schools" – for older Korean immigrant adults (Choi, 2003; Y. Kim, 2013).

Active participation in cell group and other formal ministries is merely one way for congregants to become involved in the religious and social functioning of Korean ethnic churches. While cell groups are a significant avenue by which parents form social ties that they can then leverage for information and support about their *children's* experiences of formal education and broader development, taking on other church service roles and layperson leadership positions may contribute to *individuals'* experiences of

social status, feelings of belonging, and psychosocial adjustment in contexts of

immigration, and therefore will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6.

The Korean CCN as Marketplace for Social and Material Resources

A primary function of the Korean ethnic church is the positioning of cell groups

and other formal and informal social affinity groups as mechanisms for accessing and

conveying social services, material resources, information, and guidance to members,

including those relevant to how Korean American parents understand and navigate

children's formal education. Many new arrivals as well as more settled immigrants

require assistance relevant to the basic functions of life in the United States, such as

"employment, housing, healthcare, Social Security, [and] children's education" (Min,

1992, p. 1385). Several participants in the study echoed these and other needs for which

they received help. For instance, Olivia and her husband, who lived in two Midwestern

states before moving to the East Coast, describes the type of assistance she received

initially as quite pragmatic in nature: "When we didn't have a car, I got a lot of rides, to

go to open a bank account, and what else, going grocery shopping." Similarly, Ellen, who

immigrated to the United States with her husband in 1973 to work as a nurse and whose

daughter Evelyn also participated in this study, received assistance from her former

nursing instructor and church friend, who provided rides before Ellen's husband, who

obtained a job through another friend, was able to acquire a car: "my husband, since his

friend owned the gas station [where he worked], so when they had a old car they kind of

fixed together and they gave to him." That is, the Korean ethnic church acts as a sort of

hub for the formation of social relationships as well as connections to desirable material

resources, so that the Korean church draws together people who may be interested less in

accessing spiritual guidance or broad social support, than in leveraging church connections to further economic and other pragmatic interests, such as by recruiting and referring clients for car repair or real estate businesses (e.g., V. H. Kwon et al., 1997).

In addition to these forms of broader, more general support, parents could access direct intervention and support relevant to their children's learning and care through the CCN as well. When Ellen worked long hours, first as a nurse's aide and then as a nurse, and needed help caring for her daughter, her former nursing instructor from Korea who had also immigrated to the United States, eased the transition: "she really took me under her wing, and her mother-in-law [even] babysit my older daughter. Yeah, so she really took care of me." As a Second Gen parent, Ellen's daughter Evelyn is now raising children of her own, and the community she and her husband have formed through their CCN skews younger than they are; she describes them as "more like aunties and uncles [who] don't have children of their own yet. So they still have the cool factor," which she has since discovered can be an asset when addressing challenges associated with her children. For instance, when, early in the pandemic, Evelyn and her husband discovered that their third-grade son was viewing inappropriate content on the school-issued laptop, they turned to these church-based "uncles" for help addressing the situation:

> So they, two of the guys just kind of stepped in and very non-threatening, not preachy, not anything more than like, "Hey, you know that kind of stuff. There's so much of it on the internet... You really want to be careful." They assured us, like at the end, [and] they didn't tell us what everything they talked about. They were like, "At the end, we did throw in like, there's a reason we're friends with your parents. They really do know what they're talking about." We really appreciated that.

There are several meaningful dimensions to this anecdote. Firstly, from among the intervention options available to them, including their parents or contacts more closely

linked to the school, Evelyn and her husband opted to make use of a resource from their CCN – the "cool" uncle-figures – to handle what could have been an uncomfortable conversation for them to discuss with their young son. Secondly, their openness to broach a potentially troubling subject with church contacts, combined with their willingness to allow those contacts to speak to their child about such a topic, attests to not only the trust and closeness of their church-based relationships, but also an openness to talk about personal or family matters with social contacts outside of kinship relationships, which may be less common among older life-stage or immigration generations. Thirdly, that the friends agreed to have this frank and sensitive conversation on their behalf and gently remind the child to trust his parents' life experience and expertise indicate the reciprocal nature of the relationship among the adult members of this church community. The Korean ethnic church, then, served as a crucial place where Evelyn could access and make use of support directly related to children's experiences of nonformal learning and of formal education.

While provision of and access to both physical, material objects – like a vehicle – and tangible, concrete help – like childcare or "uncle" interventions – were necessary to adjusting to life in the new country, Korean ethnic CCNs are places where Korean immigrants and parents can access helpful information and messages as well, for themselves and for their families. For instance, while the small Korean church Mrs. Nam and her family attended in the Midwest could not directly offer her language instruction, her contacts there could tell her, "There's an American church, and if you go there, they'll teach you for free, so go over there and give it a try. So I went, and that really was the

case. There were a lot of *halmeoni* (할머니; elderly grandmother) volunteers, so they're

the ones that taught, and that's where I learned a lot."

Others, like Mrs. Kwak, thinks herself as having been fortunate to have access to

information through relatives who were already settled in the United States, which helped

mitigate some measure of the challenges of immigration. They augmented their built-in

family-based network with contacts at their church, where they received both concrete

guidance, for instance, referrals for tutors for their son, and more general information:

> Because it was the beginning, what we should do about our children, in the normal parts of our daily life, this kind of thing is good or bad, this place is better or worse, or if you go here, this is more beneficial. So anyway, people who encountered these things before us would tell us these things. Of course, it was up to us to choose, but they gave us all of this information, and it was easy for us to choose from there and it helped us a lot.

Mrs. Kwak not only provides a general sense of the kinds of through-the-grapevine

information relevant to their children's learning and development in the new society

which she and her husband could access through kinship and church networks, but also

emphasizes that this knowledge provided crucial guidance for how they ultimately

navigated their children's education.

Cell group meetings were the primary setting in which these types of information

about children and their education and life in the United States circulated. Moreover,

because these guidance and advice were passed along from one immigrant family to

another, the sharing of information and support served to form and strengthen a chain of

connections and relationships across generational cohorts.

Korean CCNs and the Formation of Social Capital

A second key function of the Korean ethnic church and CCN is to connect Korean

immigrants and Korean Americans to social interactions and fellowship both within and

adjacent to churches. Social contact is particularly crucial for immigrants experiencing the loneliness and isolation of settling into a new and unfamiliar community in a new and unfamiliar country. Mrs. Nam says of her time living in a Midwestern community without many Korean people, "We were so lonely we thought we would die if we lived there…. The biggest thing was, because we were lonely, [church friends] often invited us to their home…. And the minister's wife helped a lot. I was 29 at the time, so I was very young and a little inexperienced about life." Even going to the local McDonald's for lunch with the minister's wife helped alleviate the isolation and aloneness that Mrs. Nam experienced as a newly arrived immigrant.

Both Olivia, a Recent Wave parent, and Jae, a Second Gen Korean American who came to the United States as a teenager, are actively involved with their respective cell groups. Olivia, who was expecting to entertain members of her "cell family" for dinner on the day of our interview, again invokes the language of family to identify the people she turns to most often to talk about her children: "I think the people I am closest to and most comfortable asking for advice are people here at church, or my *jahmeh* (자매; sisters, meant in the religious sense here) who I used to be close to at my former church." Similarly, cell group meetings are the setting in which Jae feels most able to talk openly and vulnerably about parenting and children's education and development. Even so, there appear to be topics and details he does not feel comfortable sharing within even that trusted setting, in contrast to Chloe's willingness to bring a sensitive situation to her church friends' attention; he admits that he has not talked to cell members about his son's challenges associated with his son's communication and speech development. In other

words, there appear to be limitations to the social connection, emotional engagement, and information that circulate in even the intimate and close fellowship of cell group ministry.

Evelyn, a Second Gen Korean American whose mother Ellen is an Early Wave participant in this study, speculates that the social function of Korean CCNs was especially crucial for first-generation Korean immigrants like her mother:

> Church was one of those places, I think my parents and their generation, for sure, it still is. There are plenty of people who come for the social aspect and not the religious aspect, which is also a different, interesting dynamic. But my parents, yeah, I think all the Korean people we knew were from church. So friend groups, even though you're not meeting in church, they are people you knew through church. And that was big. My mom [a nurse] also has kind of her network of like Korean American nursing school people who are all placed at hospitals in this area. So she has a different like support network through them as well. But a lot of them also, they go to church, they're Christians so that overlaps.

Evelyn's characterization of the social meanings that her parents and their generational counterparts ascribed to the Korean church suggests the following about the interrelationship between Korean social networks and Korean ethnic churches. Evelyn highlights that it was the social dimension rather than the religious motive which drew many first-generation immigrants to Korean ethnic churches and moreover, she suggests that the linkages – or weak ties – between members of different Korean churches could expand the reach of each individual by expanding the broader, encompassing CCN. In addition, the mere fact of being members of a Korean ethnic church connected them through a shared identity as Korean Christians. That is, even if the Korean friends and contacts who comprised Ellen's social circle did not attend the same church she did, they were highly likely to attend *some* Korean church, and that shared experience of being Christians and members of a Korean ethnic church in the United States conveyed a sort

of common ground or "overlap" that made them all part of the same Korean ethnic *church community network*.

By functioning as a context in which social engagement occurs as well as concrete, material resources and information circulate, Korean CCNs may exemplify what Oldenberg (1999) identifies as a crucial third place, and how, as Putnam (2000) argues, "faith communities in which people worship together are arguably the single most important repository of social capital in America" (p. 66). Moreover, due to the unique conditions of immigration and the structures and functions of Korean ethnic churches, the bonds and connections formed within and through them may be particularly durable and lasting.

Korean Ethnic Churches as Sites of Ethnocultural Maintenance

As mentioned previously, a common feature of Korean ethnic churches is the *Hangeul hakgyo,* or Korean language school. Almost without exception, the Korean American and Korean immigrant parents interviewed for this study mentioned Korean heritage language schools as an important program of Korean ethnic churches. For instance, the *Hangeul hakgyo* was the first example of children's programming at her former church that Jane mentioned during her interview, while Mrs. Kwak included Saturday Korean language school as part of her grandson Noah's regular routine. Multiple studies examine the role of Korean ethnic churches in maintaining and transmitting Korean language literacy and cultural identity, in both Canada and the United States, particularly emphasizing parents' expectation that Korean ethnic churches serve as sites in which such processes take place (Jang, 2019; Oh, 2007; S. M. Park, 2011; S. M. Park & Sarkar, 2007; Pyun, 2017).

In addition, while Korean and English congregations, especially in larger Korean churches, often function largely independently of each other, including programs and services for young people, they may make an effort toward collaboration to varying degrees in an effort to maintain intercultural and interlinguistic connections. For example, Laura, a Second Gen Korean American who grew up in a "mostly Caucasian" community in the upper Midwest, currently attends AGC with her husband and two daughters. Laura's husband, who oversees the children's education department of the EC at their church, works together with his counterpart in the KC to keep each other in the loop and to share information and announcements relevant to both congregations. In addition, their church creates opportunities to hold joint worship services between the Korean and English ministries:

> Sometimes we do have a joint service. We try to do it at least once a year now… like [the] church anniversary, I think we're trying to do it all together, so it will be like bilingual [with] translation, and then [my family] would always attend the Christmas service, which is hosted by the KC (Korean Congregation). And you know, [it's important] just being around… Korean people, you know.

To Laura and her family, the connection with and practice of "Korean heritage" that membership and participation in a Korean ethnic church enables is a crucial aspect of their cultural, religious, and family life.

According to some researchers, "Korean immigrant churches have been likened to a 'grass-roots community,' 'a pseudo extended family' and as an alternative Korean ethnic neighborhood" (I. Kim, 1981, 1987; Min, 1991), a Korean ethnic enclave that is detached and inward-facing, whereas other scholars discuss ways that Korean immigrant churches have engaged with broader society, e.g., political activism (for instance, through anti-LGBTQ advocacy), humanitarian efforts, evangelical missions & community

outreach, campus outreach efforts, focusing on how later-generation Korean Americans

are consciously inclusive of Christians from non-Korean ethnic and cultural backgrounds

(R. Y. Kim & Kim, 2012). The findings of this study suggest that immigrant generation,

overall life generation, and identification with Korean and American identities are factors

which may influence individual stances about whether, to what extent, and how the

Korean ethnic church ought to relate to and engage with non-Korean communities and

causes. For instance, Mrs. Kwak and her husband, their older daughter, and younger son

Jae took up residence in the United States in 1998; Mr. and Mrs. Kwak, Jae, and Jae's

family still attend the same church, ALFC. Drawing on over two decades of observing

the Korean community, she identified the Korean ethnic church's role in easing the

difficulties of Korean families:

> There are so many dysfunctional [Korean] families, and there are a lot of
> parents who are worried about their children's problems [problem children].
> They can't help but come to church to ask for help and to ask for prayers….
> I think the big problem is that there are many families like that, and the
> church needs to play a positive role. But then, those families don't come to
> church. I don't know what kind of leadership the [broader] Korean
> community should provide to help this problem.

That is, Mrs. Kwak believes that the Korean ethnic church is uniquely positioned to aid

Korean families experiencing distress and regrets that Korean families who need help the

most may not come to the church for assistance. Moreover, she cannot imagine how the

Korean community beyond the Korean ethnic CCN might be able to step in to provide

support.

Ellen, who came to the United States with her husband 25 years earlier than the

Kwak family, also attends ALFC. However, her daughter Evelyn, a U.S.-born Second

Gen parent, attends FCLC, a Korean American ethnic church that shares the building

facility with other congregations, and sees this exposure to Christians from different ethnocultural and national backgrounds as an opportunity to build a more diverse church community:

> [We] started as Korean American church, but have, like a Chinese church meeting in the church building, and the Chinese church has already started to kind of merge with us in the younger generation, like our children's ministry has absorbed their children. And so we're just like, oh, that would be so interesting! And if it…just happen[s] organically, you know. Like the Bolivian Church. We've invited their children, and we're running a VBS jointly for a second year in a row. We've had, you know, like a couple of Christmas services where all the congregations are together. And I'm like, "Oh, this is so beautiful" So it'd be really interesting to see what kind of impact [there could be] on like the larger, kind of, cross immigrant community.

In other words, while more established generations of Korean immigrants may be more inward-facing, younger generations of Korean Americans who have grown up and have been educated and socialized in more diverse U.S. environments see possibilities for creating broader communities across ethnic and cultural boundaries through religion, which suggests that complex interactions among factors such as immigrant generation, year and age at immigration, length of residence in the United States, cultural and educational contexts of socialization, type of religious institutional affiliation, and relationship to the church community network shape the acculturation experiences of Koreans in the United States in ways that have significant implications for how they situate themselves and their heritage culture vis-à-vis the mainstream American society.

Generational Cohorts and Alternative Sites for Social Connection

Despite the centrality and significance of the Korean ethnic CCN, the experiences of the three generational cohorts of study participants suggest that the ways in which they develop social ties and through these networks, seek and access information and guidance

relevant to their education of their children may vary. Whereas Early Wave parents primarily relied on contacts situated within Korean CCNs, Recent Wave parents appear more open to alternative, non-Korean, or virtual communities, such as through use of online social networks to form connections on "online mom cafes," like Eun-ju and Joo-hyun, whose immigration to the United States from Europe in 2021 makes her, her husband, and their two sons the most recently arrived immigrants in this study.

Recent Wave parents like Olivia, for instance, may be sufficiently confident about their ability to communicate in English than older-generation immigrant counterparts and therefore willing to expand social networks to include non-Korean parents. Although most of Olivia's contacts are organized around and connected to her Korean CCN, she ponders the utility and necessity of connecting with families of young children in their current neighborhood. This is because by the time family moved into their neighborhood, the other children her son's age had formed friendship groups during the pandemic, such that:

> I'm thinking about what I should do to get along well with *weguk* [외국; foreign, non-Korean] neighbors. So then Min-su will see and learn how to interact with *weguk aideul* [외국 아이들; foreign, non-Korean children]. So I have been thinking about what I should do. It is kind of hard to think about just squeezing in with people I don't know, so I haven't done much about it yet. In any case, we have a lot of Korean friends at church, so… But I'm still thinking about it.

English language proficiency and comfort significantly shape the potential for Korean immigrant and Korean American parents to engage in social interaction and to form relationships outside of Korean CCN contexts. Ellen, the Early Wave nurse who began working in American hospitals soon after immigrating to the United States, had to speak English in her professional capacity. The proficiency, practice, and confidence in

her language ability facilitated the formation of relationships with non-Korean people in her vicinity, such as the "*miguksaram* [미국 사람, American people] next door, the man was high school English teacher and wife was working at bank, and they were really nice to us, and they're the first family invite us for their Thanksgiving dinner." (This friendship developed to the point that even after they had retired and moved to another state, Ellen and her family visited them each fall.) Due to a career that forced Ellen to speak English regularly, she developed the capacity to form relationships with non-Koreans in her vicinity; in this sense, she is an outlier among her fellow Early Wave Korean immigrants.

Amelia, as a Second Gen Korean American who was born, raised, and educated in the United States, is more likely to have broader community ties, which gives her more flexibility and options about whom she reaches out to gain understanding about her children's education. Amelia does not necessarily talk to Korean friends about her children, because they are not located in the same district and therefore not as familiar with the specifics of their school system. Instead, she talks to a White neighbor whose children have gone through the school system, making her an especially good source of specific information and relevant guidance. Amelia and her family are also part of a townhome neighborhood with many children around the same age, with whom the family is close. Her extensive network of "mom friends" span various geographic locations and localized contexts, such as her "gym mom friends" with whom she can "talk about family and kids and gripe about husbands and things like that," and long-time friends who are geographically distant, but with whom she can engage in more intimate conversations about vulnerable aspects of raising a family.

Although younger generations of Korean immigrant and Korean American parents may exercise alternative strategies and pathways to help them navigate their children's formal education, the Korean ethnic CCN remains a significant resource for Korean Americans in the United States. Early Wave participant Mrs. Kwak emphasizes the salience and centrality of the Korean ethnic church in the United States: "It's only after I came to America that I realized how influential the Korean church is for Koreans. So the activities of Korean churches in each region are more important than the activities of the Korean community in the United States. The church is important, I think, because people can get closer and closer to one another." For many Korean American and Korean immigrants – or at least the nearly 80 percent of Korean Americans who are members – Korean ethnic churches fulfill multiple functions important to their lives in the United States, including material, pragmatic support; access to social interaction and capital; and practice and transmission of linguistic and cultural traditions.

Chapter 6: "Mainly We Were Looking for Korean American Church": Faith, Belonging, and Acculturation as Korean Americans

Chapter 4 focused on ways that Korean American and Korean immigrant parents make sense of and approach their children's education, and Chapter 5 addressed how Korean ethnic CCNs influence parents' decision-making and navigation of their children's education and overall development. This chapter situates the families' understanding and experience of formal education vis-à-vis their participation in CCNs in the broader context of their overall adjustment and acculturation to life in the United States. I do so by examining ways that participation in significant ethnic communities may shape immigrant adult and youth experiences of identity formation, belonging, and broader acculturation in a receiving society, with particular focus on the role of the Korean ethnic church in easing the transition for Korean American and Korean immigrant youth and families. Chapter 6 addresses the third research question: *How do the processes undertaken by Korean American and Korean immigrant families to understand and navigate the formal schooling and overall development of children relate to their overall experiences of acculturation and adjustment to life in the United States?* This chapter examines Korean ethnic CCNs as settings that can aid Korean families' efforts to address needs beyond those that provide material support, that are primarily instrumental in nature, or that are directly related to formal education, by considering the implications of such support for the formation of cultural identity and sense of belonging, and ultimately, for their acculturation to the receiving society.

Findings suggest that by facilitating the efforts of Korean American and Korean immigrant families, parents, and youth to enact, negotiate, reproduce, and maintain ethnocultural identity, Korean ethnic CCNs support families' capacity to acclimate to life in the United States. For instance, these institutions provide access to rituals and practices that combine religious, social, cultural, or educational dimensions, which in turn may support the formation of an integrated Korean *and* American identity. Moreover, Korean ethnic CCNs may be particularly well-positioned to meet the social, emotional, and psychological needs of Korean immigrant and Korean American youth who may encounter challenges due to linguistic or cultural difference in formal, mainstream-culture settings like schools, organized sports, and other activities. My study suggests that Korean ethnic CCNs accomplish this because they constitute a space where young people who are keenly aware of differences between the cultural norms and behaviors of their Korean cultural heritage and those of the mainstream cultural environments can gather and be in company with others like them, thereby enhancing their social adjustment, quality of life, and general well-being in the United States. In other words, the Korean ethnic CCN offers a crucial alternative educative space apart from the formal school environment, where Korean American and Korean immigrant parents and families can access Korean cultural knowledge and by doing so, maintain their connection to heritage social, cultural, and linguistic traditions. This form of education can in turn ease their overall adjustment to the expectations, norms, and lifeways of the dominant, mainstream society.

In addition, as an explicitly religious setting, the church could tap into members' spiritual selves and by doing so, provide a sense of purpose and meaning to their lives.

My study suggests that when Korean immigrants invoke spiritual assistance for troubling life circumstances or seek guidance through prayer, the religious dimension carries a particular gravity in relation to the conduct and unfolding of their lives. For instance, they might credit divine intervention with position or schedule changes in the workplace that enable them to spend more time in church activities or may devote family vacation time to church-related service activities as a way both to affirm the centrality of religion in their lives and to translate their faith into action in the real world.

However, my findings also suggest that the relationship between Korean church members and Korean ethnic religious institutions can be complicated and fraught. Research has suggested both that church structures can ease the transition to a new setting by connecting adult members to social status enhancement opportunities, such that negative effects of downward socioeconomic mobility or decline in professional status in the receiving society may be mitigated, *and* that conflict between factions for leadership roles can be a significant cause of schisms in Korean churches (Min, 1992, 2006b; Shin & Park, 1988; Woo et al., 2019). My study suggests that church members are keenly aware of these dynamics, even if they themselves do not explicitly attach social positioning motives to their own participation in church activities, and that further, conflict and infighting may actually deter or diminish their desire to take on more active roles in the church.

Furthermore, this study suggests that the resources and experiences that parents and youth seek in the CCN setting may vary by immigrant generation or length of time since arrival in the United States. For instance, Recent Wave and Early Wave parents in my study turned to Korean ethnic CCNs out of a yearning to experience the comfort and

familiarity of a Korean cultural setting. Second Gen parents, who may not be as fluent in their heritage language (Korean) as they are in the dominant national language (English), may be more concerned with accessing cultural continuity for their families, such as by exposing their children to Korean language instruction or Korean cultural manners and etiquette. Thus, for the intergenerational participants in this study, Korean ethnic CCNs are crucial settings in which Korean American and immigrant youth and parents engage and negotiate ethnocultural identity, as well as social belonging in the U.S. context.

The sociocultural, linguistic, and religious dimensions of the Korean ethnic CCN reinforce its ability to serve as a space of refuge for church members who may not feel a sense of belonging or may experience discomfort due to experiences of cultural difference, prejudice, or discrimination in the mainstream society, and through doing so, ease their overall acculturation to life in the United States, albeit in complex ways that may at times have negative aspects.

Intergenerational Continuity: Contact with Korean Heritage Culture

Maintaining and reinforcing cultural and linguistic continuity from generation to generation is a significant motive for Korean Americans and Korean immigrants to seek out Korean ethnic churches. Prior research has found that Korean ethnic churches are not neighborhood churches in the sense that members live in close geographic proximity to their church (Hurh & Kim, 1990a; K. C. Kim & Kim, 2001; Min, 1992). In other words, Koreans do not necessarily select their church based on location; rather, they seek out specific qualities, characteristics, programs, and resources that they believe will best meet their spiritual, religious, and other needs. For instance, that the church Laura and her family attend is located close to their home is merely a convenient and serendipitous

characteristic, not an essential criterion. Rather, Laura specifically sought a church that would allow her family to maintain a meaningful connection to their heritage culture:

> Mainly we were looking for Korean American church. I mean, we could have gone to [nearby] American church, too, but we wanted to- especially with our kids, we wanted them to know the, you know, the Korean heritage, and even though [the church's Korean and English congregations] do things separately, but still, you know, you're influenced by that [exposure to Korean culture]. Yeah, so we did send them to Korean school, too, for a while.

The access to heritage cultural and linguistic traditions was attractive for herself and her family, and especially for the implications of such exposure for intergenerational cultural maintenance. That is, even though the Korean and English congregations largely functioned as separate, independent entities, the proximity itself was regarded as crucial and important, as well as the opportunity to enhance children's cultural learning through formal language education, even if the children were not enrolled for long, as was the case for Laura.

Many immigrant communities participate in heritage language schools like the *Hangeul hakgyo* based in Korean ethnic churches in their efforts to maintain connections to language and traditions. Research suggests that participation in such schools may yield limited mastery of the heritage language, especially in the absence of continued and consistent linguistic use and engagement in home, community, and other settings; however heritage language instruction can facilitate the formation and maintenance of ethnocultural identity (Zhou & Li, 2003; Cho, 2000; Cho et al., 1997; Du, 2011; Francis et al., 2010; Siegel, 2004).

To participants in this study, the ability to communicate with grandparents, who may lack proficiency in English, is particularly important, due to its role in facilitating the

maintenance of intergenerational relationships. This ability is therefore cultivated not only through participation in formal Korean language instruction at the *Hangeul hakgyo* – as for Laura's children – but also through regular exposure to the Korean language in the home and other settings. For instance, Mrs. Kwak, Jae's mother and Noah's grandmother, explained the usage of both English and Korean in the home:

> [Noah's] language is a bit late, he is a little slower to begin speaking than the other children. In the home, we the grandparents speak Korean, and his mom and dad speak English to Noah, not because they want him to use English, but for Noah to speak a little faster. For him too, there must be some confusion, so his English is clumsy [not that good/strong] and his Korean is clumsy. That is a problem. But we don't want him to forget Korean, so his grandpa says we have to speak Korean. So grandparents always speak Korean at home, and to help with English, his mom and dad speak English, though of course they speak Korean too. So even though it is a little slow, eventually he will speak Korean and English…. And when it isn't vacation, he has Korean school on Saturday. Did you go to Korean school too?

Mrs. Kwak's discussion of the language strategy exercised within the home is significant for two key reasons. Firstly, Mrs. Kwak and her husband, their son Jae and his wife, and Jae's son Noah live together in a multigenerational household, imbuing Noah's Korean language instruction with added significance for its role in maintaining intergenerational cultural continuity by conveying the ability for Noah and his grandparents to communicate. Secondly, Mrs. Kwak's question – about whether I had attended *Hangeul hakgyo* as a child – attests to the ubiquity of heritage language instruction among Koreans living in the United States. She asked this question assuming, correctly, that the response would be "*Neh* (네, yes)." Moreover, Mrs. Kwak's question highlights the importance she attaches to the ability to communicate in Korean. In fact, she – like nearly all the participants whom I interviewed in Korean – marveled at my Korean proficiency and ability to conduct the interview in Korean.

Exposure to and education in the heritage language are just one way that Korean cultural traditions are embedded within church functions and structures. The sharing of food is another integral aspect of socializing and fellowship in the Korean ethnic church. Laura, who explained she had been drawn to a Korean ethnic church rather than a more conveniently located American church, half-jokingly identified as the most appealing aspect of their church, "Definitely food *(laughs).* So before pandemic we used to always have a lunch, you know, and usually Korean food. And slowly we're going back to that [since the pandemic], but just the atmosphere [is appealing]." By atmosphere, Laura meant the camaraderie and sense of community that developed while eating meals – *sigsa* (식사)[16] – together. Communal eating is a significant aspect of Korean cultural and relational behavior. In fact, the Korean government includes a section about Korean food culture in its guide for non-Koreans seeking to live in the country, emphasizing that "Koreans enjoy eating together and sharing their food. If they invite guests, they tend to serve better food than their usual food," and including a primer on typical Korean dishes (KOTRA, 2019, pp. 46-51).

In the next breath, Laura circled back to the significance of proximity to Korean heritage language traditions, explaining the importance of worship services that brought together both the Korean language and English language congregations periodically:

> And then sometimes we do have a joint service. We try to do it at least once a year now, before more. But you know, like church anniversary, I think we're trying to do it all together, so it will be like bilingual, you know, [with] translation. And then we would always attend the Christmas service, which is hosted by the KC [Korean Congregation]. So they would have

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[16] The Korean words for meal (식사) and for family (식구) share a root. Korean food traditions also carry deep ties to memory and kin relationships. In lieu of "hello" as a greeting, for instance, mothers like my own often ask, "Have you eaten?" (밥은 먹었어?). The musician and writer Michelle Chongmi Zauner has also written about interconnections between food, family, and memory (Zauner, 2016, 2018).

> bilingual, you know, translation, but we made a point to always go during the Christmas service. And you know, just being around, you know, Korean people, you know. Yeah.

The bilingual nature of these services, which Laura explained was accomplished by offering a simultaneous translation, helped members of the English Congregation maintain linkages with their Korean Congregation counterparts.

Korean Ethnic Church as a Place of Youth Belonging

Research on the experiences of immigrant youth suggests that they face several challenges, due to experiences of discrimination or deficit-based approaches in schools, or the necessity to take on adult responsibilities normally performed by parents due to language barriers (e.g., Rodriguez, 2018; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008). Yeong-cheol, who was 17 years old when he arrived in the United States, described some of the tasks he performed as a proxy for his parents, whose English was even more limited than his own:

> So I think the first thing that I can think of is the MVA experience, driver license experience. So whenever you go to the those places, I'm trying to get the ID. That's what you need to do whatever you want to do. You gotta be the translator [for your parents]. But then, you know that's when I was 17, and my language level was like at the bottom as well. So you know, those thing, and also like, I can think of the moment where we have to renew the apartment lease. You know, reading all the legal documentation? Again, 17. I thought I was all grown up at that time, but now I think about it, I was a little kid. You know, doing those. And then, you know, buying a car, dealing with the dealership, you know, or opening a bank account, opening a credit card and just all the other I guess you know all the stuff that I guess we have to deal with it. It's easier if the language is there, but I think it gets extra hard. Because you don't know what's coming, right. You don't. You don't know what to expect, so that was the big thing.

Due to the circumstances, Yeong-cheol needed to read, understand, and communicate in English to meet basic needs of the family in real-world settings. However, within the school environment, he found himself unable to communicate: "So when I was in high

school, my nickname was 'Mute,' because I couldn't really say anything. *(Chuckles)* I

didn't, you know, I didn't get offended. And I was okay with that."

Similarly, Jae, who immigrated after middle school reminisced about how lack of

English proficiency affected his relationship to and relationships in school:

> it was just strange to me, everything was, and also, I wasn't so good with the English back then. I don't think I am, still, but because of language barrier, everything was a struggle, really. I couldn't express myself. I couldn't really have conversation with teachers. I just couldn't, you know, involve myself with a lot of things. So basically during high school, the first 2 years, the ninth and tenth grade, I guess I sort of closed myself a little bit.

Due to immigrant children's difficulty communicating with teachers and peers, which

may contribute to a sense of social isolation and loneliness within the formal school

environment, settings in which they can cultivate social connections may become a

refuge (E. Park, 2018b). To participants like Jae and Yeong-cheol, who had immigrated

as teenagers, the Korean ethnic church, and particularly the Korean language youth

group, provided comfort and familiarity, as well as connection to other adolescent

immigrants who could relate to their experiences. For instance, Yeong-cheol, who

experienced stress both at school, as he struggled to learn English and keep up with

schoolwork, and at home, due to the adult responsibilities he had taken on, turned to the

church, which he described as "a very comfort place" where he could enjoy "being

around the other people who are in similar situation that I was in."

The social, psychological, and spiritual dimensions of participation in church

activities were explicitly intertwined for 1.5-generation Korean immigrants like Jae:

> I guess [what I enjoyed most was] just having a good time with friends. And also it's not all the time, but, when we do the activities as a group we, you know, we sometimes share I guess, share a lot of things, but then, you know, there are times where you will be spiritually deprived, and then you struggle, and you share the struggle. And then I think in those moments, you

actually, as you were sharing, you kind of experience the healing or comfort? I think. Yeah, I think that's it.

That is, Jae's excerpt emphasizes linkages among social connections and enjoyment with peers, spiritual challenges, stresses of day-to-day life, and feelings of "healing" and "comfort" sought and found in the refuge of the Korean ethnic church.

Those who had arrived as older children or teenagers were not the only ones to experience the comfort of familiarity and belonging in the Korean ethnic church environment. Children of immigrants – that is, the second generation – expressed similar experiences, such as Chloe, who was born in the United States to a mother who had immigrated to the United States in the late 1960s and a father who had arrived in 1984:

> I think there [was] just a general feeling of comfort. Like, I don't have to explain like, why my parents are the way they are…. I just feel like I don't have to explain why I have certain duties or certain like, I don't know. I just feel like… there's just like, so much more being understood without any explanation. And I think that was like, yeah, one of the probably the first times I really experienced that outside of family. That's kind of really the only time. But I think there was just like a lot of shared experience, too, of like, yeah, going through middle school, going through all of that. But then, like looking back, I could see that now. But you know, at the time. You're just like, this is fun. But yeah, I think, like, just kind of feeling understood.

While at the time, Chloe recalled the enjoyment of socializing with her friends, in retrospect, she understands the significance of feeling understood by Korean American ppers without having to explain her experiences and identity as a Korean American teenager being raised by Korean immigrant parents in a home environment where Korean cultural traditions were practiced. The parallels between anecdotes shared by Yeong-cheol, Jae, and Chloe suggest the significance of being a minoritized youth with a background of immigration, grappling with the norms, traditions, and identity markers of heritage Korean and mainstream American cultures.

Cultural Identity and Acculturation in the Korean Ethnic CCN

To examine the Korean ethnic CCN as a setting that plays a significant role in shaping Korean American and Korean immigrant families' experiences of life in the United States, I turn to the concepts of *cultural identity* and *acculturation,* applied by the psychologist John W. Berry and his colleagues (2023) to a cross-national study of youth acculturation, identity formation, and adaptation. According to Berry and his colleagues, these concepts are often studied independently; however, their analysis suggests the concepts can, when taken together, provide insight into "how, and how well, immigrant youth live in their intercultural worlds" (p. 3).

Cultural identity is thought of as the affinities a person experiences toward particular cultural groups, and for immigrants, may take a variety of forms. For instance, immigrant cultural identity might encompass aspects primarily of ethnic identity – that is, identifying primarily with one's ethnocultural in-group; primarily of national identity – that is, connectedness with the dominant, national culture of the receiving society; of both cultures, producing a bicultural identity; or of an unresolved cultural identity (Berry et al., 2023, 2023, p. 20; Phinney, 1990, 2003). Due to this potential for change, cultural identity is dynamic rather than stable and may evolve or be negotiated as one is exposed in varying degrees to the cultural and linguistic aspects of a new society (Phinney, 2003).

The concept of acculturation can be considered in the anthropological sense of describing changes that occur in group settings, that is, shifts that take place "when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups" (Redfield et al., 1936, pp. 149-152, as cited in Phinney et al., 2023, p. 72). Alternatively,

an individual-level, psychological approach conceptualizes acculturation as "Individual changes [that] are influenced both directly by the culture of the larger society and by the culture of which the individual is a member" (Phinney et al., 2023, p. 72).

For the participants in this study, cultural identity involves deep affinity with Korean ethnocultural identity and practices in balance with pursuit of everyday life in mainstream U.S. society. As a non-school educational setting that offers access to Korean cultural knowledge and heritage educational traditions, the Korean ethnic church is significant for its capacity to aid formation of more integrated Korean-and-American identities and thus supports the overall acculturation processes of Korean immigrant and Korean American families.

Social Contact, Socialization, and Belonging

The Korean ethnic church occupies a central role in not only the cultural but also the social life of Korean Americans and Korean immigrants living in the United States. This is due to its ability to facilitate social belonging and connection through consistent, regular participation in church activities in ways that enhance the adjustment of Korean American and Korean immigrant families into American life. In Chapter 5, I introduced three of four major functions of a Korean ethnic church identified by Min (1992): (1) to provide social services and practical support; (2) to facilitate social interaction and fellowship; (3) to support ethnocultural maintenance; and (4) to convey social status. In this chapter, I return briefly to the relational (2) and cultural (3) functions of the Korean church and review in greater depth the status enhancement (4) function to discuss how these roles of the Korean ethnic church support experiences of life in the United States.

At the most basic level, the possibility of social interaction with co-ethnics makes the Korean ethnic church appealing to Korean immigrants and Korean Americans; Ellen put it quite simply, stating, "most of Koreans go to church, because that's where you meet Korean people…. So it's just natural we'll go to church." The social patterning of church activities is explicitly designed to create opportunities to meet and cultivate social relationships. For instance, Korean church services are often followed by time for fellowship, or social participation, and the cell group ministry is set up to encourage regular socializing (V. H. Kwon et al., 1997; Min, 1992). Because cell groups hold meetings in intimate settings like members' homes, they are especially conducive to formation of close, lasting relationships. Several of the participants of this study spoke of the importance of the relationships they formed within cell and other church affinity groups. For instance, although Mrs. Nam has since moved churches, she has maintained friendships with those she and her husband met while attending a Korean church in earlier days:

> So when we went there, there was a group for international students, so we formed bonds with people in that group. Even now, we're still in touch with people we met at that time. That and the cell group, the small group, they're the only people we [still] know [from that time].

Mrs. Nam reminisced further about meals shared with these close friends, both when she was an active member of that church, as well as continuing efforts to connect and stay up to date about one another's lives over dinner. Church activities often involve sharing refreshments such as coffee, snacks, or meals, which furthers the development of social ties. As I discussed previously, food is an especially appealing aspect of Korean church life, not only because of the social significance of breaking bread together, but also because of the connection to cultural food traditions.

Spending time regularly and consistently with like-minded peers can contribute to general feelings of comfort and to development of a sense of belonging; this experience can be particularly heightened for immigrant and other minoritized groups who may feel disconnected or isolated from mainstream society (e.g., Oppong, 2013; Rauhut, 2020; Ysseldyk et al., 2010). Having a shared frame of reference – whether due to similar social, cultural, or linguistic experiences, challenges, or difficulties – can lead to a feeling of being understood and seen. According to Jae,

> I think the Korean church, it's an immigrant church. So it has its own struggle definitely and I guess, for some, by going to this type of immigrant church, it will be helpful to them because they share the same cultural background and same, or a way of thinking. So it's more familiar to them. And for someone who have a hard time breaking the barriers or kind of seeing things with the flexibility. There must be better words for it, but anyway, for them it'll be very helpful.

Access to such experiences of belonging may account for why Koreans living in the United States tend to participate at higher rates in religious institutions than do their counterparts living in Korea. Jae's mother, Mrs. Kwak, referenced the importance of Korean ethnic churches in Korean American life as well, observing that "it's only after I came to America that I realized how influential the Korean church is for Koreans…. The church is important, I think, because people can get closer and closer to one another."

Religion, Meaning, and Purpose for Korean Immigrants and Korean Americans

My findings shed light on some of the complex, interlocking ways that participation in Korean CCNs support Korean families' capacity to navigate life in the United States, through providing cultural familiarity and education, as well as meaningful social connection. Indeed, researchers have argued that the social-cultural and religious roles of Korean ethnic churches act in tandem with each other in relation to Korean

immigrant communities and cannot be separated from each other (e.g., Chong, 1998; K. C. Kim & Kim, 2001; C. Park & Edberg, 2021). The sociologists Kwang Chung Kim and Shin Kim (2001) suggest the combined import of sociocultural and religious functions constitute Korean ethnic churches' "ethnic role," which is "not a social function devoid of religious function, or vice versa, but rather an amalgamation of the two" (p. 75).

I further suggest that in addition to their "ethnic role," Korean ethnic churches provide a framework for understanding and contextualizing life – and therefore providing meaning, purpose, and direction for the pursuit of life – that is based on religious faith. Religious practices could offer comfort and alleviate a sense of powerlessness, and even, some believed, change one's life. For example, Ellen, now retired from her career as a nurse, turned to Biblical guidance and prayer when she found that her work schedule interfered with her ability to serve her church community:

> So I mean in the Bible verse said, "ask it will given to you," you know, and those kind of Bible verse really helped me. So I was working every other weekend. So even though I teach Sunday school, I only able to teach every other Sunday. So in the Bible verse, I learn that, ask then it will given to you. So I prayed about it. I said, "I will teach every Sunday, and if you Lord, if you give me the job where I can do that, and I will teach every Sunday." And I was able to go to a recovery room, post-anesthesia room which, they don't have a surgery schedule Saturday, Sunday. So I took it as my answer to prayer.

Interpreted differently, Ellen's prayer for a more desirable work schedule in exchange for additional volunteer service at church may appear akin to bargaining or negotiation with a higher power, but to Ellen, spiritual faith had tangible, real power to change the material circumstances of her life, by shifting her professional role so that her schedule would accommodate a more consistent service role at church, a faith that manifested both

as close and regular reading of the Bible and as application of its lessons to real-life contexts.

Others believed that change through faith was possible in additional ways as well. For several participants of this study, developing or redeveloping a relationship with God and with a church was associated with changing hearts or minds. Chloe for instance, felt transformed and comforted through Biblical faith:

> I just feel like there was a lot of burdens. I felt a lot of comparison with my sister and a lot of resentment towards her. And just, I felt very like I needed to achieve to be loved. And so I had a lot of, I think, just hardness towards people… It was kind of like, "if you're not gonna do what you need to do, like get out of my way." That kind of mindset or like, "Don't bother me with your incompetence." That kind of thing. And I think, like God really changed my attitude towards other people and just through, you know, what the Bible says is the Holy Spirit, and I think there was just a real transformed mind and heart towards others. And I really needed the Church to kind of help [and] kind of lead and guide me. It's like, what does it mean to actually believe?

Chloe and others, like Evelyn, reported undergoing changes of heart through exposure to religious instruction, spiritual faith, and "Biblical" support in Korean ethnic CCNs.

Internal effects such as those experienced by Chloe and changes in external conditions as recounted by Ellen could also shape the ways in which participants chose to live their own lives and to set goals for themselves and their families. For example, religious motivations were foundational to the lives that Chloe and her husband envisioned living: "When my husband and I were dating, we were kind of thinking what the future would look like. We thought, maybe we would do missions [and] we liked the idea of church planting [establishing a new church]… really growing disciples of Jesus." Similarly, Mrs. Nam evaluates how "pretty" or "lovely" her three adult children's lives are by their commitment to religious participation and the centrality of religion in their

married lives, noting "when they graduated [from college], I saw that their faith was lovely, that they hadn't let go of their faith. When they met their wives, or things like that, I can see that it is rooted in their faith."

Religious faith also directly shapes parenting decisions made by Yeong-cheol and his wife. For example, they plan at least one family vacation each year around the plan to complete a Christian outreach, or mission, trip:

> [It] started last year we went to the mission trip together. We went to the Native American reservation in Wisconsin… we couldn't really share the gospel but you know, we just wanted to make a relationship because they have a scar and wounded heart by Christians, many years ago. You know, their land was stolen and their culture, stolen, you know. So I guess we want to, you know, be a good friend with them, right? So we went there for the first time last year. We took a bus. It's a 20 hour drive one way. So we were a little concerned because they're little kid. But they actually enjoyed it. And after the first mission trip, they want to come back. So again this year we are going to go there.

Yeong-cheol's recounting of their annual, church-organized mission trip to cultivate "a relationship" with an indigenous community provides insight into how religion and spirituality guide the decisions he and his wife make about the education and overall development of their children. Even though the children are young – just 9 and 6 years old at the time of the interview – he believes it is important to introduce and socialize them to a life that is shaped by Christianity and faith. In addition, in his framing of the family mission trip, Yeong-cheol alludes to the historical impacts of colonization on indigenous peoples in America, which suggests a degree of amalgamation of the cultures, traditions, and practices of Korean ethnocultural churches and the historical and educational foundations of mainstream American institutions and contexts, and sheds some light on acculturation processes and experiences.

Because the Korean ethnic church is explicitly a faith-based institution, it provides a religious motivation that, combined with its ethnic, social, and ethnocultural roles, can help ease the adjustment and acculturation experiences of Korean immigrant and Korean American families in ways that connect them to deeper meaning and purpose in how they establish and nurture their relationships, how they live their lives, and how they make sense of their experiences and circumstances.

Leadership, Status, and Social Cohesion in the Korean Ethnic Church

Consistent participation in church activities could accomplish multiple social aims. Firstly, the opportunity to regularly and consistently engage in social interaction and thereby to develop social networks was appealing. Secondly, through the project of becoming a part of the church community, members could experience the satisfaction of social recognition. Jane, for instance, who described herself as having been highly devoted to church activities as a teenager, linked the amount of time she spent at church to her desire to be a part of a collective project:

> I don't think I was, like, aware of how much time [my parents] were spending there, but I was aware of how much time *I* spent at church on Sunday. And then, I actually even felt like I was at church all the time. So, I started spending more time at church, like serving or being a part of, like, worship team, or… like media team or something like that. And so I ended up spending more time [at church]. I don't know if that was because I saw [my parents] spend time, or it's just the amount of time that I spent at church [because] I wanted to like, do something or be plugged in.

Jane's youthful desire to participate actively as an integral member of special committees in the high school ministry suggests not only a yearning for social connection, but also an urge for social recognition.

For adult members who become "plugged in," particularly those who had experienced economic or professional loss or disappointment through immigration, the

church structure – with its robust lay leadership opportunities – may facilitate the

reclaiming of social status and prestige. Scholars have suggested that active involvement

and service in church leadership roles can be an avenue for Korean immigrants to

counteract any diminishment of their social or job-related standing due to immigration

(Hurh & Kim, 1984; I. Kim, 1981; Min, 1992; Yu, 1983). Opportunities to build social

positioning are embedded in the formal organizational structures of Korean ethnic

churches, such as lay leadership roles in church committees and cell group ministry

which can convey prestige and status as "[church] members legitimize the social power

of church officials by awarding them respect and honor" (Kwon et al., 1997, p. 253).

Indeed, several of the participants in this study are actively involved in church

activities, including in leadership roles. However, they do not necessarily or explicitly

link church leadership and service position with their own social positioning and sense of

self. Ellen, for instance, ascribed a social positioning motive to others who seek and hold

roles as leaders in the church:

> My instructor, you know, she was going to church so I naturally joined her.
> She and her husband was in the center of a church, that operation group
> [church oversight committee]… In human desire, you wanna get the
> recognition, but especially like when you come to America from Korea with
> the language [barrier]. You don't get much of recognition in American
> society. So that's why people, that's why there is more dramas in Korean
> church, immigrant church…. because as a human, very basic yearning, you
> know, looking for some recognition. But you cannot get it outside or
> something. And so you wanna get some recognition.

Additionally, Ellen alludes to what can occur when the desire for social status,

recognition, and power leads to conflict: "more argument, more fighting… it *is* lots of

drama."

Research has suggested that competing efforts to gain and hold positions of authority and leadership may be a significant contributing factor to conflict in Korean ethnic churches (Min, 1992, 2006b; Shin & Park, 1988). Furthermore, the sociologists Eui Hang Shin and Hyung Park's (1988) attributed the proliferation of Korean American churches between 1970 and 1985, increasing from fewer than 75 to more than 1,600 in that time frame, in part to church schisms resulting from within-church power struggles. This sort of conflict may have an effect opposite to the social network formation function of churches for members who feel turned off by intrachurch conflict. For instance, Jae, who is still a member of the church he attended as a teenager, referred to this type of infighting as a reason he sees active involvement in his church as less desirable now as an adult than when he was a youth leader. In fact, he and his family are even considering leaving the church that has been his religious home since his family immigrated to the United States:

> Actually, we consider attending another church, because ALFC had its own difficult times, especially recently with the lead pastor… I really don't understand why they are so against each other on this particular thing, but I've seen a lot of ugliness from it, and not all church members did this, but some of the church members, especially the ones who has influence or power over it, they were fighting each other, arguing each other. It wasn't, it wasn't so good to look at.

That is, the flip side of the Korean ethnic church's positioning as a place where "people can get closer and closer to one another," as Jae's mother Mrs. Kwak put it, is the potential for friction and conflict to develop among people in close social contact with one another, who may feel a sense of proprietary interest or ownership toward its functioning.

The findings of this study illuminate mechanisms by which the Korean ethnic church facilitates the acculturation and life experiences of Korean American and Korean immigrant adults and youths in the United States by fulfilling key functions that connect church members to crucial social contact, cultural connections, psychological support, and religious meaning. For instance, the Korean ethnic church provides access to ethnocultural traditions and resources, such as *Hangeul hakgyo* and communal *sigsa,* which comprise an important source of cultural education and learning outside of formal school environments. Access to such an environment can be especially important to support the overall well-being and development of young people, by connecting them to peers, opportunities, and support that mediates negative or stressful experiences they encounter in mainstream, dominant-cultural contexts. The religious foundation of the Korean ethnic church can also provide an important framework to make sense of their experiences and provide direction for living lives of meaning. Finally, participating in positions of authority through church service can support the formation of social ties and create pathways by which church members can access social respect, although, as a place where people gather, the Korean ethnic CCN is a context that is subject to interpersonal conflict and church politics that may, conversely, weaken social connection.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This dissertation has shed light on precise mechanisms of parental involvement for immigrant parents by turning the lens toward the role of immigrant community networks and relationships formed in alternative contexts to formal school settings, specifically Korean ethnic church community networks and the Korean American and Korean immigrant parents who participate in them. Prior research has shown that parents' involvement in the education of their children contributes in significant ways to their academic engagement, success, and motivation, as well as their overall development and preparation to "live a good life" (e.g., Epstein & Sheldon, 2018; Gonzalez-DeHass et al., 2005; Wilder, 2014). Such involvement can take a variety of forms, ranging from those most visible to schools and teachers, such as active participation in school-organized associations, volunteer activities, and events (e.g., Jeynes, 2024; Lawson, 2003; McNeal, Jr., 1999), to less visible but no less salient strategies of engagement outside of formal school contexts, such as offering homework assistance or creating a home environment conducive to learning (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Carreón et al., 2005; Sohn & Wang, 2006; Tang, 2015; Zhong & Zhou, 2011). For immigrant parents particularly, challenges due to linguistic, cultural, or logistical barriers or differences may shape their strategies of engagement, and the settings and spaces to which they turn for access to resources and information relevant to how they understand and make decision about educating and raising their children are especially significant (Crozier & Davies, 2007; Sohn & Wang, 2006; Turney & Kao, 2009). Outside of immediate kinship networks, the

Korean ethnic church is one of the first places to which Korean immigrant and Korean American parents turn for support (Hurh, 1998; Min, 2006b).

My study extends this scholarship on the significance of alternative strategies that parents, particularly immigrant and minoritized parents, employ to support children's education. It does so by illuminating specific mechanisms by which Korean American and Korean immigrant parents seek and receive relevant information and resources, interpret and make meaning of this knowledge, and then apply them into actions that ensure the learning and holistic development of their children. This contribution is particularly significant because my study homes in on processes that may not be readily apparent to mainstream educational stakeholders, due to the settings in which relevant interactions take place (i.e., the ethnic religious institution) or to ethnocultural or social differences.

In this final chapter of my dissertation, I summarize the findings of my study. I then discuss the study's empirical and theoretical contributions and suggest practical applications of its findings. I conclude by identifying limitations of this study and future research directions.

Interlocking Functions of the Korean Ethnic Church

Korean ethnic churches have historically been significant institutions in the adjustment to life in the United States by Korean immigrant and Korean American communities. The sociologists Kwang Chung Kim and Shin Kim (2001) have argued that the religious motive of Korean immigrant churches is intertwined with their social dimensions to such a high degree that this combination – that is, of the religious and social roles – constitutes an "ethnic role" of Korean churches. I extend this concept and

contend that in addition to their ethnic socioreligious role, Korean ethnic CCNs encompass multiple, interlocking functions that interact in complex ways to provide crucial cultural, emotional, psychological, and practical support relevant to children's education, learning, and development, which together are significant for the overall experiences of settlement and adaptation to life in the United States. That is, the multitude of functions, services, and resources that are provided or accessed through the church are inextricably intertwined such that they cannot be considered discretely or in isolation, but rather must be understood as collectively integral to the functioning and role of the Korean ethnic church vis-à-vis its members and particularly the education of children and families.

This study's findings suggest that the overall experience of migration, as immigrants to a new land or as the children of immigrants, shape how Korean American and Korean immigrant parents interpret and form ideas about education and its aims as being socially, culturally, and historically situated relative to the migration journey, and ultimately how they develop and implement strategies regarding children's learning in the receiving society. The Korean ethnic CCN is a context in which church members can situate and make sense of their own experiences and understanding relative to those of others with shared cultural and linguistic frames of reference and use this shared understanding as a starting point as they seek and obtain support, knowledge, and resources relevant to how they approach their children's education. Moreover, the structure of the Korean ethnic CCNs is designed to facilitate the pathways by which exchanges of knowledge and resources take place. Korean ethnic CCNs are also spaces that enable the enactment, negotiation, reproduction, and maintenance of ethnocultural

identity through shared experiences of cultural, social, spiritual, and linguistic education, practices, and contact that enhance integration and well-being in the United States. By providing access to practical and material resources and support; exposing parents to ideas about education and possibilities for "living well" that influence ways they navigate their children's schooling; and facilitating social, cultural, linguistic, and spiritual connections that help mitigate alienation and other negative experiences often encountered by immigrants and children of immigrants, Korean ethnic CCNs contribute to a general sense of belonging and can thereby ease the overall experience of life in the United States. I summarize the findings of each chapter in more detail below.

Summary of Findings

Chapter 4: What is Education For?

Chapter 4 focused on how Korean American and Korean immigrant parents' ideas about and actions regarding their children's education and development are shaped by material factors, such as their families' sociocultural and economic conditions, by experiential factors, such as their interpretation and experience of education and their immigration journeys, by their knowledge and understanding of their children's educational and social lives, and by their own implicit beliefs about the aims of education, children's learning, and what constitutes "living a good life." This study's findings suggest that due to these factors, parents from across the generational cohorts in this study implemented different approaches to their children's education. For instance, Early Wave parents emphasized academic achievement due to a concern with ensuring economic stability for their children, whereas the children of the Early Wave parents – the Second Gen parents – instead aimed to provide a more holistic education responsive

to children's interests and aptitudes. Recent Wave parents, who were influenced by the educational environments of both Korea and the United States, sought to balance elements of these educational motives, incorporating concern with both linear academic progress and overall development.

Chapter 5: Social and Material Support in the Korean CCN

Chapter 5 examined the sources of resources and knowledge that Korean American and Korean immigrants employ to gain practical support relevant to the education and development of children, particularly considering Korean ethnic CCNs as an especially influential setting. The findings suggest that the CCNs connect families in both direct and indirect ways to material and social resources. For instance, Korean CCNs offer programs that are directly related to children's education, such as heritage language schools, as well as those that link parents less directly to support for parenting and education children, such as district group or cell group ministries. Moreover, these pathways for seeking, accessing, and obtaining resources are explicitly embedded within the structure of the Korean CCN. Findings also suggest that immigration generation may be associated with the capacity of parents to expand their social and information networks beyond the CCN. For example, Recent Wave parents, who tend to be more accustomed to modern social media and online platforms and may be more confident about speaking English than their older Early Wave counterparts, may cultivate broader networks that extend beyond the boundaries of the Korean CCN.

Chapter 6: Faith, Culture, and Belonging in the Acculturation of Koreans in America

Whereas Chapter 5 focused on social material aspects of involvement in Korean CCNs relevant to how Korean American and Korean immigrant parents navigate their

children's education, Chapter 6 turned to an examination of the cultural, ethnosocial, and religious dimensions of interactions with and participation in Korean ethnic CCNs that are relevant to overall acculturation experiences. My study suggests that the Korean ethnic church meets several key needs experienced by Korean American and Korean immigrant adults and youths, such as social contact, cultural connection, psychological support, and spiritual guidance, which in turn influences their capacity to navigate and their experiences of life in the United States as part of a minoritized group. However, my findings also suggests that because Korean churches are such crucial settings for members to seek and find community and purpose, particularly through service and leadership in the church, there is a potential for a weakening of social bonds as when a church undergoes a schism.

Contributions of the Study

This dissertation makes both empirical and theoretical contributions to existing scholarship. Firstly, my study contributes to the body of research on ways that immigrant and other minoritized parents understand and act to support their children's education, including the strategies they develop and implement that may not align with the parental activities that are more commonly recognized by schools. That is, while the ways that immigrant parents act in relation to their children's education may not necessarily take the form of engaging directly with school-based stakeholders (e.g., Carreón et al., 2005; Lawson, 2003; Lee & Bowen, 2006; McNeal, 1999), the parents in my study reach understanding, develop strategies, and implement actions to meet their children's educational and overall needs in deep, thoughtful ways that involve the settings in which they feel comfortable and supported, as do other minoritized populations to address

diverse needs (e.g., Guzder et al., 2013; Miano, 2011; Yun et al., 2016). This research also provides insight into how interactions which take place in ethnocultural religious institutions can influence the formation of ideas and decisions related to children's learning and life trajectories, and contributes to a broader understanding of the interrelationships between ethnocultural institutions and the experiences of the marginalized populations they serve. While the broad linkages between ethnic identity, experiences of belonging, and religion are recognized (e.g., Bankston & Zhou, 1995, 1996; Yang, 1999), the role of religious organizations in acculturative processes has been understudied. By shedding light on the mechanisms by which Korean ethnic churches influence the acculturation experiences of Korean American and Korean immigrants in the United States, this study addresses this gap in research.

Thus this dissertation contributes to theoretical work on ecological frameworks for understanding both the overall development of young people and the childrearing strategies of parents, particularly as they relate to the experiences of minoritized children and parents. For instance, in research concerning immigrant experiences, ecological approaches should take into account the heightened salience of social relationships, such as those that take place amidst the interlocking functions of Korean ethnic churches. Acknowledging the importance of sociocultural relationships in these settings adds also to the body of literature on the social processes of learning by which parents form social ties and gain access to knowledge and practical resources, which they in turn can deploy and leverage in their efforts to navigate their children's education.

In addition, the findings of this study may contribute to efforts by ethnocultural institutions to support immigrant families. For instance, these institutions can help build

immigrant parents' capacity to navigate the U.S. educational terrain and support their children's education and development in more systematic ways that supplement the ad hoc strategies already employed by parents. These might include developing parenting workshops and support networks and creating web-based resources that address common needs or questions, such as "cheat sheets" of ways to get involved in schools and other significant settings, guide to important contacts and information relevant to children's education and development, or a list of preschool and childcare options. Because ethnocultural institutions are a significant setting where minoritized youth feel as if they "don't have to explain themselves," the knowledge generated by this research may also help these organizations to support healthy formation of identity and belonging in relation to both the cultural norms of both heritage and dominant society, such as through providing leadership and other capacity-building opportunities or developing broader community partnerships to promote cross-cultural education and communication. Finally, by expanding ideas about what constitutes parental engagement in relation to children's education, this study can supplement research and initiatives aimed at providing guidance to schools, policymakers, and other education stakeholders in their efforts to cultivate robust, effective school-home-community partnerships, for instance district-university partnerships to develop family engagement interventions (e.g., Montgomery & Lowenhaupt, 2018).

Limitations and Future Directions for Research

This dissertation has highlighted the significance of Korean ethnic churches on shaping the ways that Korean American and Korean immigrant families navigate the education of children. However, it is crucial to explicitly address this study's limitations

so as to properly situate its findings and to suggest additional research that would extend the findings of this study. This research was conducted in a very specific context, drawing on interviews with a relatively small number of participants, that is, Korean American and Korean immigrant members of Korean ethnic churches in one metropolitan area. Moreover, the participants comprised parents of various immigrant and life-stage generations who reflected upon their experiences of raising children and for some, of growing up as children of immigrants in the United States. For instance, the Early Wave participants' greater length of residence in the United States means larger temporal distance from their parenting days than their younger counterparts who are currently raising and educating young children. The Early Wave Parents therefore relied on more distant memory and meaning-making of their past. Second Gen Parents reflected both on their own coming-of-age as immigrants to the United States and on how their personal experiences had shaped their approaches to childrearing. In other words, the immigration trajectories of the participants in my dissertation were highly context-dependent.

Due to these limitations, there is a limited possibility of generalizability and replication of the study. However, the findings of this research would be enhanced by conducting research that expands the number of participants, explicitly attends to such factors as age, life stage, and time period at immigration, and examines ethnic religious institutions, including those that are not Protestant Christian, in other geographic areas. Doing so would develop a wider and more nuanced portrait of the relationships between Korean ethnic religious institutions and Korean Americans and Korean immigrants from across a broader spectrum of the immigration experience. In addition, future research

should examine the significance of and interrelationships between gender roles and cultural norms as they relate to parental involvement and childrearing strategies of immigrant families. Research has suggested that among families of Asian descent, mothers are more involved in day-to-day childrearing activities, particularly in countries like Japan and Korea, where mothers are tasked with overseeing the education and general development of children while their partners dedicate their time in the working sphere (Moon, 2003; Shwalb et al., 2004). Although two fathers participated in interviews for this study, the responses of my interlocuters suggested that mothers tended to take a larger day-to-day parenting role in most families. Future research can add to a growing literature which considers greater paternal involvement among families, particularly in light of demographic shifts such as increased rates of women's participation in the economic sphere and families' lower dependence on extended kin networks (Moon, 2003; H. Park et al., 2011).

Final Thoughts

In this dissertation, I initially set out with an intellectual curiosity about how immigrant parents and families with limited experience and knowledge of educational institutions, norms, and practices in U.S. settings try to make sense of and navigate these processes, whether and how, in their efforts to do so, they turn to contexts outside of formal school environments to ensure their children have the best chances possible vis-à-vis their learning and life trajectories, and what all of these collective experiences and meaning-making mean for their lives in America. I began with the intention to pursue this query through an examination of the experiences of refugee and asylee families who have resettled in the United States with the assistance of aid agencies, community

organizations, religious institutions, and other significant contacts. Due to the interruptions of the Covid-19 pandemic and the ethical underpinnings which guided my decision to change my project, which I discuss in my positionality statement in Chapter 3, I pivoted to what has developed into a deeply meaningful and personally relevant project. As a child of Korean immigrants and 1.5-generation Korean American, I continually reflect upon and situate my family's experiences and our interpretation of our lives in the United States alongside my intellectual development and theoretical understanding. This project has been part of my ongoing attempt to make meaning of my life and to make my life meaningful. My hope is that the findings generated by this study's examination of how parents and families with backgrounds of immigration approach the education and overall development of their children can be used to broaden ideas about and strategies to foster school-home-community connections, as well as to help ethnocultural institutions' efforts to support parents and youth.

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Appendix A

Korean-English Glossary

Romanized Transliteration	*Hangeul* (한글; Korean)	English
Ahjussi	아저씨	Man
Ajumma	아줌마	Woman
Appa	아빠	Dad
Baek-il	백일	100 days after a baby's birth
Bab-eun meog-eoss-eo?	밥은 먹었어?	Have you eaten?
Halmeoni/ Halmeonim	할머니/ 할머님	Grandma/ Grandmother
Hangeul hakgyo	한글 학교	Korean language school
Jahmeh	자매	Sister
Kuyok Yebae	구역예배	District meetings/worship
Miguk saram	미국 사람	American
Neh	네	Yes
Seonsaengnim	선생님	Teacher
Siggu	식구	Family
Sigsa	식사	Meal
Umma	엄마	Mom
Wegugin/ Weguk saram	외국인/ 외국 사람	Foreigner/ Foreign, non-Korean person
Weguk aideul	외국 아이들	Foreign/non-Korean children
Yebae	예배	Worship service

Throughout the dissertation, I provide parenthetical words in Korean *Hangeul* (한글) and subsequently use a Romanized transliteration. There are standard rules governing the Romanization of the Korean language (see, for instance, https://www.korean.go.kr/front_eng/roman/roman_01.do); I have loosely followed guidelines shared in the Korean language guide by Kansas University (https://guides.lib.ku.edu/c.php?g=953495&p=6879848), with the assistance of Romanization and translation tools (e.g., https://www.ushuaia.pl/transliterate/?In=en, Papago, Google Translate).

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

General Background and Biographical Information

- First, I'd like to understand a little bit more about your family, children, and life. Please tell me a little bit about: Family members (names, ages); educational/work background

Experiences of Immigration

- How long have you been living in the current location/U.S.?
- Where did you live before your current location?
- When did you leave Korea? What led to your decision?
- Tell me about when you first arrived in the United States.
    - What did you find challenging?
    - Did you have help? What kind of help?
    - Did you have the help of an organization or church? What was that like?

Experiences of Education as a Student

- Parent's/parents' childhood and educational experiences
    - What was school like for you?
    - What is a lesson or something you learned that sticks out to you?
    - What was it like being a Korean student in your school?

Experiences of Education as a Parent

- Tell me a little bit about your child(ren)'s school.
    - (How) Do you talk to your child about school? What do you talk about?
    - How would you say your child feels about school?
- What do you think about your child's school? Teachers?
    - What is one thing you like about your child's school?
- When you think that your child needs more support, what do you do?
    - Could you tell me about a time you felt your child did/didn't have the support they need?
- Do you talk to anyone else about your child's school? Whom do you talk to? How do those conversations go?
- Tell me about a typical school day for your child/your family.

- o What happens before/after school? Does your child do anything after school?
- o What was yesterday (last school day) like for your family? And the day before that?
- What did your family do last weekend? What do you have planned for next weekend?
- From a scale of 1 to 10, how much would you say you are involved in your child's education?
  - o In what ways would you say you're involved in your child's education?
- From a scale of 1 to 10, how much would you say you are involved in your child's non-school life, such as after-school activities, sports teams, etc.?
  - o In what ways would you say you're involved in those activities?
- What is it like being a Korean parent at your child's school?

Ideas about Education

- What is important to you about your child's education?
  - o Thinking about school, what are three things that would make your child's education successful? Less/not successful?
- What do you think is similar about what school was like for you, and what it is like for your child? Different?
- Where do you see yourself/your child/your family in five years?
  - o What do you think your parents hoped for your life?
  - o What do you hope for your child's life? Your family?

Experiences of Church

- What was church like for you when you were younger?
- What was it like choosing a church for your family?
  - o What were some things you considered as you decided which church to pick?
- What do you like about your church? What do you not like?
- What is it like going to a Korean church?
  - o What are some things about your church you consider Korean?
  - o What makes your church a Korean church?
- What do you like about your child in relation to your child? What does the church do well for your child? What do you wish the church did better?
- What did last Sunday look like for you? Your child? The Sunday before that?
  - o What does your time at church look like on another day that you go to church? Did your child go with you that day, what was that like?
- What is a typical interaction/meeting at church/with church people? What did you talk about?
  - o If you talk about your child's education, what was the last conversation like?

Other Social Networks and Contacts

- Who else do you talk to? What do you talk about?
- Are there any other contact persons or places you found out about from someone at church? What was that like, how did that come about?
- Could you write down, diagram, or describe the people, organizations, activities, or anything else that has been important in your life in the U.S.?
  - How have these places been important to you? Your child's education?

Covid-19-Related Experiences

- What were your family's greatest needs since the pandemic began?
- What has changed about the way you reach out to, connect with people at church/school/elsewhere?